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**'SHOULDER TO SHOULDER'? SCOTTISH AND IRISH LAND  
REFORMERS IN THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND, 1878-1894**

**ANDREW GEOFFREY NEWBY**

**Submitted for Ph.D.**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**

**2001**





**~Elisalle~**

## **Declaration**

I, Andrew Geoffrey Newby, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Signature of candidate

Helsinki, March, 2001

‘Shoulder to Shoulder’? Scottish and Irish Land Reformers in the highlands of  
Scotland, 1878-1894 – Abstract

The relationship between Ireland and the Scottish Highlands is one which has been touched upon briefly by several historians during the recent increase in Highland historiography. Apart from a few speculative attempts, there has been little attempt to analyse the precise motives of those who were involved in the land reform movement amongst the Scottish crofters. With one or two exceptions, furthermore, Irish historians of the personalities and events of the Land Wars have scarcely acknowledged the influence of Irish events on Scotland.

Contemporary commentaries on the Scottish agitation made great play of events on the other side of the Irish Sea. Generally, however, these accounts are politically loaded, and it is notable that those Highlanders who most strongly advocated co-operation with Ireland were also those who attempted to play down the Irish influence. The name of Ireland, and especially the Irish Land League, had been blackened by the ongoing agrarian violence in the country, and public opinion in Britain was very much against the agitation. Conversely, the Whig / Tory politicians and press of the early 1800s, at a loss to explain the rebellion of a people they had considered loyal and docile and keen to dampen any subversion as quickly as possible, did as much as they could to emphasise the presence of Irish reformers in Scotland.

The present study is concerned mainly with examining the way the Scottish Highlands became intimately concerned with Irish politics in the 1880s. It is not, except in some incidental areas, an attempt to compare the land agitation of the two areas, more an attempt to understand what the Irishmen hoped to gain from stirring the crofters, and what Highlanders hoped for from alliance with the Irish. A clear parallel on the land issue translated itself into support for Irish Home Rule, and opposition to Tory coercion, after 1886. Although some members of the Irish Parliamentary Party did take an interest in the Highlands, it was mainly those on the left wing of the Irish movement in Britain who spent the most time helping to nurture the Highland agitation. Again, it is important to point out that whilst some sources have referred to the involvement of the ‘Irish Land League’, it was mainly that body’s more left wing offshoot, the ‘National Land League of Great Britain’, which was concerned with the Highlands.

The land issue, and its eventual associations with the nascent labour movement, caused many Irish nationalists, such as Michael Davitt and Edward McHugh, to become somewhat isolated from mainstream nationalism in the 1880s. Similarly, one of the main reasons why splits occurred in the Highland land reform movement was that those who simply desired a degree of land law reform railed against the close identification with the Irish advocated by the likes of Angus Sutherland.

By means of a close examination of the three individuals mentioned, this study seeks to bring out the different backgrounds of many of those involved in the ‘Crofters’ War’, their disparate reasons for becoming involved, and clarify the links between the Scottish crofters and Irish agitators during the 1880s.

## Acknowledgements

My very warmest respect and thanks are due to my supervisor, Dr. Ewen A. Cameron, not only for valuable suggestions and encouragement, but also for assistance in various matters way beyond the responsibilities of a supervisor, especially after I decamped to Helsinki. Some of the views contained within this thesis have been formed in part by the many discussions I have had with Dr. Cameron, in a variety of locations, from Tallinn to John Murdoch's graveside in Saltcoats, and many places in between.

I was very fortunate to undertake my research degree at the Department of Scottish History, Edinburgh University, in an atmosphere relaxed and friendly, yet conducive to academic study and development. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Alex Murdoch, my second supervisor, Professor Michael Lynch, Dr. Steve Boardman and Alex Woolf for their support and willingness to discuss various historical matters. My colleagues in the postgraduate community, especially Amy Juhala and Ray Wells, also contributed to the vibrant atmosphere and made research fun! Mrs. Doris Williamson spent an undue amount of time chasing up my pay claims or repairing the photocopier after I had used it, or generally listening to my moaning, though never seemed to complain. I would also like to thank Neil McGillivray, Douglas Barker and Gillian Carruthers for their kindness over the three years I spent in Edinburgh. I owe a great deal of thanks to Professor Ged Martin, Centre for Canadian Studies, especially for his insights into Parnell and Gladstone.

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Staff of all the libraries which I have used have been patient and courteous, especially those at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, the Highland Regional Archive, Inverness, and the British Newspaper Library at Colindale. The Working Class Movement Library, Salford, and the Michael Davitt Memorial Museum, Straide, were also very valuable from the point of view of obscure secondary material.

I am also indebted to many other institutions and individuals who assisted me in various aspects of my research. I should especially like to thank Professor Elaine McFarland, Ian S. Wood, and Dr. Carla King, all of whom contributed to the development some of the themes in this thesis. Many people from my undergraduate career at St. Andrews University had a great influence in my pursuing Scottish History: Dr. Norman Macdougall, Dr. Simone Macdougall and Dr. Colin Martin are due acknowledgements, and no-one more so than Dr. Laurence Gouriévidis, who first introduced me to Scottish Highland history, and in many ways convinced me that research was an enjoyable and worthwhile pursuit. My colleagues at the Renvall Institute, University of Helsinki, also made my 'writing up year' a relatively stress-free one, and I wish to record my thanks to Pirkko Hautamäki, Eino Lyytinen, Harvey Green, Susan Williams, Henrik Stenius, Ilona Jännes and Johanna Tiitinen (now at Glasgow University). Students in my Scottish History and Irish History classes at the

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Acknowledgements are also due to the Gaelic Society of Inverness, especially Hugh-Dan MacLennan, Roddy Balfour and Hugh Barron. Not only did I receive financial support from the GSI for my research, I received much in the way of local knowledge. Other bodies which helped fund my studies, without whom life would have been made much more difficult, include: The Catherine MacKichan Trust, Jeremiah Dalziel Prize Committee (Edinburgh University), the Faculty of Arts (Edinburgh University), and the Finnish Centre for International Mobility (CIMO).

Without the support of friends and family, of course, this work could never have been started, let alone completed, and I would like especially to thank my mother, Bernadette, and my sister, Emma, for pushing me through grammar school, and for reminding me when I was coasting! My grandmother, Elizabeth Crean, instilled an early interest in some of the subject matter contained here by informing me that we had a close, if undefined, relationship to Michael Davitt, and Fred and Eileen Newby have given much encouragement and assistance at various stages of my life. My 'Finnish family' accepted this foreigner into the fold immediately, the only reservation being that I followed a football team from Glasgow, not Dundee! Jukka, Eija ja Esa, monesta syystä en olisi voinut saataa loppuun tätä väitöskirjaa ilman teitä! It might not be common to thank also your supervisor's family, but for all their hospitality when we have returned to Edinburgh, and during research trips to Inverness, I would like to extend very warm gratitude to Sally (and Thomas!) Cameron, as well as Mr. Ewen and Mrs. Mary Cameron.

Life can be very strange, but wonderful, and my life has changed beyond all recognition during the four years it took to complete this work. This was thrust into even sharper focus by the arrival of a beautiful baby boy, Ossian Patrik Antti, in between submitting this thesis and defending it in the viva! Most of all, I must thank my wife, Elisa. Elisa has been, literally and metaphorically, by my side through every line and every page, put up with my 'artistic' temperament, and visited places as obscure as Edward McHugh's grave and the monument to the Glendale martyrs on Skye. To dedicate this thesis to Elisa can only be a tiny token of gratitude for her love, and patience, over the last couple of years.

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Figure A: Principal figures in the Highland Land Agitation



Clockwise from top left: a caricature of John Ferguson, in *The Bailie*, 6 Aug. 1879; A Study of Michael Davitt c. 1880, in J. Dunleavy, *Davitt: Exile and Exiles* (Rossendale, 1996), 14; An impression of Angus Sutherland as MP for Sutherlandshire, in *Highland News*, 22 Jun. 1889; Edward McHugh in his role as President of the Liverpool Society for the Taxation of Land Values, c. 1900, in *The Single Tax*, Nov. 1900

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background and Thesis

With the outbreak of a land reform agitation in the Scottish Highlands during the 1880s, came a desire on the part of many contemporaries to find a reason why a previously loyal, even docile, Highland tenantry had suddenly started to give voice to their discontentment.<sup>1</sup> In many newspapers, both Liberal and Tory, amongst the Highland police authorities, and even in Government circles, the finger of blame often pointed either at the Irish people in general, or specifically at Irish agitators in Glasgow. That there was a link between Irishmen and Highlanders at this time has almost become axiomatic in general histories of Scotland or the Highlands. In one of his final speeches, the late Donald Dewar addressed an audience in Dublin on the links between Ireland and Scotland. Discussing Gladstone, Blackie and the land question in both countries in the 1880s, he remarked that:

Irish influence certainly contributed to the Land League of the early 1880s led by such men as John Murdoch. It is perhaps interesting to note that Murdoch visited the school at Braes in Skye in early 1882 - around the time of the Battle of the Braes a great incident in Highland history, although perhaps small of scale when compared with experiences in Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This view of a 'passive' people has been challenged by some more recent works. See C.W.J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* (London, 1988), 327-401; T.M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester, 1994), 209-227; E. Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances Volume 2: Emigration, Protest, Reasons* (London, 1982), 301-350. The tradition, however, has received some degree of reinforcement from twentieth century historians. Hanham claimed that 'after the rising of 1745 the Highlands were rapidly tamed... By the time of the great Sutherland clearances of 1807-20 the Highlands had been so far pacified that scarcely a hand was raised against the destruction of much-loved homes.' Hunter concurred, 'in the 1880s the peace which had prevailed in the Highland since the clearances was shattered...' See H.J. Hanham, 'The Problem of Highland Discontent, 1880-1885', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., xix (1969), 21; J. Hunter, 'The Politics of Highland Land Reform, 1873-1895', *Scottish Historical Review*, liii (1974), 45

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Times*, 29 Sep. 2000. Dewar, or his speech writer, had apparently read N. MacLean, *The Former Days* (London, 1945), claiming that 'His visit to the school was long remembered. One of the children years later recorded that he was "the first man I ever saw wearing a kilt". The teacher refused to allow Murdoch to address the children in Gaelic insisting they speak English. Despite the romanticism, the language and the culture it represented was still under very real pressure'.

This introduction will proceed to review the existing historiography, present the main themes which characterise this thesis, and then move on to a presentation of the main characters around whom the discussion rotates.

The rather vague accusations of contemporaries have, to a certain extent, carried over into modern day accounts of the 'Crofters' War'. As a result, different aspects of the Irish involvement are emphasised in the various works available, and no consensus emerges as to the precise nature of the influence of Irish agitators – or the Irish land agitation generally – on the crofting community. Some historians have noted the claims that the crofters were supported, morally or financially, from a variety of Irish sources.<sup>3</sup> Others have followed the claims made by certain crofters before the Napier Commission, and the suspicions of other contemporaries, that the Highlanders were encouraged by the passing in 1881 of the Irish Land Act, and that they found out about the Irish land agitation from their involvement in the Irish fishing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For the donation of money to John Murdoch from the North American 'Fenian Skirmishing Fund', in order to keep his campaigning *Highlander* newspaper alive, see Hanham, 'Highland Discontent', 36; J. Hunter, *For the People's Cause: From the Writings of John Murdoch* (Edinburgh, 1986), 33, 171; I.M.M. MacPhail, *The Crofters' War* (Stornoway, 1989), 86-87; J.D. Wood, 'Land Reform and Populism in the Atlantic Community, 1879-1890: Towards A Comparative Perspective' (Edinburgh University, MLitt. Thesis, 1981), 196. For the alleged donation of £1,000 from the Land League in Dublin, see Hanham, 'Highland Discontent', 53 (Hanham correctly points out that there is no contemporary evidence for this claim); D.W. Crowley, 'The "Crofters' Party", 1885-1892', *Scottish Historical Review*, xxxv (1956), 112; R. Douglas, *Land, People and Politics – A History of the Land Question in the United Kingdom, 1878-1952* (London, 1976), 64-65; P. Harding, 'John Murdoch, Michael Davitt and the Land Question: A study in Comparative Irish and Scottish History' (Aberdeen University, MLitt. Thesis, 1994), 141; T. Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace* (Manchester, 1987), 66; T. Gallagher, 'A Tale of Two Cities: Communal Strife in Glasgow and Liverpool before 1914', in R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (Beckenham, 1985), 121; J.G. Kellas, 'The Crofters' War', *History Today*, xii (1962), 282. In addition, see J. Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976), 137; E. Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances Volume 1: Agrarian Transformation and the Evictions* (London, 1982), 488

<sup>4</sup> W. Ferguson, *Scotland: 1689 to Present* (Edinburgh, 1968), 325; Withers, *Gaelic Scotland*, 372; T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950* (London, 1987), 71; J.F. McCaffrey, *Scotland in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1998), 78; Hunter, *Making of the Crofting Community*, 133; C. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics, 1707-1977* (London, 1977), 32; Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War*, 223; T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (Harmondsworth, 1999), 432. James Hunter's most recent work, which will undoubtedly be highly influential amongst a general readership, described the Irish Land League as being founded by Michael Davitt, 'a man who was later to tour the Highlands and Islands in John Murdoch's company'. It also describes the rent strikes on Skye as being imitations of the Irish Land League, and goes into great detail about the presence of Highland fishermen at the Kinsale fishing as being the spark for the Battle of the Braes, even though he admits that 'the precise extent of the Braes party's contact with Land League members is unknown'. McHugh, Sutherland, Henry George are not given a mention, and this perpetuates Hunter's 1976 theory of a more direct influence from Ireland than was in fact the case. J. Hunter, *Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1999), 307-308. Although the sources may prove that Highlanders were present in Ireland for fishing in 1880 and 1881, the impact this made on their receptivity to land reform must remain, in the absence of

The importance of individuals who linked the two areas, notably John Murdoch and Donald MacFarlane, have also been stressed.<sup>5</sup> Finally, and most importantly in terms of this thesis, claims have been made in relation to the Irish Land Leaguers of Glasgow, either through their mixing with Highlanders in the city and striking a common cause, or through more direct intervention in the Highlands.<sup>6</sup> The Glasgow angle, the apparent union between some Highlanders and Irishmen, and its relation to the nascent labour movement, has also been noted by historians interested in radical, rather than specifically Highland, politics.<sup>7</sup> It is important to stress that this thesis is a contribution to Scottish historiography, and not a comparative study of the land wars in Scotland and Ireland. Whilst it also challenges the work of some Irish historians, who have generally ignored the impact made by Irishmen in Scotland, the primary

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fresh evidence, conjectural. See *Oban Times*, 9 Sep. 1882. This has led to theories of 'Celtic unity' during the 1880s, with the Welsh Tithes agitation, too, coming under examination. See R. Gibson, *Crofter Power in Easter Ross: The Land League at work, 1884-88* (Easter Ross, 1986), 20; V. Durkacz, *Decline of the Celtic Languages* (Edinburgh 1983), 203; P. Berresford Ellis, *The Celtic Dawn* (London, 1993), 69; K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation – A History of Modern Wales* (Oxford, 1981), 38; J.P.D. Dunbabin, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York, 1974), 212. John Davies, *Hanes Cymru* (Harmondsworth, 1992), 429, explains that because the Irish agrarian agitation had achieved tangible success in the passing of the 1881 Land Act, Welsh radicals were beginning to suggest the same could be done for Wales. See also J. Graham Jones, 'Michael Davitt, David Lloyd George and T.E. Ellis: The Welsh Experience, 1886', *Welsh History Review*, xviii (1996-7), 450-482

<sup>5</sup> For Murdoch, see J.D. Young, 'John Murdoch, A Land and Labour Pioneer', in *Calgacus*, i (1975), 14-19; T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), 359; J. Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection, The Highlands, Ireland and Nationalism, 1873-1922', in *Scottish Historical Review*, liv (1975), 179; M. Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1991), 376; J.D. Young, *The Very Bastards of Creation* (Glasgow, 1996), 156-7; In his introduction to Hunter's *For the People's Cause*, J.F.M. MacLeod was even more emphatic: 'Suddenly all became obvious, John Murdoch was the catalyst who had introduced the philosophy of the Irish Land League from his place of employment in the South of Ireland to his ancestral quarter in Inverness.' Hunter, *For the People's Cause*, 5. For MacFarlane, see Hunter, 'Politics of Highland Land Reform', 49; D. Meek, 'The Catholic Knight of Crofting: Sir Donald Horne MacFarlane, MP for Argyll, 1885-6, 1892-5', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, lviii (1992-1994); E.A. Cameron, *The Life and times of Fraser Mackintosh, Crofter MP* (Aberdeen, 2000), 101-2; MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 66; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 137

<sup>6</sup> For various interpretations of Land League activity in relation to the Highlands agitation, see Cameron, *Life and times of Fraser Mackintosh*, 98; T. Gallagher, 'The Catholic Irish in Scotland: In Search of an Identity', in T.M. Devine (ed.), *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Edinburgh, 1991), 26; Ferguson, *Scotland 1689 to Present*, 325; Richards, *History of the Highland Clearances, Volume 1*, 488; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 137; Hanham, 'Highland Discontent', 53; Hunter, 'Politics of Highland Land Reform', 46; Dunbabin, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 187; MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 88

<sup>7</sup> I.S. Wood, 'Irish Immigrants and Scottish Radicalism, 1880-1906', in I. MacDougall (ed.), *Essays in Scottish Labour History* (Edinburgh, 1978), 76; W.H. Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics: From Radicalism to Labour* (Edinburgh, 2000), 101; T.W. Moody, 'Michael Davitt and the British Labour Movement, 1882-1906', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ser., iii (1953), 62; Smout, *Century of the Scottish People*, 253



focus is on the Scottish Highlands, both on the impact of wider events on the region, and, conversely, the discussion of the region in wider events.

The central thesis here concerns the activity of a certain group of Irishmen and Highlanders, and the nature of their involvement with each other and their precise relationship to the crofters' struggle for land reform. As a means both of illustrating the disparate reasons for involvement in the Highlands, and of displaying the influence of Irish politics, which was much more subtle than has been portrayed, this thesis examines three main characters: Michael Davitt, Edward McHugh and Angus Sutherland; three men who have been presented in different lights by recent historians. Rather than simply presenting the men in separate, self contained chapters, the thesis is broken down both chronologically and, within this timeframe, thematically. This method was adopted to avoid repetition and, as far as possible, constant references to other parts of the text. So much of the work of the men, and their colleagues, was inter-linked, that the chronological treatment, which also allowed other related issues to be discussed, was the logical choice.

The thesis will also demonstrate that the relationship between some Highlanders and Irishmen in Glasgow was extremely intimate. This contrasts with some comments made by researchers which suggest that establishment figures or institutions in the 1880s sought to exaggerate the Irish involvement in the Highlands.<sup>8</sup> The career of Angus Sutherland, in particular, indicates that newspapers such as the *Scotsman* were fairly accurate in their assessment at the time, and certainly demonstrates that exiled Highlanders were politically active even before the outbreak of the Irish Land Wars in 1879.

The presence of Michael Davitt in the Scottish Highlands on two occasions in the 1880s has been enough for some historians to prove the direct interest of the Irish Land League, supplemented by the presence on Skye of Edward McHugh, a prominent 'Land Leaguer', in the immediate aftermath of the 'Battle of the Braes' in

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<sup>8</sup> James Hunter (Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 137) insisted that agents from 'the Glasgow branches of the Irish Land League' proved 'on closer inspection to be nothing less than the mythical creations of understandably frightened members of the possessing classes.' I.M.M. MacPhail (MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 33) agreed that although the Glasgow Land Leaguers did take up the case of the Highlanders, this 'connection with the Irish Land League was denounced and exaggerated by the newspapers of the establishment such as the *Scotsman* and the *Inverness Courier*.'

1882. What has not been noted, however, was that McHugh and Davitt, along with other members of the Glasgow Irish community, were linked by the ideas of Henry George rather than by Irish nationalism. The National Land League of Great Britain, founded in 1881, was virtually independent from the Dublin-based National Land League. It was far more left wing politically, and had different aims – primarily consisting of breaking down British prejudice against Ireland, and of promoting Irish political ambitions in the British towns and cities.<sup>9</sup> Although McHugh was basically a single issue campaigner – the issue in question being the Georgite Single Tax – he travelled all around the world propagating the theory. Davitt’s career covered a myriad of issues, and Scotland and the crofters won a great deal of his attention in the 1880s.

Linking the principal figures in this thesis was the leading light in Glasgow Irish politics at the time, John Ferguson.<sup>10</sup> Ferguson was a Belfast-born Protestant who had moved to Glasgow in 1860.<sup>11</sup> His interest in nationalist politics had only been kindled after he left Ireland, and he later recorded that it was not until he came to live in Scotland, that he ‘discovered not only Ireland but that I was an Irishman’.<sup>12</sup> He entered the publishing business, and rose to become a partner in Cameron and Ferguson, and a fairly wealthy man by the standards of the day.<sup>13</sup> Ferguson was present at virtually every important Irish meeting in the west of Scotland from 1873 up to his premature death in 1906.<sup>14</sup> His secure financial background enabled him to devote more time to politics than most of his colleagues in the Glasgow Irish community, and this has been seen as a vital area of stability amongst a socio-political grouping which was in a state of almost constant flux.<sup>15</sup> Although Ferguson could have claimed a seat in Parliament, representing an Irish constituency, he preferred to

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>10</sup> Elaine McFarland’s forthcoming biography on John Ferguson will add substantially to our knowledge of the man. This thesis has benefitted greatly from several discussions relating to Ferguson with Dr. McFarland.

<sup>11</sup> Ferguson had been involved in the activities of the Reform League prior to the passing of the 1867 Act which helped stimulate Catholic efforts at the local political level. J.J. Smyth, ‘Labour and Socialism in Glasgow, 1880-1914: The electoral challenge prior to democracy’ (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1987), 151

<sup>12</sup> J.E. Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland* (Cork, 1947), 269

<sup>13</sup> Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace*, 63

<sup>14</sup> Handley, *Irish in Modern Scotland*, 270

<sup>15</sup> Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace*, 63; I.G.C. Hutchison, ‘Politics and Society in Mid-Victorian Glasgow, 1846-1886’ (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974), 488

remain in Glasgow, where, from 1893, he influenced land and social policy from his seat on the council.

The zeal with which Ferguson undertook tasks in which he believed is clearly seen in his involvement with the Irish Land League. On the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1879 a large meeting of tenants took place in Irishtown, Co. Mayo.<sup>16</sup> Michael Davitt probably arranged for Ferguson to speak there, and this event has gained celebrity as the first of the new land movement, and indeed as the beginning of the Irish Land Wars. One of Davitt's biographers praised Ferguson's contribution in 'dealing with the [land] problem from the too often overlooked standpoint of the town dweller... on the taxation of land values.'<sup>17</sup> For Ferguson and other like minded Irishmen, the Irish or Highland land question was part of a much broader issue, one which had the welfare of towns and cities, and the whole country, at heart. Indeed he penned an article for the *Highlander* on the subject in early 1880.<sup>18</sup> Ferguson's main intellectual influences on the land issue included Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill, and he thus not only bound together the likes of Davitt, McHugh and Sutherland, he also symbolised the way in which the Irish Nationalists of Glasgow contained men amongst their number much more concerned with broader social issues.<sup>19</sup>

The third main subject of the thesis, Angus Sutherland, is another man who has been mentioned in passing in several histories. His strong links with the Glasgow-Irish, and the extent to which he was responsible for politicising the urban Gaels as well as those Highlanders who remained in their native parishes, have not been brought out by commentators seemingly obsessed with John Murdoch or with Sutherland's later involvement with 'official' Liberalism. As a young radical, Sutherland also faced one problem which Davitt had not encountered in Ireland. The residual loyalty of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 26 Apr. 1879; M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland: or, the story of the Land League Revolution* (London and New York, 1904), 147-150; Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution* (Oxford, 1981), 284-292; D.E. Jordan Jr., *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland – County Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge 1994), 217-221; D.B. Cashman, *The life of Michael Davitt, Founder of the National Land League, to which is added The secret history of the Land League* (London, 1882), 213

<sup>17</sup> F. Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt: Revolutionary, Agitator and Labour Leader* (London 1908), 91

<sup>18</sup> *Highlander*, 20 Feb. 1880

<sup>19</sup> For the wider land issue in the British Isles, setting in context, for example, Joseph Chamberlain and Jesse Collings, see H.J. Perkin, 'Land Reform and Class Conflict in Victorian Britain', in J. Butt & I.F. Clarke (eds.), *The Victorians and Social Protest: A Symposium* (Newton Abbot, 1973)

Highlanders to landlords – some of whom were still, nominally, clan chiefs – meant that Sutherland had to break down these bonds before anything else could be achieved. The way in which he operated during the Crofters' War can be contrasted with 'outsiders' such as Davitt and McHugh. Importantly, he was – in the early years of the Highland land agitation – a strong supporter of Georgite Single Tax principles. Thus, linked through George and the Irish socio-political movements in Glasgow in the late 1870s and throughout the 1880s, Davitt, McHugh and Sutherland all require investigation as to their motives and ambitions in the area.

Through studying the careers of these men, especially in relation to the Highlands, the thesis will demonstrate that political relationships within the Highland land agitation of the 1880s were more complex than have previously been presumed. The acknowledged link with Irish nationalism, via the 'Land League', is in fact something of a red herring, for two reasons. Firstly, it was not the Irish Land League which had a direct impact on the crofters' struggle, but, specifically, the Glasgow Branch of, initially, the Land League, then the Land League of Great Britain, and subsequently the Irish National League.<sup>20</sup> This meant close links with men who were far more concerned with 'working class' politics than with Irish nationality, except in as far as the latter could help to elevate the social position of the Irish worker. Secondly, this 'left wing' of the Glasgow-Irish not only contained many Scotsmen and Highlanders, it was in frequent conflict with other branches of what became the National League in the city. In their stand for unity with Protestant Scots and workers of Britain, these men were seen as irritating mavericks by some of the nationalists. Indeed, it will become clear that neither the Irish, nor the Highlanders, were as monolithic as has been supposed, and that tension, often leading to open divisions, affected both groups.

Finally, the thesis will demonstrate that the Scottish Highlands were not a place apart, isolated from the rest of the British Isles in the Victorian era. Throughout the 1880s, Michael Davitt, John Ferguson and other Henry George influenced Irishmen saw Scotland and the Highlands as potentially fertile ground for their land nationalisation plans, having realised that, at least in the short term, Ireland was too preoccupied with Parnellism to seek further land reform. After the failure of the first Home Rule bill, the Highlands saw major set piece speeches from John Dillon and T.P. O'Connor, as

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix A



well as small local tours by other Irish MPs. Parnell himself visited Edinburgh, and was watched by a considerable Highland contingent. It will be seen that the activities of Davitt and McHugh, and especially the vigorous local agitation by Angus Sutherland in creating the Sutherlandshire Association, led to a Highland tenantry overwhelmingly, and vociferously, in favour of Irish Home Rule. This enthusiasm put the apathy on the part of the Irish nationalists for anything other than Irish self determination into even sharper relief.<sup>21</sup>

### **Ireland and the Highlands – Sources and Source Criticism**

This thesis makes use of several varieties of contemporary sources. The nature of the study means that manuscript sources such as estate papers have not been as useful as in other recent accounts of the period, although Fraser of Kilmuir's papers, held in Inverness, yielded some interesting insights into the way such men may have felt about the 'external' agitators in the region. Furthermore, some Scottish manuscript sources contain letters to, from or relating to some of the main characters in this thesis, such as the Blackie Papers, Cunninghame Graham Papers or Ivory Papers. For Michael Davitt's career, including some material on his visits to Scotland, the Davitt Papers, held at Trinity College, Dublin, provided a lot of material. Neither Edward McHugh nor Angus Sutherland, however, left personal papers. Although the National Archive of Scotland contains some memos and letters from Sutherland, these deal with his time as a member of the Congested Districts Board for Scotland, and are only of tangential relevance to this work.

Due to this lack of manuscript sources – such as private letters or diaries – for two of the main figures in the thesis, the importance of being aware of the context from which information is gleaned takes on extra significance. The land question was, of course, a very live one in the Highlands – as in Scotland in general – throughout the 1880s. By this is meant not only the land question in general, but the merits of either settling for a 'three F's' solution, along the lines of the Irish Land Act of 1881, or of a 'root and branch' abolition of landlordism through land nationalisation. Thus, there is a great deal of writing from the period both in pamphlet form, and in the pages of newspapers and journals.

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<sup>21</sup> See *Highland News*, 19 Nov. 1887 (John Dillon in Inverness), 6 Oct. 1888 (T.P. O'Connor in Inverness), 27 Jul. 1889 (Parnell in Edinburgh)

Owing to the claims which have been made by later historians, the *Oban Times* has been subjected to some scrutiny, both in its importance to the land movement in the Highlands, and in its attitude to the Irish land agitators both in Ireland and the Highlands. By way of contrast, John Murdoch's *Highlander* is also examined for its Irish content. Both provide important information about early organisation and the emergence of the land question in the Highlands.

For the period of the 'Crofters' War' in the Highlands, the newspapers have often been placed into starkly opposing camps, being perceived as either friendly or hostile to the crofters. Perhaps the most infamous is the *Scotsman*, which had been founded in Edinburgh in 1817 as a Whiggish alternative to the capital's mainly Tory press. Its leading articles were highly influential, and the *Scotsman* developed a reputation for being virulently anti-Highland.<sup>22</sup>

The varying agendas of the increasingly important newspaper owners and editors made their presence felt in the British Isles during the final quarter of the nineteenth century, and during the period of the 'Land Wars' in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands, the full range of political opinion was to be represented. Influential London papers, such as the *London Times* were supplemented by Scottish and Irish organs such as the *Scotsman*, the *Glasgow Herald* and the *North British Daily Mail*, as well as the *Irish Times* and the *Freeman's Journal*. With the growth of local newspapers it is also possible to observe the increasing influence of the *Connaught Telegraph* in the west of Ireland, and in the Scottish Highlands the *Oban Times* and the Inverness-based *Highlander*. The growth of newspaper readership was so pronounced in the Highlands, for example, that Rev. Donald MacKinnon, minister in the Skye parish of Strath, was able to announce to the Napier Commission in 1883

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<sup>22</sup> James Hunter, for example, described the *Scotsman* as 'the paper most devoted to the landlords' cause'. Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 161. This reputation had a long tradition. T.M. Devine, *The Great Highland Famine* (Edinburgh, 1989), 203, for example, states that during the famine period 'The *Scotsman* thundered in its editorials that the charitable subscriptions of industrious lowlanders had been wasted in the support of "Celtic laziness".' For a critique of the 'sectarian' attitude of secondary sources of Highland history, see E.A. Cameron, *The Land for the People: The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c.1880-1925* (East Linton, 1996), 1-9

that 'I don't suppose, in my recollection, that there were four newspapers coming to the parish [in the 1850s / 1860s]. There are a score or more now.'<sup>23</sup>

The role the press was able to play in Irish agitation, be it over land or nationalism, was noted in 1885 by Edward Sullivan, Gladstone's Lord Chancellor of Ireland. He stated that:

I am satisfied, from long and close observation, that the greatest difficulty in governing Ireland as a contented portion of the Kingdom follows from the tolerance of an unbridled and seditious press, which in the hands of wild and scheming knaves, corrupts and undermines the feelings of the country.<sup>24</sup>

Although the Highlands would never see newspapers being banned or censored in the same way as emergency legislation sometimes permitted in Ireland, many men interested in instigating a Highland land movement came to see the value of the press.<sup>25</sup>

Only one 'radical' newspaper existed in the region – the *Highlander* – although there was occasional support for the crofters from other sources, such as the *North British Daily Mail*. The *Highlander* was established by John Murdoch for the very purpose of ameliorating the condition of the Highland crofters, both socially and culturally, and

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<sup>23</sup> I.M.M. MacPhail, *The Crofters' War* (Stornoway, 1989), 10; B. Jones, 'The Mass Media and Politics', in B. Jones (ed.), *Politics UK* (London, 1997), 148; J.G. Kellas, 'The Liberal Party in Scotland 1885-1895' (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, London, 1961), 217; *PP*, 1884, xxxiii-xxxvi: *Report of Commissioners of Inquiry into the condition of the crofters and cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, (hereafter, *Napier Commission*), q.4746

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in M-L. Legg *Newspapers and Nationalism: The Irish Provincial Press, 1850-1892* (Dublin, 1999), 133

<sup>25</sup> There was a clear hunger for news on Skye, for example, where as early as 1878 a news room was opened under the auspices of the 'Portree News Club'. A report gave some idea of the enthusiasm for the facility, describing the subscriptions which had been taken out to use the telegraphic link with the Press Association as 'encouragingly large'. *Oban Times*, 23 Feb. 1878. The demand for news was later used to good effect by radicals, much to the consternation of some 'authority' figures. Indeed, Rev. MacKinnon of Strath complained in 1883 that he thought that 'the sort of newspapers most of [the crofters] prefer reading are not the newspapers that are calculated to lead them right and give them wise council; and I am afraid many of the newspapers they read are calculated to make a breach between them and their best friends.' *Napier Commission*, qq. 4747-4748. Asked if the *Scotsman* was popular in Skye, he replied that he did not think that it was, adding that 'if the *Scotsman* were a little more read it might teach them more rational views.' This patrician attitude – that the peasant farmers needed sound advice to prevent them being led astray by the radicals – had barely been necessary in the Highlands at the turn of the 1880s. Later, however, MacKinnon stated that 'The *Chronicle* is the paper which is generally read here. Sometimes the Glasgow and Dundee papers, and the *People's Journal* is quite popular'. *Napier Commission*, q. 4832

was thus similar in purpose to Daly's *Connaught Telegraph*. Importantly, however, the metamorphosis of the *Oban Times* from a rather Whiggish organ into something more radical was instigated not from the top – although the take-over in 1882 by Duncan Cameron was a facilitating factor – but rather from 'below'. Regional correspondents, especially those from Liverpool and Glasgow who had been fraternising with Irish Land League members in those cities, started to imbue the *Oban Times* with a reforming zeal at a relatively early stage. The role played by these correspondents and, by extension, by the Irish Land League, in politicising the crofters, is a subtle one which has not been noted by Highland historians. It is, however, vital in understanding the true nature of the relationship between Irish and Highland land reformers during these years.

The *Oban Times* has been one of the publications which has been held up to show a pro-crofter stance.<sup>26</sup> Under its young editor, Duncan Cameron, the *Oban Times* became a catalyst for the crofters ire during the mid-1880s, both in helping to organise it and for giving it a platform for debate. In September 1883, for example, the editor wrote that 'the opposing force is thoroughly and efficiently organised, and it is only by thorough and efficient counter organisation that it can be successfully coped with.'<sup>27</sup>

The belief that the *Oban Times* was a radical advocate of Highland land reform from the outset of the agitation is, however, a mistaken one.<sup>28</sup> During the 1880s, shaped by a variety of influences, a gradual change occurred, transforming the paper from one which abhorred the Irish and early Highland land reformers as law breakers, into one

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<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Hunter, 'Politics of Highland Land Reform', 51; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 144; MacPhail correctly notes that it only became an advocate of the crofters after 1882. MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 11

<sup>27</sup> *Oban Times*, 8 Sep. 1883

<sup>28</sup> Cowan, for example, only went so far as to describe Lorne's local paper as 'a temperate exponent of Liberalism.' R.M.W. Cowan, *The Newspaper in Scotland: a study of its first expansion, 1815-1860* (Glasgow, 1946), 306. In terms of circulation, the scanty evidence available suggests that the *Oban Times* was a 'market leader' in the Highlands. An unreliable poll taken from one shop in Fort William, during one week of 1883, and presented only in the *Oban Times* itself, gives the following sales figures: *Oban Telegraph* – 6 copies; *Inverness Advertiser* – 15 copies; *Inverness Courier* – 40 copies (average of the three issues per week); *Northern Chronicle* – 60 copies; *Oban Times* – 250 copies. See *Oban Times*, 7 Apr. 1883.

which by 1886 was a strong advocate not only of land reform, but also of Irish Home Rule.<sup>29</sup>

Alexander MacKenzie's *Celtic Magazine* entered the land debate at an early stage, and was for a time supplemented by another of his publications, the *Invernessian*. Those who have noted MacKenzie's radicalism and his contribution to the Highland land reform cause have often overlooked both his antipathy towards John Murdoch, and also his lukewarm attitude to Ireland.<sup>30</sup> The *Scottish Highlander*, which MacKenzie edited between 1885 and 1893, also throws up valuable information on land meetings and personalities of the time, but it was clearly a political vehicle for Charles Fraser Mackintosh. A similar caveat must be made for the *Highland News*, which began life in Inverness in 1883 as a temperance organ, but in 1886 became a part of Angus Sutherland's increasingly well-oiled political machinery in northern Scotland. Indeed, for the period from 1886-1894, the *Highland News* provides an incredible amount of material on the minutiae of both Angus Sutherland's speeches and career in parliament, and the workings of the Sutherlandshire Association. It was also strongly in favour of Home Rule for Ireland and Scotland, and thus, used with caution after it effectively became a Sutherland propaganda sheet, it is a very valuable source. Researchers are fortunate in that, because of the *Newsplan* scheme, regional newspapers which were previously difficult to obtain have been made widely available on microfilm.<sup>31</sup> Full microfilm runs are available for other Highland papers,

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<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, it is claiming too much to say that by that time the *Oban Times* was playing a similar role in the lives of many Highland crofters as the *Connaught Telegraph* had done in the west of Ireland at the outset of the Land War. In 1886, the *Oban Times* was certainly a vital platform for the crofters, but it merely facilitated the crofting agitation. The *Connaught Telegraph*, with others, practically instigated the Irish Land War. G. Moran, 'James Daly and the Rise and Fall of the Land League in the West of Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies* xiv (1994), 190. Daly had himself been a grazier, and claimed that although he had come into the newspaper business 'by accident', he did so solely to 'advocate the cause of the poor struggling tenantry.' As a leading member of the Mayo Land League, Daly's newspaper therefore played a vital role in transmitting the policies of the League to the people.' Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism*, 139-140.

<sup>30</sup> MacKenzie was a well-known Highland genealogist, historian, newspaper editor and one time Dean of Guild of Inverness. He was also opposed to land nationalisation, as set out at a very early stage in the life of the *Scottish Highlander*, in which he described such a measure as the crofters jumping 'out of the frying pan and into the fire'. *Scottish Highlander*, 31 Jul. 1885

<sup>31</sup> As recently as 1996, for example, it was noted that 'some of these papers are not widely available. The NLS has the *Northern Chronicle* and *Scottish Highlander*; Inverness Public Library has these and the *Inverness Courier*. All the papers are available in the Newspaper Library of the British Library at Hendon. A complete run of the *Oban Times* can be found in the offices of the paper in Oban, and access for readers can be arranged. The NLS has recently acquired a microfilm copy of the *Oban Times*.' Cameron, *Land for the People?*, 14, footnote 37. The addition of the *Highland News* to the



notably the Tory *Northern Chronicle*, and the Whiggish *Courier*, both from Inverness as well as Whig *John O'Groat Journal*. The *Chronicle* was a consistent opponent of both crofter reform and Irish nationalism from its inception in Inverness in 1881. Whilst remaining opposed to Parnellism and Irish land reform in general, both the *Courier* and the *John O'Groat Journal* eventually softened their lines on crofting reform.

These local papers were supplemented by nationals such as the *Scotsman* and, from Glasgow, the *Glasgow Herald* and the *North British Daily Mail*.<sup>32</sup> It is from sources such as these that early information about Irish political activity in Glasgow can be found, as well as a general insight into the early reaction to such events as the Valtos rent strike of 1881, or the 'Battle of the Braes' in 1882. In addition, London based sources such as *The Times* became increasingly interested in the crofting agitation at this time.

Two other main groups of newspapers also required scrutiny for the purposes of this research, namely Irish and 'Radical' sources. As a part of a wider struggle of the British and Irish working classes, and in particular as an illustration of the necessity of land nationalisation, rather than mere tinkering with the land laws, the crofting regions provided a perfect illustration for radicals. James Shaw Maxwell, a Glasgow radical and member of the Land League of Great Britain, edited *The Voice of the People* from Glasgow in 1883. H.M. Hyndman was responsible for *Justice!*, the journal of the Democratic Federation, both of which gave coverage to the crofters, and especially the apparently excessive measures taken by the authorities, such as Sheriff Ivory of Inverness-shire. The *Christian Socialist* followed a similar path in the mid-1880s, and even though there were tensions and differences of opinion within these radical groups, the crofting agitation continued to be of great symbolic importance to all of them.

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NLS collection gives a new dimension to the study of the Highlands. This newspaper certainly carried the radical tradition in the Highlands for longer than the *Oban Times*.

<sup>32</sup> The *North British Daily Mail*, although it has often been referred to as an important supporter of the early crofting agitation, is one of the most difficult sources to obtain. No microfilm is available at the NLS, although a full run is offered in the Glasgow Room at the Mitchell Library. This, however, has been well used and is rather difficult to read.

Henry George's Single Tax movement also spawned a number of journals, some of which seemed to have been extremely influential at the time.<sup>33</sup> Glasgow was recognised by Henry George himself as the most important centre for the propagation of his theories in the British Isles. Included amongst his supporters in the city were, in the early 1880s, John Ferguson, Edward McHugh and Angus Sutherland. Other characters who have hitherto received little or no coverage in secondary sources, such as Rev. James Cruikshank, David McLardy and Rev. David Macrae, also linked the early crofting movement with the Single Tax agitation which continued from the mid-1880s to the second decade of the Twentieth Century.<sup>34</sup> The year 1888 saw the emergence of the *Bridgeton Single Tax Review and Advertiser*, but more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, an 'official' journal of the Single Tax movement – initially known as *Single Tax*, renamed in 1902 to *Land Values* – appeared in June 1894. Although this appeared many years after the most important initial period of the Highland agitation, one of the leading figures amongst the Single Taxers was Edward McHugh, and the many articles about his activities, both retrospective and current, provide insights into his beliefs and methods. Most importantly, the view which can be gleaned of McHugh as a major figure in the Single Tax agitation throws doubt upon the way in which his activities in Skye in 1882 have been portrayed, both by contemporaries and modern researchers.

Irish sources also shed light onto the 'Crofters' War', and are another area which have, hitherto, been neglected by Scottish historians. We may divide these Irish

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<sup>33</sup> Henry George (1839-1897) is, along with John Ferguson, the figure who binds the three main characters in this thesis. His *Progress and Poverty* (1879) proposed the Single Tax, namely that the state should tax away all economic rent (the income from the use of the bare land, but not from improvements), and abolish all other taxes. As a native of Philadelphia who moved to California at the age of 21, George noted the way in which land values increased as the land became more densely populated. As a basis for his argument, George gave new meaning to the orthodox, or 'Ricardian', doctrine of rent. He argued that since economic progress entailed a growing scarcity of land, the idle landowner reaped ever greater returns at the expense of the productive factors of labour and capital. This unearned economic rent, he held, should be taxed away by the state. A tax on the land could be paid wholly by the landlord, as they would not be able to move the tax burden onto others in the economy. George envisaged that the government's annual income from this 'single tax' would be so large that there would be a surplus for expansion of public works. See Appendix B; H. Landreth & D.C. Colander, *History of Economic Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, (Boston, 1994), 141. George's contribution to Labour politics in Scotland has recently been re-evaluated. See J.R. Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left: the impact of American ideas on the Scottish Labour Movement' (Aberdeen University, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, 1998), Ch. 3; C. Collier, 'Henry George's System of Political Economy', *History of Political Economy*, xi (1979)

<sup>34</sup> Where appropriate, this thesis will provide detailed biographical footnotes about such men. Although they have been almost completely omitted from published work on the Highlands, there were many 'unsung heroes' of the reform agitation throughout Britain and Ireland.

sources into three main subsections: Irish newspapers in Ireland, either national (*Freeman's Journal*, *United Ireland*), or local (such as the *Connaught Telegraph*); Secondly, Irish-American papers (notably the *Irish World*, which was a very radical publication, in favour of Davitt's land nationalisation scheme after 1882) contained a lot of information not only on the crofters, but also on Henry George's progress throughout Britain. George himself was a correspondent of the *Irish World* in 1881, and Edward McHugh and John Ferguson, as well as Michael Davitt, provided regular updates on the crofters' struggle and the Irish involvement in it. Caution must be employed when utilising these American sources, however, owing to the need of the Scottish-based Irishmen to appeal to the radical sentiments amongst Irish Americans in their money raising efforts. Thirdly, British based Irish newspapers, especially in Glasgow, provide a rich source of information not only of the Highland Land Wars, but also of the tensions and personality clashes within Glasgow-Irish circles. Indeed, free from the prejudice and fear of some of the Scottish sources, it is the Irish sources which demonstrate quite clearly that the Irish movement in Scotland was by no means monolithic, and the tensions between radical land reformers on the one hand, and fundamentalist Home Rulers / Parnellites on the other, have important implications for a full understanding of the Irish involvement in the Highlands. Unfortunately, between 1868, with the demise of the *Glasgow Free Press*, and 1884, with the establishment of *The Exile*, the Glasgow Irish community were not represented in the print media.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the *Observer* contained several retrospective articles throughout its existence giving an impression of life amongst the Glasgow Irish in the 1870 and early 1880s. Although these have to be utilised cautiously, they give important leads which may be corroborated, or challenged, by other evidence.

Having considered the main issues to be explored in the body of the thesis and examined, in a critical manner, some of the problems relating to source material, the

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<sup>35</sup> The most comprehensive recent work on the Irish community in Glasgow presents a slightly confused picture in this respect. It makes no mention of *The Exile*, but mistakenly claims that the *Glasgow Observer* was established in 1884, rather than 1885. See Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace*, 61. Bill Murray, *The Old Firm: Sectarianism, Sport and Society in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1984), 283, also claims the *Observer* was founded in 'April 1884'. The first edition was, in fact, 17 April 1885, and ran an editorial on the need for an Irish Catholic newspaper in Glasgow. *The Exile* is certainly an obscure newspaper, which ran for less than a year from August 1884. It has several articles expressing solidarity with the crofters, and its content is of a generally political nature. Although there are some omissions, most of the numbers are available as a hard copy at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow. It is bound up with *The Voice of the People*, mentioned earlier. I am grateful to Dr. Elaine McFarland for drawing my attention to *The Exile*.



remainder of this introductory chapter will outline the biographical backgrounds of Michael Davitt, Edward McHugh, and Angus Sutherland.

### **Michael Davitt and the Highland Land Issue**

Michael Davitt's role in the crofting agitation is one which has been acknowledged by several sources. This has, however, sometimes been explained away in rather sentimental terms, the friendship between Davitt and John Murdoch leading to conclusions that the Highland and Irish peasant farmers united as 'Celtic cousins;' to throw off the bonds of English tyranny.<sup>36</sup> He has been portrayed both as a Celtic nationalist and a labour pioneer, and if this has led onlookers to believe Davitt was all things to all people, it is only necessary to look at recent articles in which he is claimed as an inspiration by both Sinn Fein and the Northern Ireland Peace Movement.<sup>37</sup> As recently as June 1997, Davitt was hailed as the 'Irishman who won the hearts and minds of the Skye crofters.' In advance of her visit to the island, the then Irish President Mary Robinson spoke of her admiration for Davitt: 'When I go to Skye it will be deeply special to me to know that I am following in the footsteps of Michael Davitt, and that he was welcomed there as someone who had been an important advocate for Scotland's crofters.'<sup>38</sup>

Michael Davitt was born to a smallholding family in Straide, Co. Mayo, in 1846 – during the great Irish famine – but at the age of four his family were evicted from their holding and had to emigrate to Lancashire in England. After working sixty hours a week for two years in a cotton mill, Davitt lost his arm in an industrial accident at the age of eleven, and thereafter attended school and worked as a printer's mate.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 548; Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 304, 496; Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances, Volume 1*, 491; Hunter, *The Last of the Free*, 307; Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People* (London, 1986), 71; Hunter, *For the People's Cause*, 38; Hunter, 'The Politics of Highland Land Reform', 58; Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection', 187

<sup>37</sup> *An Phoblacht / Republican News*, 28 Mar. 1996; Irish language TV channel TnaG also recently featured Davitt in *An Lasar Ceiteach*. S. O'Donaile, 'Better than lovin'', *An Phoblacht / Republican News*, 3 Dec. 1998, described Davitt as an 'international socialist' who 'campaigns politically on Russia, South Africa, the Jews, Scotland and England'. Even contemporary anarchists used him as a fine example to follow when, after the Bodyke evictions, Davitt cursed himself for ever teaching the doctrine of passive resistance. See *Freedom – A Journal of Anarchist Socialism*, Jul. 1887

<sup>38</sup> *West Highland Free Press*, 6 June 1997; Mary Robinson also showed a awareness of the importance in Scotland of John Ferguson, referring to him in her speech of acceptance of an honorary degree from St. Andrews University. L. Siggins, *The Woman Who Took Power in the Park* (Edinburgh, 1997), 189

<sup>39</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 1-185; C. King, *Michael Davitt* (Dublin, 2000), 10-14; Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt*, 1-13

Like many of his contemporaries in the Irish emigrant community, his sense of nationalism and an early desire to avenge perceived injustices led him to the Irish Republican Brotherhood.<sup>40</sup> He soon became a very active Fenian in England, and on May 14<sup>th</sup> 1870 he was arrested whilst he waited for an arms supplier in Paddington Station, London. After seven and a half extremely arduous years in Clerkenwell Prison, which had a very bad effect on his health, he was released on a 'ticket of leave', meaning that his continued liberty depended on his good behaviour.

It was in the period immediately after his release from Clerkenwell, when he was one of the prime movers of the Irish 'New Departure', allying Fenianism, parliamentary agitation, and the nascent land movement in Mayo, that Davitt earned the title 'Father of the Land League'. As Moody has pointed out, however, there was more to Davitt than this, and after 1882 he fought not only for Irish self-government and land reform, but championed causes throughout the world, from the Scottish crofters, to the Russian Jews, to the Boers.<sup>41</sup> Another recent article has noted that:

In the last years of his life he travelled and corresponded widely. He had, indeed, in those years more international influence and his interests were far less insular than a concentration on his Irish contribution might lead one to believe. This is not to deny that Ireland was central to his political life but to add that he was a man with a commitment to important international issues as well.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the portrayal of Davitt as being condemned to 'a career of relative ineffectuality' after taking up the cause of land nationalisation in 1882 is only tenable if one accepts that Ireland was the most important issue in world politics.<sup>43</sup> It has also been claimed that, after 1882:

Davitt moved out of the inner circle of the nationalist movement to create for himself the role of loyal opposition to Parnell. The Land Leaguer's greatest days were behind him, but he could take comfort in the realisation that the agitation he had organised resulted in reducing

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<sup>40</sup> F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (New York 1971), 163

<sup>41</sup> Moody, 'Davitt and the British Labour Movement', 53

<sup>42</sup> C. King, 'Michael Davitt and the Kishineff Pogrom, 1903', *Irish Slavonic Studies*, xvii (1996), 43

<sup>43</sup> J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1974), 88

the tenant farmers' rents by millions of dollars and preparing the way for their eventual take-over of the land they tilled.<sup>44</sup>

Certainly, Davitt's influence over the Irish nationalist movement waned, even though he entered parliament for a while, but he busied himself with numerous other activities to improve the position various groups of people throughout the world. His activities have only recently started to receive the recognition they deserve from Irish historians.<sup>45</sup> What is certain is that, in the aftermath of the 'Kilmainham Treaty', Davitt did not comfort himself with the work that had been done so far on the land issue. Indeed, he turned himself towards working on a far more comprehensive settlement of the problem. This notion of land nationalisation was a far more radical plan than had been previously espoused, either of the 'Three F's' or Peasant Proprietary, and it was a plan which would not only include the farmers of Ireland, but of the workers of the whole of Britain, including the Highland crofters.

In a letter, written in 1908 to Mary Davitt, Michael's widow, Ferguson's widow displayed that she was in no doubt as to their late husbands' respective contributions to the crofting agitation:

I have come upon a scrapbook from which I have taken the enclosed papers. One paper which I send has references to the crofter movement in the Highlands and the Islands of Scotland, which Mr. Davitt and my husband started and which, I expect, few people in Ireland now know anything of...<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> T.N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism 1870-1890* (Philadelphia, 1966), 129; Parnell's most prominent recent biographer also suggests that Davitt returned to Ireland from America as a 'diminished political force'. F.S.L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977), 234

<sup>45</sup> Although only a brief study, Carla King's *Michael Davitt* gives the most balanced account of Davitt's multi-faceted career. Another account appeared in 1976, dealing with Davitt's later life, but using only secondary sources. The author referred to Moody's then forthcoming book, which would 'surely prove the definitive biography'. See J.M. Cahalan, 'Michael Davitt: "The Preacher of Ideas", 1881-1906', *Éire-Ireland*, xi (1976), 13-33. Moody's *Davitt and Irish Revolution* is, as King noted, 'an indispensable source for Davitt's life and times'. Whilst there is a general concluding chapter on Davitt's later life, however, the detail of this work is concerned almost entirely with events up to 1882. Moody's other work on Davitt partly fills the historiographical gaps, but there has been almost no research undertaken thus far on Davitt and Scotland. Harding, 'John Murdoch, Michael Davitt and the Land Question' forms a partial exception to this, but lacks analysis and contains some factual errors. If Moody treated Davitt with a sympathy lacking in some of the more general histories, Sheehy-Skeffington's *Michael Davitt* is practically a hagiography. Moody noted that 'while Skeffington tries always to be accurate and fair, he is uncritical alike of his subject and his sources.' For these brief bibliographical notes, see King, *Davitt*, 91-94; Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, xvii-xxii

<sup>46</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9375/ 993, Mrs. Ferguson to Mrs. Mary Davitt, 13 Jan 1908

While the personal links Davitt had with Scotland, through John Ferguson, John Murdoch and others, must be acknowledged, his involvement was much more complex. In Scotland, and especially the Highlands, he saw a land bedevilled by landlordism, and a community which could help in the push for Irish Home Rule.<sup>47</sup> Moody, for example, indicated that Davitt ‘increasingly he came to believe that home rule could only be won for Ireland with the support of the British working classes.’<sup>48</sup> This meant that there could be no room for religious or racial bitterness between Scots and Irish, a theme which both Ferguson and Murdoch had striven to bring to prominence, and which Davitt happily took up. It is also clear that, after the land league was wound up in Ireland, Britain offered more promising ground for Davitt’s social ideas.

This preoccupation with land reform brought Davitt into conflict with his former allies. Tension with Parnell and the ‘Parnellites’ increased during the 1880s as land reform became more important to Davitt than narrower nationalist issues. In the aftermath of the Phoenix Park murders, for example, Davitt sought to direct public attention away from nationalism. ‘The gospel of the land for the people’, he said:

Is a Universal gospel and in its triumph is involved the social regeneration of England as clearly and as fully as the regeneration of Ireland. In the heart of whoever receives it, race bitterness and ancient hatreds die away.<sup>49</sup>

It should be remembered that the images presented by Davitt and John Ferguson to Irish America, which were vital for supplying funds, usually portrayed an oppressed and helpless Celtic race in the Highlands, and stressed the importance of the Scots in winning Home Rule. The rhetoric used both by Davitt in his speeches, and by Ferguson nearer to home, however, show that the 1882 tour by Davitt in Scotland was part of a wider attempt to break down prejudice against the Irish in Scotland, and to

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<sup>47</sup> Like Parnell, however, Davitt, at least initially, seemed to think that Home Rule for Scotland was out of the question. Whilst incarcerated in Portland in 1881, he wrote in his journal that if England had allowed the Irish people to retain their land, and freely accepted their religion, ‘there is every probability that we in Ireland would be today in reality and not in name “an integral part of the British Empire”, and my countrymen as submissive to English rule as those of their kilted and Cambrian race north of the Tweed and west of the Severn.’ Quoted in Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 509

<sup>48</sup> See also, T.W. Moody, ‘Michael Davitt’, in J.W. Boyle (ed.) *Leaders and Workers* (Cork, 1965), 47

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in *Land Values*, Jun. 1902; Wood also notes the hostility shown by many in Irish America towards Scotland during the 1870s. Wood, ‘Land Reform and Populism in the Atlantic Community’, 194.

encourage Irish people to make common cause with the natives. Many strands of his thought, often inter-linked, can be discerned in his forays into Scotland and the Highlands, especially his lecture tour of 1882 and his direct appeals to the crofting community in 1887. In between his two visits, he paid attention to the region through the other land reformers who came to the Highlands.<sup>50</sup> These points will be explored in greater detail in chapters 4,5 and 6.

### **The early life and career of Angus Sutherland, 1848-1882**

Angus Sutherland, son of William, was born on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1848, in the Sutherlandshire village of Helmsdale, a settlement made up largely of crofters relocated from the interior regions of the county. Like Michael Davitt, who had been born some two years earlier, Angus Sutherland was born into a traditional tenant farmers' community in a peripheral region of the British Isles. Like Michael Davitt, a man with whom Sutherland would, for a time, work closely for a common cause, Sutherland appears to have been brought up with a burning sense of injustice regarding the system of landlordism in the Scottish Highlands, resulting from the evictions which had been carried out in his native county since the early years of the nineteenth century.<sup>51</sup> As will be seen, the Highland Clearances, the idea of landlords oppressing previously contented tenants, and the infamous 'burnings' of Patrick Sellar and James Loch, dominated much of Angus Sutherland's early rhetoric and attempts to mobilise the political forces lying dormant in the Highlands.

Unlike Michael Davitt, however, Sutherland was not himself the victim of an eviction. The fact that Davitt and his family were turned out of their dwelling in Straide, Co. Mayo, in 1850 and compelled to travel to Lancashire to make a living clearly gave Davitt a strong sympathy both with rural workers and urban labourers.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, such was the impact that this event was thought to have had upon Davitt's later career, that

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<sup>50</sup> James Hunter has claimed repeatedly that Michael Davitt was offered a Parliamentary seat by the Skye crofters in 1887, as a replacement for the Unionist Charles Fraser Mackintosh. My research has failed to find any evidence whatsoever to back up this theory. Devine has recently accepted Hunter's version of events. Hunter, 'Politics of Highland Land Reform', 58; Hunter, 'Gaelic Connection', 188; Devine, *Scottish Nation*, 496

<sup>51</sup> He informed the Napier Commission in 1883 that 'I have seen in my grandfather's house and my father's house a pile of correspondence describing the vicissitudes they underwent. They were left exposed on the north coast, and they had to find their way from Hudson's Bay to the Red River settlement; and they were exposed to the rigours of a lengthened winter, and, to crown all, the Indians came and killed some of them.' *Napier Commission*, q. 38252.

<sup>52</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 10



in 1887 the *Irish World* ironically suggested that ‘the Irish people should erect a monument in memory of the landlord who forty years ago evicted Michael Davitt’s father from his home’.<sup>53</sup> Sutherland does not appear himself to have had a difficult childhood. Remaining in Helmsdale, he was educated at the Free Church school there, and shone as a gifted pupil from an early age. At the age of 15, he was appointed to the post of student-teacher at the Free Church school, a position in which the *Highland News* – Sutherland’s strongest political ally in the press after he became a member of parliament – claimed ‘he became a prime favourite both with the master and the pupils.’<sup>54</sup>

The clear contrast with Davitt is that whilst the Irish agitator was forcibly evicted from his native village at the age of four, along with his family, Angus Sutherland remained in his until the age of twenty, and even then only left in order to take up a teacher training position in Edinburgh. Here, he apparently lived with an uncle in Buccleuch Street.<sup>55</sup> Whilst one newspaper claimed, many years later, that ‘here, the Land League movement had its origin’, there is little evidence to link the young Angus Sutherland with the future crofting agitation until a few years later.<sup>56</sup>

Whilst Michael Davitt was a self-educated man to a large degree, the loss of his right arm in a factory accident at the age of 11 enabling him to resume some elementary schooling, and long periods in prison allowing time for study of economics, history and politics, for example; Sutherland followed what might be seen as a traditional path of education for an intelligent young man. After his training course in Edinburgh he received a position in Aberfeldy, Perthshire, where he worked until going to Glasgow University in November 1872.<sup>57</sup> Prior to arriving in Glasgow, Sutherland devoted himself to assiduous study of ‘the leading authors of the day’, and eventually

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<sup>53</sup> *Irish World*, 22 Jan. 1887

<sup>54</sup> *Highland News*, 22 Jun. 1889.

<sup>55</sup> *Highland News*, 22 Jun. 1889; *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Jan. 1922

<sup>56</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Jan. 1922; This conjectural point, picked up on by Crowley, has been reinforced in recent times. One historian claimed that ‘Angus Sutherland founded the Highland Land League in Edinburgh in 1882’. See Crowley, ‘The Crofters’ Party’, 113; Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics*, 102.

<sup>57</sup> *Highland News*, 22 Jun. 1889; *Inverness Courier*, 20 Jan. 1922

completed his degree course 'with distinction, especially in Mathematics and Philosophy'.<sup>58</sup>

In retrospect, these years seem to have been formative ones for Angus Sutherland the agitator and politician. Whilst it is often noted that he was a mathematics teacher, the fact that he had also reputedly excelled at philosophy should not be underestimated. His early articles and speeches on the crofting problem attempt, not always successfully, to give a dispassionate, analytical view, concentrating on political economy and legal issues rather than appeals to emotion. His years at Glasgow University, between 1872 and 1876, when he became a mathematics teacher at Glasgow Academy, were also a time of great political activity amongst the Glasgow Irish, especially John Ferguson and his Home Rule Association. By the time Sutherland is first mentioned in a political context, he had been influenced by the Irishmen of the city.

Therefore, having been brought up – peacefully, it would appear – in Sutherlandshire, and progressing on merit through training college and University to become a respected teacher, Angus Sutherland might even be portrayed as one of the successes of the policy of Loch and Sellar. Forcing the crofters, to a degree, to diversify their pastoral existence in order to make a living, the Improvers would have argued that Sutherland was a perfect example of a man who had 'made good'. Had it not been for the Sutherland estate's reorganisation, Angus Sutherland would never have risen to such a respectable job, rather, he would have remained on a subdivided family croft at Ceann-na-Coille, further up the Strath from Helmsdale, and forced to eke out a miserable existence.<sup>59</sup> It is not, however, altogether surprising that Sutherland did not, in later life, feel grateful to those who had rationalised the Duke of Sutherland's lands, and instead he turned his abilities as a good public speaker, and as an organiser, to helping 'vindicate the rights' of his Highland kinfolk.

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<sup>58</sup> *Highland News*, 22 Jun. 1889; G.B. Clark and James Mavor were contemporaries of Angus Sutherland at Glasgow University. J. Mavor, *My Windows on the Street of the World*, (2 Vols., New York, 1923), i, 57-80

<sup>59</sup> Prebble identifies Ceann-na-Coille as the dwelling place of Angus Sutherland's great grandfather James Sutherland, *Seumas Buidhe*. However, he also mistakenly claims that Sutherland entered Parliament in 1885. J. Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (Harmondsworth, 1963), 115

Just as Michael Davitt, growing up around other Irishmen in Haslingden, was inevitably brought up with a folk memory of the evils of landlordism, so Sutherland, whilst not directly affected by it himself when growing up, nevertheless had a two-fold exposure to its impact. Firstly, the stories of his parents and his grandparents, had a great influence on his young mind, as becomes apparent through his speeches, written articles and even formal statements, such as that to the Napier Commission in 1883, when he was taken to task for describing events from oral tradition as concrete fact.<sup>60</sup> Secondly, of course, he spent his student years at a time when the likes of John Stuart Mill were championing individual liberty, and in a place – Glasgow – which bore eloquent witness to the results of landlordism, in its high proportion of both Irish and Highland Gaels struggling amidst poverty to adjust to an urban life. From 1873, furthermore, John Murdoch began to articulate Highland grievances and plea the case for land reform through his *Highlander* newspaper. T.W. Moody has described Michael Davitt's mindset in relation to landlords, and a similar argument can be put forward for Angus Sutherland:

There is nothing surprising in the bitter indignation that the poverty of Mayo, contrasted with the great rentals of the landowners of the county, inspired in Davitt, nor in his tendency to exaggerate the militancy of the Mayo people in resisting 'landlordism'... The peasant tradition received support from contemporary inquirers and observers, the latter including such eminent Victorians such as John Bright and John Stuart Mill. The case for the landlords was presented with great ability but with considerably less popular appeal.<sup>61</sup>

Although the same tradition of resistance was absent from Sutherlandshire, the ingredients were present which would enable Angus Sutherland to appeal to a deeply held, if seldom expressed, sense of injustice. Whilst there was no single defining action in within his own life which caused Sutherland's antipathy towards landlordism, he was in no doubt that, as he stressed himself at a meeting in Glasgow in 1880, 'every Highlander was a born agitator because he had suffered directly or indirectly from the Clearances.'<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See below, 183

<sup>61</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 33-34

<sup>62</sup> Meeting of the Federation of Celtic Societies, Angus Hotel, Glasgow. Reported in *Highlander*, 10 Nov. 1880; *Oban Times*, 13 Nov. 1880.



### **Edward McHugh and the Highland land agitation**

When taking their weekly copy of the *Highland News* during the spring of 1915 the majority of the Highland population would, no doubt, first have turned anxiously to find news about friends and loved ones fighting in Europe. The edition from Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1915, for example, contained the names of many from Inverness and the Highlands who would not return home alive. Perhaps the most prominent war victim of that week was W.G.C. Gladstone, grandson of the ‘Grand Old Man’, and M.P. for Kilmarnock Burghs, killed in action in France. The paper also detailed German bombing attacks on the English towns of Sittingbourne and Faversham. There was no mention, however, of the death of a 61 year old Ulsterman, Edward McHugh, who had passed away quietly at his home in Birkenhead the previous Tuesday.<sup>63</sup>

McHugh was therefore something of an enigma. Prominent in the Highland land agitation from the very start, from his base in Glasgow, it is surprising that his death went unmentioned even during the turmoil of the Great War. In spite of being remembered three years later in a book dedicated those who had advocated land reform in the Highlands, McHugh has remained a figure who has been either ignored, or misunderstood, in spite of the recent increase in the historiography of the Victorian Highlands.<sup>64</sup>

Edward McHugh had been noted as bringing the Irish Land War into the Scottish Highlands at a relatively early stage, and it is equally clear that the portrayal of his – or the Land League’s – motives as being either nationalist or as a blow for workers’ rights, could be suitably blurred. John Ferguson, appealing in 1887 for funds for the Highland agitation, and to contest Scottish crofting constituencies, reminded readers of the *Irish World* that:

When the Crofter Commission of Lord Napier was held some years ago, bitter mention was made of the ‘secret agents of the Glasgow Land League’, how they stirred up the ‘pious, law abiding Highland

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<sup>63</sup> Ironically, Gladstone had been a strong advocate, like McHugh, of the Single Tax. Both their deaths were noted in the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values’ Annual Report for 1914. See *Land Values*, July 1915.

<sup>64</sup> See J. MacLeod, *Highland Heroes of the Land Reform Movement* (Inverness, 1917), 154; McHugh is buried alongside his wife, Ellen, and daughter, Ethel, at Flaybrick Hill Cemetery, Birkenhead. It is possible, with difficulty, to find the McHugh plot (Roman Catholic Section 3, Grave No. 267), but it is unmarked by any headstone.

people' to demand reductions of rent, and how one dangerous Irish Fenian, 'Ed. McHugh, had gone from cottage to cottage teaching the communism of Henry George and the *Irish World*.' This was quite true, Ed. McHugh spend months amongst those simple people...McHugh from time to time reported to me that with half a dozen to help him he could create a division in the North of Scotland that would at once weaken England's hold on Ireland and elevate the social condition of the Highland people...<sup>65</sup>

Writing in the aftermath of the failure of Gladstone's first Home Rule scheme, and at the start of A.J. Balfour's crackdown on the 'Plan of Campaign' in Ireland, Ferguson naturally attempted to appeal to the nationalist instincts of Irish America. In doing so he continued a theme which had been a favourite of Dr. William Carroll, namely of creating an Irish 'Fifth Column' in Britain by agitating amongst the brother Celt in the Highlands.<sup>66</sup> This would have the two-fold benefit for Irish nationalism of both distracting Westminster's attention from affairs in Ireland, as well as showing the way forward for the Highlanders' co-religionists in Ulster. When looking at Ferguson's American letter, however, it is worth bearing in mind that there was always a need to accentuate the revolutionary for that audience. As Kee wrote of Parnell's overtures to the Irish in America, 'there was a tactical need to give an impression of extremism in America, where the financial support came from.'<sup>67</sup> John Ferguson was quite prepared to portray what had gone before to suit the needs of the moment. Later, as a member of Glasgow City Council, for example, he presented the Land League agitation in somewhat less revolutionary terms.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 14 May 1887

<sup>66</sup> Dr. William Carroll's parents were evicted from their holding in Rathmullan, Co. Donegal, when he was only three years old, and settled thereafter in Keene, Ohio. He was proud of the fact, as he told the Times Special Commission in 1888, that his ancestors had 'paid England back blow for blow' during the American Wars of Independence. Settling in Philadelphia, he subsequently joined the Fenian Brotherhood, and Clan-na-Gael. See W. O'Brien & D. Ryan (eds.), *Devoy's Postbag* (2 Vols., Dublin, 1953), i, 125. The relationship between John Murdoch and William Carroll has been well covered in the history of the period. See, e.g., Hunter, 'Gaelic Connection', 179. In spite of the fact that Alexander MacKenzie later printed letters from the *Scotsman* which tried to prove Murdoch's links with Fenianism by showing his friendship with Carroll, MacKenzie himself was acquainted with the doctor, and indeed made a special round trip of 200 miles to meet with the 'genuine Irish Celt' in 1880. *Celtic Magazine*, Aug. 1880, Oct. 1881.

<sup>67</sup> R. Kee, *The Laurel and the Ivy: The Story of Charles Stewart Parnell and Irish Nationalism* (Harmondsworth, 1993), 343

<sup>68</sup> Bemoaning that the 'cream of the Irish race' had been imprisoned in 1881-2, Ferguson asked 'What for? Because they advocated passive resistance to the Landlord garrison which was driving the population to foreign lands and turning their country into a wilderness. Because they counselled the people to use British Trades' Union methods, admitted to be legal in England, towards the traitors to their country who took farms from which people had been evicted for non-payment of rents which had

Of all the Irishmen concerned with the plight of the crofters, McHugh appears to have been the one least concerned with Home Rule for Ireland. That is not to say that, like most politically active Irishmen of his time, he did not think the idea of Home Rule unimportant to the development of Ireland. As a devoted follower of Henry George, however, he believed nationality to be subservient to the condition of individuals.<sup>69</sup> Whilst Davitt and Ferguson shared this view, they were much more vociferous on the subject of Irish self-government, even if as a means to the ultimate end of land nationalisation and the taxation of land values. Indeed, in his biographical work, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, Davitt presented McHugh's mission as a part of a wider land agitation rather than as any attempt to win Home Rule:

Steps were likewise taken to carry land league propaganda into the Highlands in order to stir up a crofter revolt against Scottish landlordism. Mr. Edward McHugh, then of Glasgow, a man of remarkable ability and an ideal propagandist to any just cause that captures his adhesion, was commissioned by the league executive in Dublin to make a tour of the Island of Skye and other districts as an emissary of the anti-landlord movement. Mr. McHugh, being able to converse in Gaelic, performed his task with marked success. In a short time the mission showed results in the formation of the Highland League, which, though independent in its organisation and government from that of Ireland, was allied in a bond of sympathy and purpose to the movement in the sister Celtic country...<sup>70</sup>

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ceased to be possible.' J. Ferguson, *Three Centuries of Irish History, from the Reign of Mary the Catholic to that of Victoria the Protestant* (Glasgow, 1898), 122

<sup>69</sup> He had been a member of the Irish Home Rule Confederation, for example, before the establishment of the Irish Land League.

<sup>70</sup> Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 228. This is the only reference to McHugh's ability to speak Gaelic. Some Skye delegates before the Napier Commission claimed that they were unable to understand McHugh's speeches because they were in English. See *Napier Commission*, qq. 7220, 7221, 7230. Henry George also implied that the reason why John Murdoch accompanied McHugh on his trip to Skye in 1882 was to explain things in Gaelic to the crofters. See *Irish World*, 5 May 1882. McHugh did speak English with a Scottish accent, and as far as being a native Irish speaker is concerned, all that can be said is that, at the time of his birth in Co. Tyrone, less than 5% of the county claimed ability in the language. See L. Kennedy, P.S. Ell, E.M. Crawford & L.A. Clarkson (eds.), *Mapping the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 1999), 103. It is possible that he learned Irish as an expression of national identity whilst living in Greenock or Glasgow, of course, but, in general, nationalism seems to have held minor importance for him. Of the other main characters discussed in this thesis, Angus Sutherland was certainly able to converse fluently in Gaelic, and gave many speeches in the language. Even though Michael Davitt's family moved to Lancashire when he was just a boy, it is recorded that Irish was the domestic language of many in the Irish community in Haslingden. It was the native tongue of Davitt's family. Davitt had also used Irish to baffle police reporters during the Irish Land War, such as at Corofin, near Tuam, in November 1879. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 6, 13, 348. Both of Davitt's visits to the Highlands drew comment upon the subject of language. He wrote in his diary during his first visit to Inverness that 'I can understand their Gaelic and have been understood in return

Davitt was able to reap some of the fruit sown by McHugh when he made his enthusiastically received visit to the Highlands in late 1882, and again seemed to credit the Land League envoy with setting later events in motion.

In spite of a long subsequent career in Trades Unionism and promotion of the Single Tax, McHugh's obituaries reveal that he was recalled for the work he had done among the crofters some three decades earlier. Indeed, this episode in his life took up the bulk of his obituary notice in the *Freeman's Journal*, and whilst his efforts are obviously linked with the parallel Irish agitation, there is little to suggest he was an ardent Irish nationalist:

His experiences among the Highlanders... excited Mr. McHugh's keen sympathy with the condition of the crofters, and it was mainly through his initiative and efforts that the agitation was set on foot which resulted in the passing of the Crofters' Act and the various other measures which have been enacted for the benefit of the Highlanders – services which, one is glad to hear, are still gratefully remembered by them.<sup>71</sup>

The *Freeman's Journal* correspondent undoubtedly thought that McHugh's exertions in the Highlands would be remembered by many readers. However, his assertion that 'his connection with the Irish and Scottish land agitations led Mr. McHugh to make a close study of the land problem generally, and he became an ardent advocate of the policy of Henry George' is somewhat misplaced. McHugh had been exposed to Georgite teachings, possibly at first in association with John Ferguson or Richard McGhee – both McHugh and McGhee would call their sons 'Henry George' - since the publication, in 1880, in Britain of *Progress and Poverty*. He appears to have encountered George in person for the first time in Glasgow a month prior to his visit to Skye.<sup>72</sup> And given the choice of material and arguments put forward throughout the envoy's time on Skye, there is no doubt that he was already thoroughly convinced by the truth of George's arguments.

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speaking Irish'. TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9353, Sat. 4 Nov. 1882. In 1887, he told reporters that 'I can understand the Gaelic in Skye, and I have found good Gaelic scholars who understand me when I speak in native Irish'. The language issue proved the bond between the two areas, he said, because 'neither in Irish nor in Gaelic is there any word for landlordism'. *Glasgow Observer*, 14 May 1887

<sup>71</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Apr. 1915

<sup>72</sup> *Single Tax*, Nov. 1900

Given the sobriquet 'A Tyrone Hero', Edward McHugh was remembered by Joseph MacLeod in 1917 as a 'Highland Hero of the Land Reform Movement.' And yet, while he recognised the strong association with Henry George, who followed McHugh to the Highlands and Islands, detail of earlier activity is noticeable by its absence.<sup>73</sup> Whilst this seems to cast doubt as to the assertion in the *Freeman's Journal* that McHugh's activity was still well remembered in the Highlands, an account of his final visit to Skye suggests that it is MacLeod who is at fault neglecting to mention the Tyrone man's groundbreaking initial visit. At a meeting at Borrodale Public School on Friday October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1908, John MacPherson – the 'Glendale Martyr' – greeted McHugh as an old friend. Furthermore:

John MacKenzie moved a vote of welcome and thanks to Mr. McHugh, and Roderick McFarland seconded. Both speakers dealt in a thorough and businesslike way with the substance of the resolutions, and referred in grateful terms to the help they had received now and in former times from Mr. McHugh...<sup>74</sup>

It would appear, therefore, that two problems in the contemporary sources dog the historian of McHugh's career. The first is brought about by the fact that McHugh never cared to enter a career in parliamentary politics and make a name for himself, but rather was happiest to agitate wherever and whenever the need arose. This led to him making an impact in several areas, but by a constant nagging agitation, especially in later years on behalf of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, rather than by monster meetings or widespread publicity. If, like Richard McGhee, McHugh had entered parliament, the historian could have expected to have more extant material from which to build up a picture of the man. As it is, his very refusal to take up parliamentary politics tells us more than anything about his single minded advocacy of land reform. If this makes him appear a single issue campaigner, his retort would have been that no other social reforms could be undertaken until the root cause of all deprivation, the inequitable distribution and use of land, was destroyed.

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<sup>73</sup> MacLeod, *Highland Heroes*, 154. MacLeod wrote that: 'Though an Irishman by birth, he was not unknown to many of us in the early eighties, when he was advance agent for Henry George's speaking campaign in the Highlands of 1884. Along with Mr. McHugh was associated Mr. Richard McGhee MP, who, too, visited the Highlands in favour of land reform. As a result of this visit he took back with him a wife from the district of Beauly, which he used to declare himself a good Highlander.'

<sup>74</sup> *Land Values*, Nov. 1908



Irishmen, crofters, dockers, and workers of all kinds from New York to New Zealand benefited from his efforts over the years, but this meant that no one organisation could be said to 'own' him. Similarly, even though he settled down periodically with his wife and children at 'Single Tax Cottage' in Birkenhead, McHugh endured a nomadic existence for the majority of his life. In spite of claiming he was 'the Irishman who had to explain he was not a Scotsman', the obituary in his local newspaper still referred to him as a 'hard headed Scotsman.'<sup>75</sup> McHugh, therefore, died something of an enigma. In spite of a life 'serving the cause of humanity', his life was not remembered in the same way as Davitt, or even John Murdoch, the most striking example of this apathy coming in the omission of any notice of his death from the *Highland News* or any of the other northern journals.

The second point of contention is over the label of 'Irish nationalist', which is often hung on McHugh. He was certainly a leading figure in Glasgow Irish politics in the late 1870s, 'being one of the first Irishmen in Scotland to enrol [himself] among [Davitt and Parnell's] followers', when they 'raised the banner of the Irish Land League', and showing such promise that he was 'immediately singled out as a recruit of exceptional capacity, and he was appointed to be the first organiser of the League in Scotland.'<sup>76</sup> It was in 1881 that the London executive of the Land League had appointed McHugh as paid secretary for Scotland, and along with other radicals such as John Bruce Glasier, they formed themselves into the Michael Davitt Branch of the National Land League of Great Britain and Ireland that November.<sup>77</sup>

It must be remembered, however, that his being secretary of the League in Glasgow, under John Ferguson's leadership, meant a closer relationship with land reform than with Irish nationalism. Naturally, the two issues were inextricably linked in Irish politics at this time, but by April 1882 when he went to Skye, his land nationalisation principles would have put him at odds with the majority of the leaders in Irish politics, who believed – like Parnell – that the Land War was over. Unlike Ferguson and Davitt, there is no record, or accusation, of any connection, between McHugh and the Fenians or IRB, and the nearest allusion to any such connection is the rather tenuous

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<sup>75</sup> *Land Values*, May 1915; *Birkenhead Advertiser*, 17 Apr. 1915

<sup>76</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Apr. 1915

<sup>77</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 14 Nov. 1881

comment after his death in the *Liverpool Daily Post* that ‘he started as an almost violent democrat.’<sup>78</sup> This need not refer to any Republican leanings, however, only, as the piece itself explains, that he was ‘insistent at all costs upon the rights and advancement of man.’

The Glasgow Branch of the Land League, and later the Home Government Branch of the National League, always contained a peculiar blend of nationalists and labour activists. It was criticised in 1889, for example, by the *Glasgow Observer* after it had condemned the policy of local branches of the Irish National League for trying to ensure the return of five Catholics in the five Parochial Board seats. The Home Government Branch stated that ‘Turk, Jew, Christian or Atheist’ should all have a right to representation, as well as Catholics. The editorial remarked that:

The Home Government Branch of the Irish National League has in its time cut some strange capers. Its reputation for doing queer things should possibly protect it from the criticism which would apply to utterances or acts of a body composed of ordinarily sane men...<sup>79</sup>

Whilst the two roles are by no means incompatible, as exemplified by Ferguson and Davitt, it is a struggle to find any mention ever made by McHugh on the subject of Home Rule for Ireland, and, as will be seen below, his hard headed adherence to the principles of Henry George and land reform would from time to time bring him into direct conflict with the Parnellites.

An ‘Edward McHugh’ is recorded as having attended meetings of the Central Land League in Dublin between December 1879 and October 1881, but this would appear not to be the Land League organiser for Scotland, rather the Irish Nationalist MP for Armagh, who died in Margate in 1900.<sup>80</sup> The *Freeman’s Journal* recorded in May 1880 that ‘several new members of the league were proposed, including... Edward McHugh of Hollywood, Co. Down.’<sup>81</sup> The absence from these meetings of Frank

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<sup>78</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 15 Apr. 1915

<sup>79</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 14 Dec. 1889

<sup>80</sup> Harding, ‘John Murdoch, Michael Davitt and the Land Question’, 151, correctly identifies McHugh as a native of Tyrone and a member of the Land League of Great Britain, but mistakenly claims that he ‘sat as an anti-Parnellite MP for Armagh in the 1890s.’

<sup>81</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 May 1880



Byrne, who would occupy a role in England similar to that played by McHugh in Scotland upon the instigation of the Land League of Great Britain, also serves to emphasise the distinct nature of the two bodies.<sup>82</sup>

Even if McHugh's involvement with the central authorities in the Land League is questionable, rumours of his impending visit to Skye in 1882 increased the fears of the British authorities and landowners that a Fenian plot to bring the Highlands to anarchy was being formed. As noted above, John Ferguson played on this as a way of raising money amongst the associations of New York and elsewhere, but his reference to McHugh being a 'dangerous Irish Fenian' is purely ironic. And yet, it is the loose usage of terms such as 'fenian' which has perhaps misled successive generations of historians as to the motives not only of McHugh, but of the whole Irish operation in the north of Scotland. A recent biographer of Charles Stuart Parnell, for example, freely refers to John Ferguson as a 'fenian', even though it seems Ferguson never took the IRB oath.<sup>83</sup>

It was enemies of the land reformers in the Highlands, however, who more than anyone else would create the impression of an effort being made to subvert the Highlands. Then, as now, 'fenian' was used freely as a derogatory term for anyone with Irish involvement, and again this helps to blur definitions and can create confusion. In addition, too much has perhaps been made of a police report from Skye which referred to McHugh as a 'trusdair', and too much credence given to the later reports of the Inverness newspapers.<sup>84</sup>

J.B. Balfour, the Lord Advocate for Scotland, in a report to Prime Minister William Gladstone in September 1882, identified McHugh, along with John Murdoch, as having been 'largely instrumental' in instigating the recent waves of trouble in Skye.<sup>85</sup> By the time the Napier Commission was hearing evidence in 1883, McHugh was already seen as one of the leading figures of the whole agitation. Lord MacDonald's

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<sup>82</sup> Byrne was General Secretary of the Land League of Great Britain, but at the same time was secretly involved with the 'Invincibles' and implicated directly in the Phoenix Park murders. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 481; Kee, *The Laurel and the Ivy*, 420, 435.

<sup>83</sup> Kee, *The Laurel and the Ivy*, 155;

<sup>84</sup> 'Trusdair' is translated into English as 'dirty fellow'. See Appendix C

<sup>85</sup> British Museum Add. MS. 44, 476, f. 244: Memorandum to Gladstone, 19 Sep. 1882. (Quoted in Hanham, 'Highland Discontent', 32)

factor, Donald MacDonald, highlighted the Irishman's role along with John Murdoch and Alexander Mackenzie.<sup>86</sup> Some of the panic instilled in subsequent months can be seen in Malcolm MacNeill's 'Confidential Report' from 1886, which claimed that:

The teachings of the Land League seem to have penetrated to every district of Skye... Ireland was certainly the origin of the Skye agitation... an Irish emissary, Mr. McHugh, followed and his presence was succeeded by an outbreak of lawlessness in Glendale; publications of socialistic tendency were, and still are, circulated among the population through agencies which bear to have been printed in Dublin.<sup>87</sup>

Whilst many have recognised the importance of the intercourse between the Glasgow Irish and the Glasgow Highland communities during the early stages of the land agitation in Scotland, and indeed this was, as will be seen, recognised by contemporaries, not enough importance has been placed on the independence from Dublin enjoyed by the Glasgow Branch of the Land League. The confusion as to on whose behalf McHugh visited Skye has again been caused by the subsequent writings of Davitt, Clark and others.

Although there has been a lot of research undertaken on the 'Crofters' War' since Crowley and Hanham wrote in the 1950s and 60s, some aspects of the agitation, especially in relation to the Irish impact, have not been examined in detail. Therefore, by focussing on the involvement of Davitt, Sutherland and McHugh with the land agitation in the Highlands, this thesis will make a contribution towards understanding the subtle and complex sets of relationships which existed at the time. It will expand the existing historiography not only in relation to the lives of the main subjects of the work, but also in relation to the wider political and socio-economic questions alive at that time in the Highlands.

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<sup>86</sup> *Napier Commission*, q.9473

<sup>87</sup> National Archive of Scotland (NAS), AF67/401, Confidential Reports to the Secretary of Scotland on the Condition of the Western Highlands and Islands (Edinburgh, 1886), 3. MacNeill had been secretary to the Napier Commission when it toured the Highlands and Islands in 1883. Three years later, he was dispatched by Arthur Balfour, then Scottish Secretary, on a confidential mission to gather information on the mood of the crofters, and the influences to which they had been subject since the outbreak of the land agitation.

The thesis will demonstrate that the Highland region was neither isolated from mainstream Victorian political life, nor treated as a special case by many of the land reformers who took an interest in the area. It will highlight that fact that any Highland 'land movement', if such can be said to have existed at all, was far from monolithic, and that there were tensions between many individuals and groups. Most importantly, perhaps, it will be seen that the early Irish involvement in the Highlands was not connected with 'Parnellism' or Irish nationality, in spite of the fears of contemporary British commentators or the hopes of a handful of radical Irish Americans.

The 'Crofters' War' was not a postscript to the Irish Land Wars, but one of the earliest component parts of a much wider social movement, centred around Henry George's followers in Glasgow. The crofters themselves were not always a willing part of this movement, and indeed they often seem to have been unaware of the situation. What is apparent, however, is that the land reformers saw the Highlands as an area which would help keep the land question, in its most general formulation, on the political agenda while they set about winning the hearts and minds of workers, both rural and urban, throughout Britain.



## CHAPTER TWO: THE EARLY YEARS OF THE HIGHLAND LAND AGITATION

I have passed through streets in Liverpool, in Glasgow, and Manchester, and at the corner of streets I have seen men and women demoralised, debauched, with the language of hell on their lips, and the accents told me who they were, and that those men and women were the joyous boys and virtuous girls who had innocently danced in the levelled village from which they had been evicted.<sup>1</sup>

John Ferguson, 1881

Having outlined in the introductory chapter the themes which this thesis will discuss, this section will cover events surrounding the nascent Highland land agitation between 1878 and 1881. With Michael Davitt organising Ireland for much of this period, he made little direct impact on the development of the land question in the Highlands and Islands. However, men with whom he was associated, such as John Ferguson and John Murdoch, as well as Edward McHugh, were very active in Scotland through the Irish Land League branch which was established in Glasgow. Angus Sutherland, too, was involved with this group, and together they played a central role in forming some degree of organised agitation. This chapter will examine in detail the composition of the radical wing of the Irish Land League in Glasgow, which was instrumental in uniting the causes of Highlander and Irishmen, but for reasons which, as suggested in the introduction, have often been misinterpreted. It will emerge that this group was composed of a variety of Scots and Irish radicals, less concerned with the national question than social reform, linked by John Ferguson and, especially after 1880 and the British publication of *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George.

This alliance faced a wide ranging opposition from various sources. Lack of reliable circulation figures make it impossible to state just how influential the *Oban Times*

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<sup>1</sup> *Irish World*, 10 Sep. 1881. This quotation by John Ferguson, made at a speech in Grand National Hall, Glasgow, in August 1881, displays some of the key components of his thinking and rhetoric on the land question. The fact that those evicted from the countryside tended to congregate in the cities meant that the land issue was as much a problem for urban life as for rural, creating crime and poverty, and pushing down wages as competition for work increased. This means that the 'joyous boys and virtuous girls' could as well have been from the Highlands as Ireland. The romanticism of life before mass evictions (these boys and girls were, in fact, part of a longer anecdote about Ballinrobe, Co. Galway) and clearances employed frequently by land reformers in order to give moral backing to their intellectual arguments.



newspaper was at this time, but if it is taken as a yardstick of Whig-Liberal opinion at this stage, it is clear that the reformers had a great deal of work to do in order to spread an agitation in the Highlands. It is equally clear, through writing in the *Oban Times*, and the attack made on John Murdoch over his links with Irish agitators, that any links with Ireland had to be deliberately downplayed. Association with Ireland, synonymous by 1879 with agrarian outrage and disorder, would be more likely at this stage to stall a reform movement than develop one.

Thus, crofters not only received conservative messages from ministers, politicians and newspapers such as the *Scotsman* at this early stage, splits amongst reformers, which would remain for the duration of the Highland agitation, appeared. Some of this was exaggerated further by obvious personality clashes, such as that between John Murdoch and Alexander MacKenzie, but there was also a group who genuinely believed that crofters only required a minimum degree of reform, based initially around the demand for security of tenure, and that they could benefit nothing from getting their case bound up with the Irish agitation. Just how the radicals overcame efforts to stifle or minimise the Highland agitation will be covered throughout this chapter.

**‘No union among Highlanders would have any affect in bettering their condition’. The early manifestations of a Highland land agitation**

Unlike the Irish Land Wars, which commenced in spectacular style in 1879, the Highland land agitation developed gradually, and cautiously, with much of the effort coming from city-based Highlanders. The delicacy with which these reformers had to move, both in attempting to organise crofters, and to introduce ideas which, in the eyes of much of British public opinion, had reduced Ireland to a state of lawlessness, can be seen through the pages of the Highland press. In terms of their attitudes to the crofting population of the Highlands and Islands – their main constituency – it is possible to make a direct contrast during the formative years of the land reform agitation between the *Oban Times* and the *Highlander*. The contribution made by John Murdoch, who owned and edited the *Highlander* newspaper, to the Highland land movement, has been well documented.<sup>2</sup> His belief that the Irish were an

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<sup>2</sup> See, *inter alia*, E.A. Cameron, ‘The Highlands’, in A. Cooke, I. Donnachie, A. MacSween & C. Whatley (eds.), *Modern Scottish History, 1707 to Present*, (5 Vols., Edinburgh, 1998), ii, 51; T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation, 1700-2000* (Harmondsworth, 1999), 432; J. Hunter, *Last of the Free: A*

oppressed people came from his own background in Ireland, where he had worked for the excise service, and also from a deep conviction in the philosophy of James Fintan Lalor – a similar philosophy to that which underpinned the Irish ‘New Departure’ in 1878.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of this conviction, shown first in a series of letters Murdoch wrote to *The Nation* in 1856-57, the *Highlander* was somewhat tardy in recognising the outbreak of a ‘Land War’ in Mayo. This failure to acknowledge the agitation in the columns of the *Highlander* is more notable given that Murdoch had long advocated a joint Irish, Scottish and English plan of action which would unite the workers of the British Isles.<sup>4</sup>

From the outset, Murdoch was determined that his journal would stimulate Highlanders into affirmative action to better their position.<sup>5</sup> He was equally convinced that the problems besetting the Highlands were intrinsically linked to the inequitable distribution of land in the region.<sup>6</sup> In spite of all this, however, even as late as August 1879 the *Highlander* had little to say about the Irish land agitation.<sup>7</sup> In spite of being strongly pro-crofter, and having lambasted the *Scotsman* for forecasting the imminent doom of crofting, the *Highlander* mentioned in its editorial peasant proprietorships in Flanders and Saxony, but did not use the aspirations of the Irish peasants as a model.

Therefore, the *Highlander* can be seen in early 1879 to be mainly concerned with the crofters – especially in defending them against the onslaught of the *Scotsman* – and with some issues which united the Celtic lands. Rarely, however, was there any mention of the Irish peasants. In fact, the only item in which the crofters were given an example from the British Isles was a piece on the English landless labourers

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*Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1999), 305. Hanham commented that ‘Glasgow played a special part in the Highland Land Reform because it was the centre of support for both Henry George and the Irish Land League in Scotland’ Hanham, ‘Problem of Highland Discontent’, 62.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hunter, ‘The Gaelic Connection: the Highlands, Ireland and nationalism’, *Scottish Historical Review*, liv (1975), 182. For Lalor, see M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland: or, the Story of the Land League Revolution* (London & New York, 1904), 55, 82; P. Bull, *Land Politics and Nationalism – A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin, 1996), 29-33; R. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (Harmondsworth, 1988), 381

<sup>4</sup> J. Hunter, *For the People’s Cause: From the Writings of John Murdoch* (Edinburgh, 1986), 98

<sup>5</sup> *Highlander*, 16 May 1873

<sup>6</sup> *Highlander*, 12 Jul. 1873

<sup>7</sup> *Highlander*, 1 Aug. 1879

requiring land.<sup>8</sup> There is little reason to question Murdoch's attachment to Ireland, and it must be concluded that, at this stage, public opinion in the Highlands was not sufficiently advanced to accept any co-operation with Irish agitators.

During a similar time-span, the *Oban Times* displayed apathy towards events in Ireland, and even a degree of antipathy towards Highland land reform. As early as the summer of 1877, the *Oban Times* ran an editorial expressing concern at the apparent desire to establish a 'tenant right' movement in the Highlands, and did its best both to question the motives of the agitators, and to deny that any movement could bring about benefits to the crofters. Alarmed at the apparent desire for 'union' amongst Highlanders in the numerous reunions held in Glasgow, the *Oban Times* stated that 'union without any object is simply nonsense; and none of the speakers at these social gatherings dropped the least hint as to what the union they were so eloquent about was intended to accomplish.'<sup>9</sup> As the union clearly could not be aimed at the 'Saxon', could it be possible that a union against Highland landlords was intended? That, ran the editorial:

Might be of some use to Highlanders who are still in the Highlands, but would be of no use to those who push their fortunes in Glasgow, to whom the Highlands can only be a memory, or, at the most, a place to visit at some holiday time... no union among Highlanders would have any affect in bettering their condition permanently, unless each individual in that union were to look after his own interests by the exercise of honest industry, along with prudence and foresight...

Stressing the importance of the individual, and the good fortune of the Highlanders in having the opportunity of migrating to the 'second city of the empire', the piece concluded by hoping that 'when the soirée season comes round again, let us hope that the speakers at them will be more precise in their language; and, instead of giving currency to platitudes that may mean anything or nothing, will give sound practical advice about which there can be no mistake, which, although it may not sound so well, is as valuable as the other is worthless.'

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<sup>8</sup> *Highlander*, 25 Jan. 1879. Furthermore, those items which referred to Celtic unity were concerned mainly with cultural, linguistic and literary matters. *Highlander*, 25 Jan. 1879 (Review of *The Thistle*), 21 Mar. 1879 and seq. (Letters on Welsh / Highland gatherings).

<sup>9</sup> *Oban Times*, 30 Jun. 1877

There was also a notable difference in editorial opinion from that adopted by John Murdoch in the *Highlander*. Some editions carried small reports of agrarian unrest in Ireland, but as regarded the Highlands, the *Oban Times* was of the opinion that ‘the crofter is better circumstanced than his ancestor of a still earlier time.’<sup>10</sup> A more severe editorial followed a couple of weeks later, which stated that it was time for the crofters to accept that landlord / tenant relations had become irrevocably commercial, and that ‘everyone must agree with the *Scotsman* when it says that improvements should be carried out before a year of destitution like 1846 carries starvation into the Highlands.’<sup>11</sup>

Although attention has focussed on Irish influence on the ‘Crofters’ War’, there were certainly political forces at work organising the urban-based Highlanders which predated the Irish Land League. Those elements of Glasgow Highland society who aimed at organising the inhabitants of the Highlands, often young men who had an admiration for the work being undertaken in Inverness by John Murdoch, commenced with their work through soirées held under the auspices of Highland Associations. It is at this time that Angus Sutherland, a prominent member of the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association even at a relatively young age, first came to public prominence.

The Sutherlandshire Association had been formed in 1860, and was one of the several societies which held the meetings and soirées referred to by the *Oban Times*. Initially, however, most of these bodies did not touch on controversial political or social questions, and were more concerned with cultural matters, and the transformation of such societies into more radical and well-organised outlets for the Highland *vox populi* could only be a slow one.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Oban Times*, 18 Jan. 1879; Reports from Ireland at this time concerned an increase of security on Lord Leitrim’s estate, the murder of a farmer’s wife in Castlegregory, and random agrarian incidents in Meath. *Oban Times*, 18 Jan., 8 Mar., 15 Mar. 1879

<sup>11</sup> *Oban Times*, 1 Feb. 1879

<sup>12</sup> One recent author has claimed that the ‘politicisation of crofter unrest from within the Highlands was aided by the involvement of Highland Societies in the Lowlands and by radical societies there and further afield. The Glasgow Argyllshire Society, founded in 1851, the Islay Association, the Sutherland Association (1860), the Skye Association (1865), the Tiree Association (1870), the Lewis Association (1876)... were all Highland migrant bodies in the Lowlands involved in political support for the crofters.’ This is true to a degree, but these societies only gradually began to take up the cause of those people still in the Highlands in the years after 1878. C.W.J. Withers, *Urban Highlanders: Highland - Lowland migration and urban Gaelic culture, 1700-1900* (East Linton, 1998), 47

Nevertheless, although the *Highlander* had been attempting to open a land question in the Highlands for some years, it was late 1877 and early 1878 which saw a proliferation in articles relating to the crofters and their situation. The pages of Alexander MacKenzie's *Celtic Magazine*, for example contained correspondence from such men as the Duke of Argyll, William Gladstone and Charles Fraser Mackintosh, debating what should be done to improve the condition of the Highland tenants, and whether the situation was analogous with Ireland.<sup>13</sup> John Murdoch himself gave a detailed report on the crofting system to *An Comunn Gaidhealach Ghlaschu*, whilst the *Celtic Magazine* congratulated itself on opening the whole land issue which, it claimed, had since been taken up by the *Highlander*, *Inverness Courier* and the *Scotsman*.<sup>14</sup>

From its inception in 1878, the Federation of Celtic Societies (FCS) had expressed a desire to 'ameliorate the condition of the people', as well as increase political organisation amongst the various Celtic societies in Britain. Initially, however, there was a marked reluctance to 'go to extremes on the land issue', and it was debated whether it should be a predominantly cultural body, rather than a political one.<sup>15</sup> The Gaelic Society of Inverness, for example, decided not to send delegates to the Federation's annual meeting in 1880, one of the reasons being that it was getting too concerned with political affairs.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., *Celtic Magazine*, Nov. 1877

<sup>14</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, Jan. 1878. It was also at this time that the Highlands found another issue on which it could unite, that of the use of Gaelic. Although it was subsequently dwarfed by the land issue, the debates over whether to include Gaelic in schools, the establishment of a chair of Celtic at Edinburgh University, and the agitation for the inclusion of Gaelic speakers in the census all provided a rallying point for politically aware Gaels in Scotland. E.A. Cameron, *The Life and times of Fraser Mackintosh, Crofter MP* (Aberdeen, 2000), 72

<sup>15</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, Nov. 1878, Jan. 1879. The first meeting of the Federation was notable for the debate between various delegates. Neil Brown, of Greenock, for example, said that whilst it was important to improve the position of the people, he did not want to see the Highlands overpopulated with poor crofters. Colin Chisholm, the former President of the Gaelic Society of London, took Brown to task, asking whether he would rather see his countrymen littering the streets of Glasgow in abject poverty.

<sup>16</sup> I.M.M. MacPhail, *The Crofters' War* (Stornoway, 1989), 88; *Celtic Magazine*, Jan. 1881, reported the Gaelic Society's complaints that the Federation was becoming too dominated by Glasgow, that it 'had departed from original purpose by becoming more of a political than a social and literary association', and was not, therefore, in agreement with the constitution of the Gaelic Society of Inverness.



Just as the *Highlander* was calling for increased politicisation and organisation in Glasgow's *An Comunn Gaidhealach*, so Angus Sutherland was increasing his profile amongst the exiled Highlanders of Glasgow. Along with several other radical Highlanders, such as Rev. James Cruikshank, Henry Whyte ('Fionn'), John Whyte and J.G. Mackay, Sutherland gradually and carefully set about introducing a more political angle to the agendas of the various Highland societies in the city.<sup>17</sup> This vigorous activity began well in advance of the Irish Land War. Indeed Michael Davitt's speeches at the outset of the land agitation in Ireland bore many similarities to remarks which had already been made in Scotland, although he himself was almost certainly unaware of this.<sup>18</sup>

Most of Angus Sutherland's early pronouncements on the land issue were based on legal questions, especially relating to the legal justification, or lack of one, for evictions from crofts. At a meeting of the FCS, convened in order to discuss the Leckmelm evictions, Sutherland contented himself by expressing the opinion that 'legal advice should be taken to ascertain whether the eviction of tenants who were willing to pay rent, and had been in possession for a number of years, was not illegal.'<sup>19</sup> Such an approach, placing the onus of guilt at once on the landlords, might be seen as a very prudent way to begin an agitation which could come to be associated with the excesses of Ireland. It was just a few days after his suggestion to call in legal advice that Angus Sutherland's series of articles in the *Highlander* commenced. Again, he dismissed, rather unconvincingly, any suggestion that emotion played a part in his argument.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Highlander*, 9 Mar. 1878. It is also around this time that we read of a 'Mr. Sutherland, Glasgow' at a large rally of Charles Fraser Mackintosh supporters in Inverness, and of 'Mr. Sutherland of the Glasgow Sutherland Association' addressing a meeting of various Highland Associations in the same town. It must be borne in mind, however, that although Angus Sutherland was the secretary of the Sutherlandshire Association at this point, the vice president was his namesake, William Sutherland. *Highlander*, 4 May 1878; H.J. Hanham, 'The Problem of Highland Discontent, 1880-1885', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., xix (1969), 62; *Highlander*, Aug. 1881. J.G. Mackay (John Gunn Mackay) worked as a draper in Glasgow, and was a 'vigorous member of all the Highland Societies, Gaelic or otherwise, of the town'. His father is described as an opponent of Patrick Sellar, and his mother 'a native of the desolate parish of Bracadale, Skye'. He moved to Portree, Skye in the 1880s in order to help organise the crofting agitation there. J.P.D. Dunbabin, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York, 1974), 184

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Davitt's speech at Milltown, June 1879, when he advised the people to 'organise'. *Freeman's Journal*, 16 Jun. 1879; *Connaught Telegraph*, 21 Jun. 1879

<sup>19</sup> *Oban Times*, 6 Nov. 1881

<sup>20</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Nov. 1880

Although the very foundation of the FCS had shown that some Highlanders were prepared to start a loose political movement, progress was not rapid enough for the more radical amongst them, such as Angus Sutherland. The constitution of the Federation meant that radical speeches could be made – such as that made by Sutherland on the Leckmelm evictions, but had no real influence on official FCS policy.<sup>21</sup> Proclaiming the establishment of a ‘Highland Parliament’, Alexander Mackenzie had written excitedly about the Federation’s establishment.<sup>22</sup> Although the Federation had shown some degree of organisation and vigour over the issue of a Gaelic census, complaints relating to inactivity over the land question were increasing in volume, mainly from John Murdoch and other, more advanced, Highlanders.<sup>23</sup> Those who wanted more radicalism from the Federation knew that they had a voice within the group, in the form of its secretary, Angus Sutherland, who tried to give practical hints on how the organisation could regain its initial vigour.<sup>24</sup>

The *Highlander*, as usual, was to the fore in attempting to motivate its readers into action. In an editorial article John Murdoch attempted to break down residual feelings of loyalty to the clan and the chief, by stating plainly that the days of mutual obligation between landlord and tenant were over, and were not going to return. This, hoped Murdoch, would lead to a feeling amongst crofters and their relatives in the

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<sup>21</sup> *Highlander*, 21 Nov. 1879

<sup>22</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, Nov. 1878. The declaration ran: ‘Federation of Celtic Societies: Policy statement: Firstly, to ameliorate the condition of the people. Secondly, the wish for better political organisation... ‘Courage then! The dawn of a new epoch in Highland history is already rising in the east. On the 20<sup>th</sup> day of this month, representatives from all the Highland Societies in the UK will meet in Glasgow to deal with the question of federation. Perhaps that day will witness the establishment of a new Highland Parliament... Courage then! The battle we fight is not that of the Highlands only; it is the battle of Great Britain, of freedom, of truth, of reason, of humanity...’ This was, however, a very vague statement, and by the end of 1880 it is apparent that there was a good deal of frustration about the passive role taken by the Federation to date, which had not represented the views of some its more vociferous members.

<sup>23</sup> For the Federation of Celtic Societies’ manifesto on the Gaelic census, see *Oban Times*, 26 Mar. 1881. Murdoch stressed that ‘all Highland societies should discuss the Land Question. Here is a question for debate:- “How did the landlord system come into the country?”. Another: “When the land becomes too small or too poor to support the ornamental landlords, who luxuriate without working, and the farmers and their men, who labour without luxury, and often without comfort, who ought to emigrate – the lords, or the labourers?”’ *Highlander*, 22 Dec. 1880. Murdoch was supported by ‘Alastair Glas’, who stated that ‘we really have much need of a Scotch Parnell... What are your Celtic Societies doing? If their labours consist of eating and drinking, piping and dancing, and listening to the speeches of dissimulating Tories, we may say to them what the farmer’s wife said to her ploughman: “*Moran feadaireachd’s beagan a thalamh dearg*”’. *Highlander*, 26 Jan. 1881

<sup>24</sup> *Oban Times*, 1 Jan. 1881; *Highlander*, 5 Jan 1881

cities that it was time to start asserting themselves.<sup>25</sup> There is also an attempt to portray change, and the decline of the power of the landlord, as inevitable.

### **The development of Irish involvement in the Highlands**

In 1870, Isaac Butt, an ex-Tory who had acted as a defence lawyer for Fenian prisoners, established the Home Government Association in Dublin. Soon after this it spread to Britain, and the first British branch of the Association was established in Glasgow in 1871.<sup>26</sup> It had been John Ferguson who had arranged for Butt to speak in Glasgow, and from that meeting the Home Rule agitation in Britain began.<sup>27</sup> It became a very active organisation, and within a year it reported that it had acquired premises at 14, East Nile Street, which contained committee offices, a library and a room for social meetings.<sup>28</sup> The exact number of members was undisclosed, but the branches followed the boundaries of the seven Catholic city parishes.<sup>29</sup> Frequent meetings were held by these branches, but more importance was placed on the public demonstrations and mass meetings which were developed by the Irish, and especially Ferguson, to a greater degree than any other political movement.<sup>30</sup>

After Parnell had visited Glasgow in 1877, the Home Government Association in the city reformed itself into 'Parnellite' branches, reflecting the growing feeling amongst Irish nationalists that it was the youthful Parnell, rather than the ageing Butt, who

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<sup>25</sup> *Highlander*, 14 Mar. 1879

<sup>26</sup> T. Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace* (Manchester, 1987), 150

<sup>27</sup> Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace*, 150; *Glasgow Herald*, 15 Nov. 1871; I.C.G. Hutchison, 'Politics and Society in Mid-Victorian Glasgow, 1846-1886' (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974), 491

<sup>28</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 18 Sep. 1872; Hutchison, 'Politics and Society', 491. East Nile Street exists in Glasgow today as Molendinar Street.

<sup>29</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 18 Aug. 1873; I.G.C. Hutchison, 'Glasgow Working Class Politics', in R.A. Cage (ed.), *The Working Class in Glasgow, 1750-1914* (London, 1987), 131

<sup>30</sup> Moody expressed Ferguson's importance to the Irish movement in Britain by stating that 'in the Irish National Movement in Britain, two men, John Barry and John Ferguson, occupied a place similar to that of Power and Egan in Ireland.' T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), 125. John O'Connor Power and Patrick Egan were both on the supreme council of the I.R.B. and were important in reconciling Fenianism and the Home Rule Movement of Isaac Butt. G. Moran, *A Radical Priest in Mayo* (Dublin 1994), 153. John Ferguson can also be seen as also an early supporter of the policy of 'obstructionism' in Parliament, although he claimed never to have taken the Fenian oath. In many ways Ferguson's career ran parallel with that of Davitt, leading from the nationalist movement, then specifically to the Land League, and through to a great interest in working class politics, lending support, for example, to Keir Hardie's Mid-Lanark campaign in 1888. He eventually became a leading figure in Glasgow local politics, before being killed in a tram accident. Even then, a wreath was sent by John Redmond – then chairman of the Irish Parliamentary Party – in recognition of the loss to the Nationalist movement of 'such a staunch, whole hearted and generous supporter.' K.O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie* (London 1975), 27-30; *Glasgow Herald*, 26 Apr. 1906

would be the future of the movement. Little changed, however, and the leadership – under Ferguson – remained stable.<sup>31</sup> Three years later, with the ‘New Departure’ under way, and the land issue more prominent, a committee was formed to establish a Glasgow branch of the Irish Land League. The members duly abolished the Home Government Association and became a part of the new league. They continued to meet in East Nile Street, the hall often full to capacity.<sup>32</sup> As a veteran of Irishtown, Ferguson was the inevitable choice to lead the steering committee concerned with establishing the new body.<sup>33</sup>

Although based in Glasgow, Ferguson remained a regular attendee at meetings of the Irish Land League in Middle Abbey Street, Dublin.<sup>34</sup> He was especially concerned about bringing Ulster Protestants ‘on board’ the land movement.<sup>35</sup> It was a logical step, therefore, for him to concentrate attention on spreading the land agitation to the country in which he was resident, and attempt to break down the suspicion which prevailed between Scots and Irishmen in Scotland. Ferguson mentioned on several occasions that it was mainly due to religious animosity that this suspicion existed, and his emphasis on the number of Irish Protestants within the Land League was an attempt to show Scots, including Highlanders, that all were welcome to join the land struggle. The Glasgow Irish Land League increased in influence under his guidance, and he supported Davitt throughout the latter’s 1882 visit to Scotland.

The number of prominent Home Rulers amongst the Irish Land League in Glasgow has been noted, but the fact that Home Rule and the land issue had been inextricably bound up under the terms of the ‘New Departure’ in 1878 makes this less than remarkable.<sup>36</sup> More notable, and with more importance for the impact the Glasgow Irish would have on the Highland land question, was the radicalism shown by the Land League in the city, and the presence in it of many Scotsmen and Highlanders. For such people the land question was not simply an Irish problem, nor even a rural problem, but an issue which affected the whole society. Although encouraged by the appearance of Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*, the land question was already

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<sup>31</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 18 Apr., 29 May, 18 Aug. 1877; Hutchison, ‘Politics and Society’, 495

<sup>32</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 8 Oct. 1887

<sup>33</sup> *North British Daily Mail*, 2 Nov. 1880

<sup>34</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9635, Reports of meetings of the Central Land League

<sup>35</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 20 Oct. 1880

<sup>36</sup> Hutchison, ‘Politics and Society’, 495

exercising the minds of many radicals in Glasgow, and the debates held in East Nile Street would provide them with a welcome home for their ideas. Indeed, the demand made by Ferguson and the Glasgow League for nationalisation of the land, and the strongly independent line the branch often took from the leadership, put them increasingly at odds with both London and Dublin as time progressed.<sup>37</sup>

Although he was a member of the Glasgow Land League at an early date, it was in the context of the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association that Angus Sutherland first appears as a public figure. Whilst his early appearances at meetings of Highland societies in Glasgow are peculiar only for his apparent silence, it is notable that Sutherland was often in the company of John Murdoch.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the predominant voice from Glasgow in relation to Sutherland at this time was John Mackay, of Shrewsbury, and latterly Hereford. Indeed, given the later tensions between the two men, there seems a certain irony in the fact that at the above meeting, during which Sutherland was elected to his first official post within the Sutherlandshire Association, Mackay was occupying the chair.

As secretary of the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association, and a delegate to the FCS, Angus Sutherland gained in confidence in expressing publicly his views on land reform and politics. He exercised his rhetorical skills at the second annual supper of the Glasgow Sutherland Association in early 1879, giving an unspecified 'neat speech'.<sup>39</sup> There is evidence, too, that the Sutherlandshire Association, following the stimulus given by the FCS, was starting to debate more politically relevant issues. Although Angus Sutherland does not appear to have been present, a debate at the Association in March 1879 asked the question as to whether 'Small farms are more

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<sup>37</sup> Although his later recollections were sometimes unreliably dated, Ferguson suggests that he was sent a gift of *Progress and Poverty* by the author himself when it was first published, probably, in fact, in 1880. See *Taxation of Land Values: A Retrospect and a Forecast* (1906), 2-3. Ferguson wrote that 'It was in the later seventies that I received a letter from Henry George, who till then was unknown to me. He said – "I perceive that you advocate upon your side of the Atlantic the land reform I advocate on this. I send you two copies of my book *Progress and Poverty*. Some day I hope to discuss with you the points on which I perceive we differ.'" I am grateful to Dr. E. McFarland, Glasgow Caledonian University, for this reference.

<sup>38</sup> In January 1878, for example, at the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting of the Association, Sutherland and Murdoch were both in attendance. Sutherland's standing in the society even at this early stage is underscored by the fact that he was elected as secretary for the following year. At the Association's annual supper the following month, Sutherland acted as croupier, or assistant chairman, and gave a toast to 'The Mother Country'. *Highlander*, 19 Jan., 23 Feb. 1878; *Oban Times*, 19 Jan. 1878

<sup>39</sup> *Highlander*, 8 Feb. 1879



beneficial to the country than large ones?’<sup>40</sup> This was possibly a response to an article which appeared a few weeks earlier in the *Highlander*, putting the case for crofts over farms.<sup>41</sup>

**‘Shooting the Landlord is not looked upon as the best mode to ending agricultural distress’. Reactions to Irishtown and Leckmelm**

Neither the *Highlander* nor the *Oban Times* gave mention to the Irishtown meeting, at which the Glasgow-based John Ferguson played such a prominent part, although the *Highlander* ran a piece taken from the *Freeman’s Journal* about how the Irish farmers were ‘up and stirring’.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps more noteworthy is that the *Highlander* gave no coverage to the Westport event, in spite of the fact that it had been publicised since mid-April, soon after Irishtown, and despite the fact that it had been known for some time that Parnell would be addressing the crowd.<sup>43</sup> A comment on the state of affairs in the Highlands was made by the Portree correspondent of the *Highlander* who wrote, almost contemporaneously with the Westport meeting, that John Murdoch would be a wise man not to attempt any lectures on the land issue in Skye. The warning indicated that in Skye there was a fear of, or even antipathy towards, reformers:

When you begin to speak of the ‘land laws’ on the Isle of Mist, you are more likely to have the door shut in your face than if you were to preach against Popery in the city of Rome.<sup>44</sup>

In view of the situation by the mid 1880s, this quotation is remarkable, and hints that there was at this stage not only a large difference between Irish and Highland peasants, but also between the crofters and the city-based Highlanders, who were beginning to take up land reform as a serious political issue. If John Murdoch was aware that strong opposition to the land reformers existed, he would also have known that he had to take a very cautious approach in his crusade. To be seen giving support for the Irish smallholders, for whom he already had known sympathies, would be to lay himself open to charges of Fenianism from the Whig and Tory press. He was later

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<sup>40</sup> *Highlander*, 14 Mar. 1879

<sup>41</sup> *Highlander*, 21 Feb. 1879

<sup>42</sup> *Highlander*, 25 Apr. 1879

<sup>43</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 21 Apr. 1879; Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 151

<sup>44</sup> *Highlander*, 6 Jun. 1879

to be accused of this anyway, but at such an early stage it could have been fatal for his campaign.<sup>45</sup>

Until September 1879, when John Murdoch set off on his tour around America, sharing a platform with Parnell, Davitt and Dillon, the position of the *Highlander* was strangely ambivalent towards Ireland.<sup>46</sup> A similar general apathy was to be found in the *Oban Times*, with the only editorial comment before September of relevance to the land issue being one on the suffering of the crofters. Even this piece was dealt with in the context of the world-wide depression, however, and did not use the apparently obvious parallel of Ireland.<sup>47</sup> The *Oban Times* did report the Westport meeting, along with some other set piece events of the Irish Land War, but it withheld opinion on the matter, save for giving the agitators an anti-imperialist and anti-British hue by stating that the Westport meeting closed with 'cheers for the zulus'.<sup>48</sup> Even an article on Davitt and Mayo was simply taken from the *London Times* and not subjected to any comment or analysis.<sup>49</sup>

If these Highland weeklies can be said to have shared something of an apathetic consensus for the majority of 1879, the final three months of the year were a different matter. The winter months saw a polarisation of views between the two papers. John Murdoch was touring America, 'not for his own health or elevation but that of his

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<sup>45</sup> Alexander MacKenzie, a supporter of land reform, was as vociferous in his attacks on Murdoch as anyone. In 1880 he wrote that 'perhaps it may be as well to say that, in any connection Mr. Murdoch had in the past, or may have in the future, with the Parnell – Dillon agitation in America, the editor of *The Highlander* represents no-one but himself. His own best friends, and indeed all rational Highlanders, entirely disapproved of his Parnell – Dillon crusade in America last year, and we have the very best evidence that the part he took with the Irish agitators was very much regretted and repudiated by all Highlanders and Scotchmen alike in the States as well as in Canada.' *Invernessian*, 30 Oct. 1880. For further attacks relating to Murdoch's Irish links from MacKenzie, including accusations also made by the *Scotsman* that Murdoch was in the pay of the Fenian movement, see A. MacKenzie, 'The Fenian Skirmishing Fund and the Highlands', *Celtic Magazine*, Oct. 1881; A. MacKenzie, 'The Death of *The Highlander*', *Celtic Magazine*, Apr. 1882

<sup>46</sup> For Murdoch in the USA, see Hunter, *For the People's Cause*, 168-185

<sup>47</sup> *Oban Times*, 21 Jun. 1879

<sup>48</sup> *Oban Times*, 14 Jun. 1879; contrast this with the *Greenock Telegraph*, which ran a piece on Westport entitled 'Irish Communists'. *Greenock Telegraph*, 13 Jun. 1879. The local paper in Mayo, the *Connaught Telegraph*, complained that '*The Times* and all the anti-Irish newspapers in reporting the Westport demonstration attached particular importance to the cheers given for the zulus. They could not say it was very criminal to give a few hearty cheers for a brave people struggling for house and home against unscrupulous invaders. But the cheers had a latent meaning in the opinions of our critics in England'. *Connaught Telegraph*, 21 Jun. 1879

<sup>49</sup> *Oban Times*, 30 Aug. 1879

countrymen'.<sup>50</sup> The *Oban Times* was putting out the a stern editorial on the land question in Ireland and the relevance it had to Scotland:

The Irish view of the matter is not likely to find many supporters on this side of the channel, where shooting the landlord is not looked upon as the best mode to ending agricultural distress... there is a class of politician who would have us believe that there is a great land question to settle before agriculture can again be in a prosperous condition. This is simply nonsense... at present [in Scotland] rents are too high, but the tenants are to blame as much as the landlord.<sup>51</sup>

This was the start of a series of strongly worded editorials which warned crofters against both becoming involved with Irish-style agrarian agitation and even against relying on anything other than hard work to pull the crofting community up from its troubled position.<sup>52</sup>

By way of a farewell to the 1870s, after assuring its readers that 'Blessed are those who expect little, for they shall not be disappointed', a summary of the state of Britain and Ireland was given.<sup>53</sup> Ironically, the statement about Ireland was made at a time when Parnell was addressing crowds of Irishmen, and some Highlanders, in Glasgow:

Monster meetings have been held in the west of Ireland, at which violent speeches were made, counselling the tenantry not to pay any rent, and if attempt was made to eject them from their holdings, to use force. Three or four of these land agitators have been arrested on

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<sup>50</sup> *Highlander*, 5 Sep. 1879

<sup>51</sup> *Oban Times*, 27 Sep. 1879;

<sup>52</sup> *Oban Times*, 1 Nov. 1879 warned that 'neither Royal Commissions nor Acts of Parliament can create prosperity in any branch of industry; and the agricultural interest must mainly depend for its future prosperity, as it has done in the past, on a cordial co-operation between tenant and landlord, where each will be rival only in the ardour of their patriotism and activity of public spirit.' *Oban Times*, 29 Nov. 1879 spoke out thus against the Irish menace, 'IRISH SEDITION: ... the anti-rent agitation, it is said, is not political in character. Perhaps it is not so in the strict sense of the word, but if it is not political then it is something infinitely worse, as the leaders of the agitation teach that 'property is robbery', more especially property in land, which the anti-rent agitators tell their dupes belongs to the people... it is only the ignorant and unthinking who can be led astray by the specious and hollow sophistry of Mr. Parnell and his colleagues.' The statement about Parnell was reinforced the very next week (*Oban Times*, 6 Dec. 1879), when it was remarked that 'the people of the Highlands have too much common sense ever to listen to the teachings of Mr. Parnell and other Irish agitators, who go for the abolition of landlords as the only solution to the land question.'

<sup>53</sup> *Oban Times*, 20 Dec., 27 Dec. 1879. The *Oban Times* also sought to improve the Highland economy by legitimate means, running a series of over sixty articles by W. Anderson Smith, on various options open to the crofters for improvement. This covered everything from communications and land, to willow basket making, walking sticks, eels, and 'sobriety'. See *Oban Times*, 15 May 1880-9 Jul. 1881 *passim*.

charges of sedition, and with the last two or three weeks the agitation has subsided, and probably before long will have lost all political significance.<sup>54</sup>

It was probably the Leckmelm incident, and its attendant controversy, which placed Angus Sutherland most firmly in eye of those who had an interest in the Highlands. Events in 1879 had taken a turn which began to suggest that there might be a receptive audience for radical views. Ireland, of course, saw the series of meetings associated with Michael Davitt and the formation in the west of the National Land League of Mayo. The Highlands were starting to become the subject of national attention after the evictions from Pirie's estate at Leckmelm, on Loch Broom, and indeed by the end of the year there were even reports coming through of a potential land agitation beginning on the Reay estate in Sutherlandshire.<sup>55</sup>

In *The Making of the Crofting Community*, James Hunter identified the Leckmelm evictions and subsequent fuss as the real start of the Highland land agitation. 'In 1880', he wrote, 'John Murdoch, Angus Sutherland and several kindred spirits had hailed as a glorious opportunity to launch a Highland land reform movement an attempt to evict a number of crofters from Leckmelm.'<sup>56</sup> It was evident that, for all these radicals might talk about the possibility of political organisation, they would not succeed without making full use of evictions and landlord / tenant tension whenever it arose. Even though Sutherland spoke out very promptly, and strongly on the Leckmelm evictions, before the FCS, the continued procrastination of the Federation forced him to make a second attempt almost a year later. Progress, in the form of resolutions being passed in support of the dispossessed tenants, seemed to be made.<sup>57</sup> A fortnight later, the Irish Land Leaguers of Glasgow passed resolutions condemning

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<sup>54</sup> The three who were arrested at Gurteen, Co. Sligo were Davitt, Daly and Killen, for alleged seditious libel. By contrast, the *Highlander* used the arrests both to strike a note of moderation, and to shame Highlanders into questioning their own positions. It stated that there was 'no excuse for the violent and inflammatory language they were said to have used... on the other hand it is true that in Ireland, as in Scotland, there is much cause for complaint... the difference is that while the Irish seek redress by most unconstitutional and unjustifiable methods, we in Scotland prefer suffering in silence or at most uttering futile protests against iniquities.' See *Highlander*, 21 Nov. 1879; *Oban Times*, 22 Nov. 1879; For Davitt's own – later – version of events, see Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 181-192.

<sup>55</sup> *Highlander*, 19 Dec. 1879; *Oban Times*, 20 Dec. 1879; MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 20-21

<sup>56</sup> J. Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976), 141. Hunter claims that 'little came of their endeavours' on this occasion.

<sup>57</sup> *Highlander*, 21 Nov. 1879; *Oban Times*, 6 Nov. 1880

Pirie and the Leckmelm evictions.<sup>58</sup> Further goading of the FCS was felt necessary, and Sutherland made full use of the propaganda of Leckmelm when he addressed them at New Year, 1881.<sup>59</sup>

In his increasingly vociferous contributions to various Highland Associations, Angus Sutherland could be seen both criticising the Highlanders for their previously docile attitudes to landlordism, and also stressing the justice and inevitability of reform. Possibly a degree of self reference also came into play for Sutherland, such as when he was given a platform in a meeting of the Glasgow Highland Association, in November 1880, to describe some 'Economic Aspects of Evictions'.<sup>60</sup> The evicted tenant would be, to the landlord and the whole landlord system, 'constantly a thorn in the flesh, never losing an opportunity to break down the monopoly which belongs to the evictor.' Like Michael Davitt, Sutherland described how an evicted tenant would 'never lose the opportunity to agitate against the laws which have used him so cruelly'.

Although Sutherland was ostensibly concentrating on economics, and saying that such a state of affairs – the loss of a working man to embittered agitation – was a tragedy for the economic life of the country, the speech at Glasgow reads as an unashamed clarion call to all generations of Highlanders to join the nascent reform movement. Certainly, Sutherland had never suffered eviction himself, but through folk memory, and the memory of his own upbringing in Helmsdale, destination for many of the evicted of Strathnaver, he was able to speak with the passion of a wronged tenant. This, he hoped, would inspire others, possibly Highlanders who had come to Glasgow – or elsewhere – and prospered, to reassess their own situations and attempt to help those left in their ancestral homes. In his reply to the vote of thanks afforded him by

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<sup>58</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 23 Nov., 25 Nov. 1881

<sup>59</sup> *Oban Times*, 1 Jan. 1881; *Highlander*, 5 Jan. 1881. He accused the Federation of being satisfied with the social position of the Highland crofters, and that 'certain conclusions are forced upon you by the logic of events, and you persistently refuse to see the cause. Only a few months ago, a high minister in the senate of the great British empire (as some are so fond of calling it) stood up in his place and confessed before the first assembly of gentlemen in Europe, that he and the laws combined were powerless to protect the homes and property of good, loyal, and loyal subjects against an Aberdeen paper manufacturer.'

<sup>60</sup> *Highlander*, 10 Nov. 1880; *Oban Times*, 13 Nov. 1880. The speech was made at the Angus Hotel, Glasgow.



J.G. Mackay, amongst others, Sutherland replied that he was glad to find such a deep and intelligent interest being taken in the land issue.

Not only was Sutherland by this time a well-known figure in Glasgow Highland circles, he was also invited by John Murdoch to produce a series of articles for the *Highlander*, and the speech in Glasgow served as an *hors d'oeuvre* for what would appear in print. Although the *Highlander* was printed in Inverness it had a wide, if thinly spread, circulation in Scotland and abroad.<sup>61</sup> The series, under the banner of 'Our Land Laws', appeared in the paper from December 1880 to March 1881. The rallying tone adopted by Sutherland in his speeches continued in his writing. Referring to the agitation in Ireland, he told readers that:

We have wrongs nearer to home and less disposition on the part of public men to redress them, and on the part of private persons to understand them. At all events, of one thing we may rest assured – that the time has come when it is necessary to face the Land Question boldly and fearlessly.<sup>62</sup>

At the conclusion of his articles, he questioned the wisdom on the part of the landlords in keeping the subject of land reform taboo. Any attempt to delay could only end in a more violent revolution than the one under consideration.<sup>63</sup>

This idea of shaming Highlanders into action is one which recurred again and again in Sutherland's speeches during the early years of the land agitation in Scotland. Again, there is a direct comparison with the attitude of Michael Davitt. In spite of the theory which points to a tradition of agrarian resistance in Ireland, Davitt used the same tactic of shaming people into action in the early days of the Irish Land Wars. During a speech on Tyneside on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1879, he said that:

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<sup>61</sup> For Murdoch's travails in collecting subscriptions from far-flung places, see Hunter, *For The People's Cause*, 147-164

<sup>62</sup> *Highlander*, 22 Dec. 1880

<sup>63</sup> *Highlander*, 23 Feb. 1881. As always, the ordinary people were shown that they could take control of their own destiny, as long as they would take the responsibility. 'Why', he wrote, 'should the question be forced upon the people? Is there no other way of solving the question except the French way? Has history been made and written, and have wise men interpreted it in vain? Have moralists and political economists written and taught to no purpose? And will dumb millions be dumb forever? Let us hope not. Their regeneration is in their own hands. Thought must precede wise speech and wise action.'



he felt a crisis was coming to his country and that it was necessary to rouse the people of Ireland in order that they should not be guilty of the suicidal act, the guilty act, of lying down to die as their kindred did in 1848... That was a blot upon their country. Although he could lay the blame on foreign misgovernment, still it did not redound to the credit of the people of 1847-48 that they lay down on the roadside and died.<sup>64</sup>

In an attempt to shock and provoke a reaction, Davitt knew he was on secure ground by evoking the famine. By the same token, Sutherland spoke about the Clearances which had taken place in his county in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Where Davitt spoke about 'foreign misgovernment', Sutherland referred to the mismanagement of the large estates in the county, but both were of the same mind that this could be defeated if only the people would begin to act for themselves.

Addressing a public meeting, under the auspices of the FCS, at the turn of 1881, he followed a speech by J.S. Blackie by referring to Cameron of Lochiel, a Highland Chief and Tory MP for Inverness-shire. In spite of accusing Lochiel of rack-renting his tenants, Sutherland claimed not to have anything personal against the chief.<sup>65</sup> The message was a simple one, that the land laws in Scotland, and especially in the Highlands, were as they were because no-one had dared to challenge their injustice. And as long as that situation remained, Highlanders could expect little in the way of reform. How could the likes of Lochiel or Argyll be expected to reform laws which were so beneficial to their own interests?

Similarly, Sutherland's *Highlander* articles attempted to reassure readers of the certainty of forthcoming reforms.<sup>66</sup> Angus Sutherland saw his task at this point in time being to harness the potential that the Highlanders and their families possessed in terms of political power. Even before the extension of the franchise, which some saw

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<sup>64</sup> Working Class Movement Library, Salford. *Jim Garnett Papers: Michael Davitt /Land League /Haslingden*

<sup>65</sup> *Oban Times*, 1 Jan. 1881; *Highlander*, 5 Jan. 1881. Sutherland argued that Lochiel was 'perhaps, by no means the worst of his class. Neither he, nor they, are to blame. Your forefathers allowed them to attain the position they now occupy; and you allow them to retain it.'

<sup>66</sup> *Highlander*, 22 Dec. 1880. In describing his purpose in writing, Sutherland claimed 'that [the need for land law reform] will ultimately come to be recognised cannot reasonably be doubted. Anyone who has thoughtfully and attentively followed the course of political events for even the last dozen years, cannot fail to have observed that the way is being paved for the consideration of the Land Laws. It is then with the hope of contributing in a small degree to the discussion of this important question that the writing of these articles has been undertaken.'

as inevitable, it was important for any reformers that they should get the objects of the possible reforms acting as one. Before real organisation, there had to be education, and this was Sutherland's immediate goal.<sup>67</sup>

In spite of the close alliance that Sutherland and Murdoch enjoyed with the Irish Land League both in Glasgow and, in Murdoch's case, in America, the political situation in Great Britain in the late 1870s made it inexpedient to compare the situations of the two countries too closely. The Irish were synonymous with murder and mayhem, and any attempt to link the land questions could have resulted in any Scottish agitation being abortive.

Slowly, however, confidence grew amongst the Radicals. 'Fionn' wrote an *Oban Times* column in late 1880 calling for the formation of a Scottish Land League. Aged twenty-six at the time his contributions started, Henry Whyte, in his guise as 'Fionn', would be one of the main forces behind the radicalisation of the *Oban Times* and its subsequent effect on a significant proportion of the crofting population. Both 'Fionn' and the anonymous 'Liverpool Correspondent', however, were emblematic of a wider phenomenon in the cities of Great Britain. Highlanders had become well represented in an increasingly vocal and organised social reform movement, which embraced many Irishmen, workers and middle class radicals.<sup>68</sup> Whyte was one of the most prominent Glasgow supporters of the Highland land agitation, and through his columns in the *Oban Times* he attempted to break down resistance to Irishmen and radical ideas.<sup>69</sup> It is inconceivable that he had not read the 'Local News' section of the *Highlander* a couple of weeks beforehand, where a piece ran proclaiming 'The Irish Land League Wanted in a Neighbouring Country':

A tenant, asking for a 20% reduction in rent, received the following answer from the proprietor that 'you must go to Ireland for that'.

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<sup>67</sup> *Highlander*, 26 Jan. 1881

<sup>68</sup> Hanham, 'Problem of Highland Discontent' 33. Hutchison has commented that although Ferguson wooed the Highlanders for electoral reasons, this 'was never really likely to come off. Firstly, the Irish were at all times intent on their single goal, and their involvement in the Highland agitation was merely a manoeuvre towards that end, which could be discarded if the circumstances altered'. See Hutchison, 'Politics and Society', 510

<sup>69</sup> *Oban Times*, 30 Oct. 1880; Whyte had had a long-standing involvement with the FCS, and thus was well acquainted with John Murdoch, Charles Fraser Mackintosh, Alexander MacKenzie, Angus Sutherland and other prominent reform advocates. When he died, aged 61, at the end of 1913, a Celtic cross memorial was put by his grave in Glasgow's Western Necropolis, as a sign of gratitude for his efforts. *Highland News*, 3 Jan., 11 Jul. 1914

Meaning, of course, that in this country a landlord can 'do what he wants with his own', but in Ireland not quite. Perhaps a branch of the Land League would do some good in the neighbourhood.<sup>70</sup>

Apocryphal or not, the story seems to have had some impact on an emotive address Angus Sutherland made to the FCS a month later, when, in describing an evicted tenant, he used similar terms:

Let us, however, follow our evicted tiller of the soil. The owner of the soil, doing with his own as he likes, breaks up this man's home, tears up his life's affections by the roots, separates him and his family from all the associations that make life endurable – nay, sometimes pleasant – and brings him face to face either with starvation, the slums of the cities, or emigration.<sup>71</sup>

Writing in the *Highlander*, Sutherland agreed that the Irish issue was what had helped focus attention on the broader picture, but denied that the case of Ireland was intrinsically different from the rest of the country. The development of towns and cities in England and Lowland Scotland gave those who would not accept 'landlord tyranny' a means of making a living. In Ireland, and, by extension, the Highlands, no such outlet existed.<sup>72</sup> Sutherland showed increasing confidence in bringing Ireland into the equation, stating that the agrarian crimes being committed by the Irish Land League had to be mitigated by the coercive measures employed by the Government.<sup>73</sup>

The same allegory with the Highlands was employed a few weeks later, when Sutherland argued that if the land laws of Great Britain and Ireland were fair and just, then Ireland, given its total dependence on those laws, 'ought to be the most contented and best governed country in the world'.<sup>74</sup> As it clearly was not, the land laws were to blame. The same rationale led Henry George to make Ireland a laboratory for the theories he expounded in *Progress and Poverty*.

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<sup>70</sup> *Highlander*, 13 Oct. 1880

<sup>71</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Nov. 1880; *Highlander*, 10 Nov. 1880

<sup>72</sup> *Highlander*, 22 Dec. 1880

<sup>73</sup> *Highlander*, 22 Dec. 1880. He admitted that 'I have neither the desire nor the intention to attempt a justification of the murders and outrages being committed in Ireland. It is vain and unjust, however, to blame Mr. Parnell and the Land League for these outrages. It must be remembered that the fact of Mr. Parnell having a political existence at all is itself the result of some other cause. The existence of that cause is recognised and admitted by our best statesmen and by every reasonable and intelligent person. This is not, however, the time for entering into a discussion on the wrongs of Ireland...'

<sup>74</sup> *Highlander*, 26 Jan. 1881

Even before the radicals had fully asserted themselves, however, the relationship between certain Highlanders and Irish within the city had come into the open. It was T.P. O'Connor, then the MP for Galway, but later the Irish Nationalist member for Liverpool Scotland Division, who was to raise the question of Leckmelm in the House of Commons, for which he was thanked gratefully by John Murdoch in the *Highlander*. That an Irishman should have to raise the issue, however, left John Murdoch wondering:

Are our Highland MP's too intent on the extermination of grouse to remain at their post to protest against the extermination of their own flesh and blood at Leckmelm?<sup>75</sup>

This was the era of 'Obstructionism' in the House of Commons, and the interest taken in particular by Joseph Biggar in parliament over the crofter question in the next couple of years might be seen as a cynical way of wasting government time.<sup>76</sup> That would be an uncharitable view, however, as there was usually clear relevance for Ireland and the Irish smallholders in the questions asked regarding the Highlands. Even though Parnell, for example, has been seen as not caring about any nation other than Ireland, even he was made aware at an early stage of the 'New Departure' that any Irish national movement should advocate 'all struggling nationalities in the British Empire and elsewhere.'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Highlander*, 1 Sep. 1880; Conversely, the Tory *Northern Chronicle* proudly noted a few months later that 'it should be noted that not a single Scotch member voted with the Revolutionists.' *Northern Chronicle*, 19 Jan. 1881.

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Gillis Biggar (1828-90) was the son of a wealthy businessman, and then head of the family firm. He joined the Home Government Association in 1870, was elected onto the Supreme Council of the IRB in 1875, and became treasurer of the Land League in 1879. MP for Cavan County from 1874-1890, Biggar converted from Presbyterianism to Catholicism in 1877, possibly to annoy his sister. Biggar took it upon himself to follow an idea proposed by Joseph Ronayne, a former Young Irelander, that Irish members in the House of Commons should interfere more in the affairs of England and Britain. This tactic – 'Obstructionism', was carried to its extreme form by Parnell and his allies in Parliament, and in 1877 they forced the Commons to sit continuously for 45 hours in the final stages of the South Africa Bill. See, e.g., R. Kee, *The Laurel and the Ivy* (Harmondsworth, 1993), 145-151; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 398; L. Curtis, *The Cause of Ireland: From the United Irishmen to Partition* (Belfast, 1994), 86.

<sup>77</sup> *New York Herald*, 25 Oct. 1878. Quoted in Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 250

## **‘Scotia minor’ and ‘Scotia major’. Irishmen, Highlanders and the Valtos rent strikes**

Entering the 1880s, there was little change in the positions of the *Highlander* or the *Oban Times*. The *Highlander* adhered to its policy of educating the crofters in the position and actions of the Irish tenants, an editorial piece, for example, begging the question ‘the people of England and Scotland are much interested in the agitation now going on in Ireland, but what do they know about it?’<sup>78</sup> The article urged people to find out as much as they could themselves about the agitation, rather than depending on the press. ‘As a rule we are content to be led by the very men who are tightening the yokes around the necks of the Irish’, it continued. Comparing the situation to the times of the Clearances, Murdoch remarked that a large proportion of the world was quite prepared to accept the view of Loch, Sellar and others that the Highlander was ignorant, lazy and bloodthirsty. These people said that ‘improvement’ was for the good of the people, and the same was now being said of the Irish.

Thus, encouraged by the publicity surrounding Pirie’s evictions, the tone was set for the *Highlander* to concentrate relentlessly on such issues as the success of the Irish Land League, the creation of a peasant proprietorship in the Highlands, and the high profile of Parnell in America, a land mercifully lacking in confidence in the British press.<sup>79</sup> Murdoch hoped to break down some of the prejudice which existed against the Irish in Scotland – a theme later continued with vigour by Davitt and John Ferguson – and to unite the causes of Ireland and the Highlands in the minds of his readers.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Highlander*, 16 Jan. 1880

<sup>79</sup> *Highlander*, 30 Jan., 5 Mar., 9 Apr., 30 Apr., 14 May, 11 Jun. 1880. An interesting article in the *Highlander*, taken from the *Scottish Miner* is one of the earliest mentions in the Highland press of land nationalisation. It was not at this stage, however, something which Murdoch was advocating vociferously, but a part of his quest to present the Highlanders with as much information as possible on the land issue. *Highlander*, 7 Nov. 1879. Murdoch was also extremely prompt in reporting the April 1880 Irish Land League manifesto in full (*Highlander*, 30 Apr. 1880).

<sup>80</sup> *Highlander*, 30 Jan., 21 May, 18 Jun., 27 Oct. 1880. Indeed, the *Highlander* was one of few British newspapers to speak out against the arrest of Michael Davitt in early 1881. Unlike his rivals, Murdoch was keen to accentuate the moderating influence Davitt had on the land movement, rather than the fact that Davitt had once been a Fenian. ‘Davitt’, Murdoch wrote, ‘has been indefatigable in his labours on behalf of the people, and with his fine, clear head and marked ability, he was telling upon them... Davitt’s work would have resulted in a peaceful settlement of the land question, without loss or injury to anyone. We tremble at the result of the alternative.’ *Highlander*, 9 Feb. 1881



Perhaps the most common theme for the *Highlander* in 1880 was the attempt to portray itself as a shining beacon of truth in a very murky world of Whig, Tory and landlord dominated press. The *Scotsman* was attacked savagely and often, encapsulated by the sarcastic comment that ‘if Scotland wishes to rise in a moral and enlightened age, to the heroism and chivalry it showed in times of physical war for freedom, it must certainly have others gods than those of Cockburn Street.’<sup>81</sup> The *Highlander* believed that it was winning the battle for the minds of the people, and also the press opinion was shifting.

Like the *Highlander*, the position of the *Oban Times* did not change appreciably between 1879 and 1880, and for most of this time it conformed to the image of the anti-Irish Land League organs condemned by John Murdoch. It told of dissension within the Land League, of growing opposition to Parnell, and of the anarchic state of Ireland.<sup>82</sup> Although the paper could not be called ‘anti-crofter’ – it was, by this time, just as indignant towards the *Scotsman*’s attitude to the Highlands as John Murdoch, for example – it was certainly anti-Irish.<sup>83</sup> During 1880-1881, the *Oban Times* carried many articles in favour of coercive action against the Irish, and the editorial line was that the government was not doing enough to prevent agrarian outrages in Ireland.<sup>84</sup>

1881 was a turning point for several reasons. It saw the advent of a new Irish Land Bill, displaying to all that agitation could be successful, and seemed to indicate that, as long as crofters remained silent in relation to their troubles, they could expect no redress. The resulting Land Act, and scaling down of the Land War, although not obvious at the time, also drove Davitt and Ferguson to the conclusion that Scotland and England would be more receptive than Ireland to their radicalism. 1881 was also the year during which the *Highlander* lost its long battle against its creditors, and although it struggled on gamely as a monthly until the end of the year, it reverted to more cultural than political content.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the *Oban Times* could no longer

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<sup>81</sup> *Highlander*, 13 Oct. 1880. Cockburn Street, in Edinburgh, was home to the main office of the *Scotsman*. For other attacks – which did not go unnoticed in Edinburgh – see *Highlander*, 16 Jan., 28 Jul., 6 Oct., 13 Oct. 1880

<sup>82</sup> *Oban Times*, 7 Feb., 14 Feb., 29 May, 19 Jun., 28 Aug., 2 Oct., 11 Dec. 1880

<sup>83</sup> *Oban Times*, 21 Feb. 1880

<sup>84</sup> *Oban Times*, 20 Nov. 1880

<sup>85</sup> Hunter, *For the People’s Cause*, 35 It has been claimed that ‘the *Highlander* was forced to close down in 1881, but the *Oban Times* carried on the radical tradition.’ This is an oversimplification, but it would be true to say that the *Oban Times* had started its metamorphosis into a weekly that would



ignore the fact that lawlessness, although not in the acute form seen in Ireland, was spreading throughout the Highlands and Islands. Whatever the direct cause of this, the paper would be forced to reassess its constituency, and so from the start of 1881 an increasing amount of column inches were given over to news about land reform – often treading a fine line between support for the crofters and condemnation for the Irish.

Just as in 1879, at the outset of the Irish Land War, the embryonic Highland agitation was reported in the *Oban Times*, but barely commented upon. Where rent affray in Scotland was mentioned, such as on the Kilmuir, Skeabost and Treaslane estates on Skye, for example, it was usually juxtaposed with examples of lawlessness from across the Irish Sea.<sup>86</sup> Disgust with the antics of the Irish Parliamentary Party also received frequent airings, especially in relation to ‘Obstructionism’, and the editor clearly believed he was speaking for the majority of his readers when, in February 1881, he stated that ‘of the ultimate fate of the leaders of the Land League, few in this country have any interest’.<sup>87</sup> The circumstances of the Irish and Highland smallholders were held up to comparison, but only in a piece borrowed from the *Aberdeen Free Press*, which portrayed the Irish Celt as violent and cowardly.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, there was little difference at this time between the *Oban Times* and the *Northern Chronicle*, the Inverness based Tory paper which would remain implacably hostile to the Irish agitation.<sup>89</sup>

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eventually pick up the cudgels reluctantly relinquished by John Murdoch. Murdoch did, of course, carry on a vigorous agitation in many other ways. M. Maclean & C. Carrell (eds.), *As an Fhearran – From The Land* (Stornoway, 1986), 22

<sup>86</sup> *Oban Times*, 1 Jan., 8 Jan. 1881

<sup>87</sup> *Oban Times*, 26 Feb. 1881. In relation to Parnell, for example, see *Oban Times* 29 Jan. 1881, which stated that ‘it is mortifying to find what we used to boast of as the greatest representative body in the world held up to scorn by a few Irish demagogues.’

<sup>88</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Feb. 1881

<sup>89</sup> Early in 1881, for example, the *Northern Chronicle* repeatedly called for increased coercion against the Irish Land League. In its mission statement it referred to the ‘dreadful spread of anarchy in Ireland... The *Chronicle* will hold that law and order must be re-established, only thereafter should attempts be made to pass measures having for their object the removal of real life grievances.’ *Northern Chronicle*, 5 Jan. 1881. A month later, a speech by Michael Davitt was quoted, along with the comment that ‘this sort of oratory, although stuffed with falsehoods, is not empty bombast. It has a soul and fires other souls... we have scarcely any doubt that mild coercion is now too late, and that if insurrection is to be prevented, and Ireland is to be retained, recourse must be had to far more drastic measures than those proposed by the government.’ *Northern Chronicle*, 2 Feb. 1881

Sutherland's attempts to stress the political aspect of the FCS led to some resentment. The Gaelic Society of Inverness did not send any delegates to the annual meeting in 1881, because 'the Federation has departed from its original purpose by becoming more a political than social and literary association, and is therefore not in agreement with the [GSI's] constitution.'<sup>90</sup> As will be seen, however, it is characteristic of Angus Sutherland's career as an agitator that he was perfectly content to lose the support of people or organisations who were not committed to the same degree of social or political reform as himself. Far from being disconcerted at the complaints of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, Sutherland attempted to broaden the politicisation of Highland societies in Glasgow. He spoke to the Islay Association in the spring of 1881, and, later in the year, addressed *An Comunn Gaidhealach Ghlaschu*.<sup>91</sup> He asked the latter body:

If he might be allowed to make a suggestion to the directors he would like it if they would take into consideration the possibility of having short addresses in the mother tongue on subjects of pressing importance to the Celts, delivered occasionally at these meetings. They had upon their directorate men well qualified to deliver practical addresses which, he had no doubt, would be fully appreciated.

Having stressed the legal basis for their actions, the two main tactics which appear to have been used in the politicisation of the Highland or Celtic societies at this time were, firstly, goading the Highlanders into assessing their own positions, and, secondly, trying to convey the impression that united action could actually achieve some tangible results. It was also seen as important to make the Highlanders of Glasgow and other cities feel as if they were part of a wider struggle, involving not just Ireland, but working people throughout Britain, Ireland and other parts of the world.

A further theme which ran through Angus Sutherland's speeches in the early years of the land reform movement in Scotland was that whilst the law of the land should be respected as far as was possible, it was also necessary to observe moral or natural justice. Occasionally, he even sought to attack landlordism from a legal viewpoint himself, such as over the Leckmelm evictions, when he suggested seeking legal

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<sup>90</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, Jan. 1881

<sup>91</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Mar., 1 Oct. 1881

advice 'in order to ascertain whether eviction of tenants who were willing to pay rent, and had been in possession for a long period of years, was not illegal...'<sup>92</sup> In his *Highlander* articles, he again sought to put the agitation on a firm legal footing, writing that if the State, through the Monarchy, had the power to vest land in private hands, then it also had the right to take them back at any time, either for the state or redistribution. If anyone denied this, he argued, it would simply demonstrate that the present situation of land tenure was based on illegal confiscation, and that 'if the State had the right to grant it has the right to revoke.'<sup>93</sup> At a meeting in Glasgow in 1879, which presumably Sutherland was at least aware of, although there is no definite evidence that he attended it, Michael Davitt asked whether the Dukes of Buccleuch or Argyll had any right to their lands other than those gained by plunder and confiscation.<sup>94</sup> To this, of course, Angus Sutherland would have added the Duke of Sutherland.

Most important, however, was Sutherland's belief that many of the ills besetting the Highlanders at that time were as a direct result of the laws operating to benefit the landed classes. This allowed him to raise the concern that if laws were seen to be unjust, it would result in a lack of respect for all laws, not merely the unfair ones. Such laws, he warned, would inevitably force the 'tillers of the soil' to revolt against those who benefited from them.<sup>95</sup>

One of the legal issues central to the land question was whether it was constitutional to confiscate land from landlords and, if that was to be done, whether they should receive any compensation.<sup>96</sup> Sutherland recoiled at this idea: as a proponent of the

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<sup>92</sup> *Oban Times*, 6 Nov. 1880. Compare this also with Irish Land League strategy. See S. Ball, 'Crowd activity during the Irish Land War, 1879-1890', in P. Jupp & E. Magennis (eds.), *Crowds in Ireland, c. 1720-1920* (Basingstoke, 2000), 220

<sup>93</sup> *Highlander*, 12 Jan. 1881

<sup>94</sup> *Oban Times*, 6 Dec. 1879

<sup>95</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Nov. 1880; *Highlander*, 10 Nov. 1880. He argued before the FCS in Glasgow, for example, that 'the tiller of the soil, who retires to the city. He is equally bitter against the laws that have treated him so harshly... and as it cannot be reasonably expected that the man should reason like a philosopher, or forgive like a saint, he often confounds laws that are just with laws that are unjust and thus loses respect for law of every kind... It is impossible to violate the laws of morality without paying the penalty. Retribution may be slow, but it is none the less certain.' See also *Highlander*, 23 Feb. 1881

<sup>96</sup> This would later become a divisive issue in the reform movement – the Nationalisers in favour of compensation, the Single Taxers – following Henry George – against. See, for example, *Single Tax*, Jul. 1896, in which H.M. Hyndman refused to debate the single tax issue with former ally Richard McGhee, referring to him as 'a third or fourth rate hack of the capitalist Liberal Party'. Earlier, the

'land for the people' philosophy, of course, he denied that there was any justification for absolute ownership of land by an individual, and he used historical reasoning to state that, as the land was concentrated into the hands of a few by illegal confiscations in the first place, after Cromwell and Culloden, there was no legal problem in returning it.<sup>97</sup>

In his deeply held sense of oppression of the Highland crofters by landlords, stemming from the personal experiences of his family, and the power of folk memory, Angus Sutherland bore a resemblance to Michael Davitt. Similarly, just as Davitt was not averse to recalling the past misdeeds of landlords in his speeches, Sutherland made frequent evocations of the evictions and clearances in his native county. Although not bound up with Nationalism to anything like the same extent as the Irish Land War, there was nonetheless an appeal by Sutherland to those who had left Sutherlandshire – and the wider Highlands – not to forget their homeland. At an early stage of the agitation, Sutherland addressed the FCS on the power of nationality. This was not British, or even Scottish, nationality, but specifically an idea of 'Highland' nationality. Simply living outside of the Highlands did not change the fact that an individual had Highland blood, and neither did it lighten their responsibility to improve the social condition of the 'old country'.<sup>98</sup>

Putting the Highlands onto a similar level as Ireland and other 'oppressed' countries, Sutherland made frequent references to the Highland Clearances, the Kildonan

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Single Taxers had mocked their 'friends', 'what a simple minded honest set of reformers are our friends the land nationalisers – by compensation!'. *Single Tax*, Jan. 1896. A year later, Michael Davitt advocated the Single Tax doctrine over Socialism. *Single Tax*, May 1897. See also Appendix B.

<sup>97</sup> *Highlander*, 12 Jan. 1880

<sup>98</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Nov. 1880; *Highlander*, 10 Nov. 1880. Sutherland stressed the importance of nationality thus: 'Rulers sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind. They sowed the wind of oppression, and as a necessary and inevitable consequence, they reaped the whirlwind of revolution... The owner of the soil, doing with his own as he likes, breaks up this man's home, tears up his life's affections by the roots, separates him and his family from all the associations that make life endurable – nay, sometimes pleasant – and brings him face to face either with starvation, the slums of the cities, or emigration... Unity in diversity is everywhere in nature. Unity of design, diversity of means, is the law of social phenomena as well as the science of material phenomena. Individuality is the centre of the circle, nationality the circumference. Individuality gives strength to the personal character, nationality to that of race. Nationality is to the race what the home influence is to the family; and who so saps the family influence undermines morality. So we see that who represses a nationality or despises it undermines morality a hundred-fold more than he who removes a reproach or a stumbling block.'

Burnings, and also the importance of Gaelic in building up a sense of nationality.<sup>99</sup> Like John Murdoch, Sutherland saw the continued use of Gaelic as a vital tool in the regeneration of the Highlands. As James Hunter has pointed out, to assert Highland 'nationality was necessarily to promote the Gaelic language.'<sup>100</sup> The Gaelic language had been one of the main campaigning points in the *Highlander*, along with the land issue, and had also been one of those issues which less radical Highlanders and their friends felt able to rally around. Sutherland, however, wanted to incorporate the protection and teaching of Gaelic amongst Highlanders as part of his wider plans.<sup>101</sup>

Alongside his allies amongst the Glasgow Land League, Angus Sutherland was keen to stress that the resolution of the land question was not simply to improve the condition of the Scottish or Irish tenant farmers, but that it was for the economic benefit of the whole country. In introducing his series of articles on the land laws, Sutherland explained this, but also, naturally, applied the question specifically to the crofters.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> In Glasgow during the height of the Braes trouble in 1882, he referred to those 'people so grievously robbed in the past as the burnt out of Kildonan, and who had ever since lived in poverty's house through no fault of their own'. *Oban Times*, 22 Apr. 1882; It has already been noted above that an 'unnecessary' reference to the Clearances precipitated Blantyre's resignation from the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association; In Edinburgh at the end of 1882, he spoke about how history repeated itself in the Highlands, 'but he failed to find a parallel to the meeting of Commissioners which was held at Inverness for the purpose of devising measures of coercion against the Skyemen unless it be the meeting of Highland chiefs of Mac-Cailein at Fort William and the immediate result of which had been the Massacre of Glencoe...' *Oban Times*, 2 Dec. 1882

<sup>100</sup> Hunter, *For the People's Cause*, 27

<sup>101</sup> *Oban Times*, 11 Nov., 18 Nov. 1882. As he explained in Paisley, 'The Language of the Highlander as a means in his moral and intellectual condition can utilised in two ways – first, by its use philologically as a scientific study; and secondly, by its use in the schools of the Highlands by the means of which national instruction alone can be imparted. It has been said that we urge this latter merely on sentimental grounds, that is, on no grounds apart from the practical. That is not so – the suggestion is eminently practical...'

<sup>102</sup> *Highlander*, 22 Dec. 1880. Sutherland argued that 'the question of the distribution of the land of our country is fast becoming the question of the day. Several circumstances of recent occurrence have tended to give consideration of the question a great impetus. No doubt, the recent depression in the commerce of our country has had the effect of calling attention to the grave anomalies that exist in our Land Laws. But entirely apart from causes of merely transient interest, there seems at length to be an undercurrent of thought steadily directed towards the subject as being the key to the solution of nearly all the economic problems of the time. This is as it ought to be. A rational basis for the tenure of the land must be the foundation of any system of Political Economy worthy of the name of a science... There can be no doubt, whatever, that this question of distribution of tenure of the land is the great political question of the immediate future... as no class is so vitally interested in the question as its readers; and certainly no class has suffered more in the past, or is suffering more at present from the monstrous iniquities of the Land Laws of our country.'



Similarly, much of the thinking of the Land League's 'left wing' was not directed merely at ensuring protection from predatory landlords, but at producing, at minimum, a system of peasant proprietary, and hoped to bring about the complete abolition of landlordism. At Irishtown in 1879, John Ferguson had told the crowd that 'land provided by God for the people. Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and France didn't have paupers – and they didn't have landlords...'<sup>103</sup>

Because of their subsequent careers as labour agitators, it has become axiomatic that Ferguson, and his friends Davitt and McHugh, were keen propagators of this brand of political economy. Angus Sutherland's debt to Ferguson and Henry George has not, however, been fully recognised. Sutherland's written contributions on economics to the *Highlander* fully supported John Murdoch's position on the land question. Soon after the Irishtown meeting, Murdoch ran editorials on land systems in Flanders and Saxony, echoing Ferguson's speech.<sup>104</sup>

In claiming inspiration from the same economists as Ferguson, George, Davitt and McHugh, Sutherland argued from a very early stage amongst the Highland community in Glasgow that nationalisation of land was a viable alternative to any half-hearted implementation of the '3 F's'. Ferguson and McHugh, along with J. Bruce Glasier, James Shaw Maxwell – all followers of Henry George – attempted to persuade Irishmen of the merits of the scheme.<sup>105</sup> Sutherland, at the same time, was speaking on the subject to Glasgow members of the FCS.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 26 Apr. 1879

<sup>104</sup> *Highlander*, 1 Aug., 3 Oct. 1879. Sutherland himself, in condemning the laws of Entail and Primogeniture, complained that 'we hear men in high places sneer at the system of peasant proprietors in France, Prussia, Belgium, Switzerland and Norway. And why? Because in these countries and under this system, the right is recognised of each member of the family to share equally in the common inheritance – because the accident of priority of birth gives no exclusive right to the fruit of industry of the parents, as is the case in our country...' *Highlander*, 16 Feb. 1881

<sup>105</sup> James Shaw Maxwell had been born in Saltmarket, Glasgow, in 1854. Having apprenticed as a lithographic designer, he started his own business in this field. He 'early showed interest in social problems, which led him to attach himself to the labour shade of opinion' (*Glasgow Herald*, 7 Jan. 1929). In 1883, he edited his own newspaper, *The Voice of the People*, which advocated land nationalisation, and hinted at taking an independent path from Liberalism. As will be seen, although only 24 years old at the outset of the Highland agitation, Shaw Maxwell played an important role in the radicalism of the Glasgow Land League, which continued throughout the 1880s in the Home Government Branch of the Irish National League. For a picture and brief biography of Shaw Maxwell, see *The Bailie*, 15 Sep. 1897. J. Bruce Glasier was even younger than Shaw Maxwell, born in Glasgow in March 1859. His mother was 'the daughter of a Highland crofter', and his father, an Ayrshire farmer, died when Glasier was a young boy. It was also recorded that, as a boy, he himself herded sheep in Kyle, Argyllshire and Arran. Having trained as an architectural draughtsman, J. Bruce Glasier became

Even before the Glasgow-Irish influence on the Highland land agitation became common knowledge, therefore, there seems to have been a dual approach amongst the radical members of the Land League. Sutherland also used the same historical references in order to illustrate the iniquity of the land laws. Whether speaking at a meeting or writing in the *Highlander*, Angus Sutherland used not only the history of the Sutherlandshire Clearances, but much wider and more distant history to illustrate his points. From the Scots invasion of Argyll from Ireland, through the Picts and Norsemen, to the Restoration Parliament of Charles II and Culloden, history was presented as a cycle of oppressed freedoms.<sup>107</sup> When Ferguson and McHugh began addressing Highlanders directly, Angus Sutherland had ensured that many Gaels in the city had already been exposed to similar doctrines.

Although Michael Davitt has been credited with laying the foundations of uniting the British working classes with the Irish land agitation, he did not undertake this project in isolation.<sup>108</sup> A meeting of Land League leaders in February 1881 saw Ferguson express fears for the future of the movement – the increasingly lawless nature of the agitation leading, he felt, to certain suppression by the Government. One way of countering this problem, it was thought, was to cultivate the support of the English and Scottish people on the Irish question.<sup>109</sup> It seems likely that Ferguson, with his

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involved with various radical groups in Glasgow, such as the Land League, and eventually helped set up the first Scottish branch of the Social Democratic Federation in 1884. In 1885, alongside Andreas Scheu, James Mavor and William Morris, he founded the Socialist League. A long career in Socialist politics followed, including helping to found the ILP in 1893, and being chairman of that body from 1900-1903. For a eulogistic account of his life, see W. Whitely, *J. Bruce Glasier: A Memorial* (Manchester, 1920); For more details on the relationship Glasier and Shaw Maxwell had with radicalism in Glasgow, see J.R. Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left: The Impact of American Ideas on the Scottish Labour Movement from the American Civil War to the end of World War One' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1998), 77-118.

<sup>106</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Nov. 1880; *Highlander*, 10 Nov. 1880. He reminded the audience that 'we have the teachings of such kings of men as Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Professor Blackie, and the practical application of same by Gladstone and Bright, all of whom look upon the unit as the important factor of civilisation...I maintain, then... that evictions, economically considered, are pernicious; they are opposed to the highest interests of humanity and civilisation; and that they constitute a flagrant violation of the first principles of political economy and public morality... the only true remedy was for the Government to buy up the land, and then the state would be the farmer's landlord. The thing could be managed as cheaply as the post office was conducted.'

<sup>107</sup> See (e.g.) *Oban Times*, 13 Nov. 1880; *Highlander*, 10 Nov., 29 Dec. 1880, 12 Jan., 23 Feb. 1881

<sup>108</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 461; A.L. Morton & G. Tate, *The British Labour Movement, 1770-1920* (London, 1956), 157

<sup>109</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Feb. 1880

practical experience in this matter, deserves as much credit as Davitt for persuading Parnell to advocate – albeit temporarily – a ‘junction’ between Irish nationalism and the British democracy.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, one of the notable results of this meeting was the establishment of the National Land League of Great Britain (LLGB).<sup>111</sup>

As the Glasgow Branch of the Irish Land League entered the 1880s, it contained not only a number of already prominent Irishmen, both Catholic and Protestant, but also several radical Scotsmen.<sup>112</sup> In August 1881, John Ferguson showed his pleasure at the cosmopolitan nature of the organisation he had done so much to set up.<sup>113</sup> A pragmatist, Ferguson also realised at an early stage that Scots were just as likely, if not more so, as Irishmen to accept his advanced land policies. Discussing land nationalisation, he claimed that the idea was:

Not difficult to deal with in an audience of Irishmen who still have a proclivity after the old Celtic custom – nor difficult with Highlanders and Scotchmen – if I am right in calling them Scotch at all – for ‘Erse’ would be a better name; for their country is Scotia minor and Ireland Scotia major. Even from the old feudal times we find ‘the land for the people’ comes down – it is no new doctrine...<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 449; for Parnell’s reported feelings on the English and Scottish working classes, see below, 162

<sup>111</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 481

<sup>112</sup> John Ferguson, Michael Clarke, Dan O’Reilly and Edward McHugh, all leading members of the Glasgow Branch of the Home Rule Confederation, established the Glasgow Branch of the Irish Land League. Like Ferguson and McHugh, Clarke appears to have been a radical, Georgite, member of the Land League. See ‘Papers of J. Bruce Glasier’, in J. Bruce Glasier Papers, University of Liverpool, GP1-1-13 / GP1-1-14 (Letters of M. Clarke to J. Bruce Glasier, regarding Henry George, J. Shaw Maxwell, and the Irish Question, 27 Mar. 1883, 27 Oct. 1883). Clarke was also chairman at a meeting which condemned a resolution from elsewhere in the city that the Irishmen of Glasgow should not put their faith in Protestant leaders (quoted in *Glasgow Observer*, 8 Oct. 1887). Ferguson was elected president, Clarke was vice-president and McHugh was secretary. Scotsmen James Shaw Maxwell and John Bruce Glasier, two friends who were to be very important figures in the Scottish Labour movement, joined at the end of 1880. Neil Brown, Angus Sutherland and J.G. Mackay were also all involved. See also *Glasgow Herald*, 8 Jun. 1881, 13 Jun. 1881 for Glasier and Shaw Maxwell, and *Glasgow Herald*, 6 Nov. 1883 for Angus Sutherland and D. Campbell; Hutchison, ‘Politics and Society’, 510; *Glasgow Herald*, 19 Apr. 1881, 4 Jun. 1882, 19 Feb., 26 Feb., 20 Mar. 1883

<sup>113</sup> *Irish World*, 10 Sep. 1881; *Glasgow Herald*, 15 Jul. 1881. Ferguson stated that he was ‘pleased to find that of this National Land League of Great Britain, this Branch in Glasgow is no longer exclusively Irish. You display your liberality – and no uncommon thing in the history of Ireland – by electing a majority, if not the half, of your council Scotchmen and, counting myself, I believe a majority Protestants...’

<sup>114</sup> *Irish World*, 10 Sep. 1881

However, there was already a certain interest in events in the Highlands being shown by the Glasgow-based Land League members, for as early as November 1880 it was reported that one branch in the city had been discussing the recent evictions. It was also at around this time that Angus Sutherland was addressing *An Comunn Gaidhleach Ghlaschu* on the same subject, although it is not clear whether it was he who was invited to address the Irishmen.<sup>115</sup> Thus, an important part was played by Irish labour activists in the Scottish urban centres, such as Glasgow and Greenock, which have been acknowledged as areas which nurtured the nascent labour movement, but which also helped to ferment opinion towards a more radical Highlands in the early 1880s.<sup>116</sup> Although some Irish historians have dismissed the importance of the 'junction' between Irish and British working classes, Scotland – and the Highlands in particular – was to become a clear manifestation of the success of the policy.<sup>117</sup>

In April 1881 T.P. O'Connor and Charles Stewart Parnell were present at a Land League demonstration in Glasgow, a meeting chaired by John Ferguson and attended by Edward McHugh.<sup>118</sup> Parnell's main aim in the speech he delivered was to persuade people that the Irish Land League was not 'the league of assassins and midnight marauders they were represented to be.' In spite of the predominantly Irish audience, however, there was a significant Highland presence at the meeting. Henry Whyte, 'Fionn', moved that:

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<sup>115</sup> *Highlander*, 17 Nov. 1880, 24 Nov. 1880

<sup>116</sup> T. Gallagher, 'The Catholic Irish in Scotland', in T.M. Devine (ed.), *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Edinburgh 1991), 26; J.G. Kellas, 'The Liberal Party in Scotland, 1885-1895' (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University College London, 1961), 216

<sup>117</sup> P. Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-1882* (New Jersey, 1979), 154; *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Mar. 1881. Bew argued that 'it was widely appreciated that this [Irish and British working class alliance] meant very little except maintaining the traditional alliance with a small section of minor English left-wing political figures, for example, the Democratic Federation. In fact Harris, Kettle and Sexton – all of whom had been present in Paris – were publicly sceptical of this left wing alliance when it was advocated in Ireland by John Ferguson and James Loudon.' This may be true of the attitude of the leading Irish Nationalists of the day, but does not take into account the attitudes of many of the Highlanders who, stemming from the land question, came to support Home Rule in the mid to late 1880s.

<sup>118</sup> *Scotsman*, 19 Apr. 1881; *Freeman's Journal*, 19 Apr. 1881; *Highlander*, 27 Apr. 1881; *North British Daily Mail*, 19 Apr. 1881; *Glasgow Evening News*, 19 Apr. 1881. The *Highlander* report added that 'Mr. Whyte further stated that he regretted that Highlanders had been so long in appreciating the services of the Land League, but that he now looked forward to giving them assistance and seeking their co-operation'. The *Freeman's Journal*, furthermore, recorded that a resolution calling for Davitt's release from prison was moved by a Mr. McElroy, but seconded by 'John Stuart, a Scotchman'.

This meeting expresses its abhorrence at the threatened evictions in Skye and Glenelg, and other places in the Highlands, and pledges itself to use all means to expose and to prevent these outrages on humanity and on justice; and further pledges itself to advocate such a reform of the land laws as would make further outrages impossible in the future.

It was also reported that the meeting saw 'some incidental reference to the Duke of Argyll', which 'led to a most extraordinary scene of hissing and booing', which could have come from both Highlanders and Irishmen, given the Duke's opposition to the 1881 Land Act. With the main meeting in Glasgow City Hall 'filled to suffocation', however, there were also 'overflow' meetings held in adjacent areas.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, O'Connor, having addressed the overflow, reported back to the main meeting that:

most of the movers of the resolutions at the other meetings being Highlanders... [he] accepted it as proof of the strong, ardent and vigorous union of the Celtic race.

He further:

recognised in the presence of the Highlanders that night a happy augury for the future. (Cheers). The system of feudalism was toppling, and before many years it would be lying in the dust. Some rats had discovered that the ship was sinking, and had left it...

Two nights later, although Parnell did not show, O'Connor, Ferguson and McHugh were again prominent at an Irish meeting in Edinburgh.<sup>120</sup> Whilst this meeting did not have the same Highland presence as the one at Glasgow City Hall, the close relationship between Ferguson and McHugh, and the man who had raised the issue of Highland evictions in parliament, shows that the interest of the Irish Land League in a crofter agitation predated not only the 'Battle of the Braes', but also the Valtos rent strikes on Skye.<sup>121</sup> Whilst a general 'No Rent Manifesto' was not issued until some

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<sup>119</sup> It has been stated that one of these was chaired by Angus Sutherland, although the *Scotsman* reported that it was a J. Sutherland, possibly John Sutherland, Angus' brother and also a member of the Glasgow Sutherland Association, who took the chair. D.W. Crowley, 'The "Crofters' Party", 1885-1892', *Scottish Historical Review*, xxxv (1956), 112

<sup>120</sup> *Scotsman*, 21 Apr. 1881; *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Apr. 1881

<sup>121</sup> For details of Valtos, see *Highlander*, 4 May 1881; *Oban Times*, 1 Jan. 1881; MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 30-34; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 133-4; C.W.J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* (London, 1988), 372. Norman Stewart, later nicknamed 'Parnell', had refused to pay the rent increase since 1877, again predating the outbreak of agitation in Ireland.



time later, the idea of rent strikes had been a tried and trusted tactic of the Irish Land League.<sup>122</sup> Clearly, with the Skye tenants adopting similar tactics as the Irish, the foundations had been laid for a closer connection to develop.

The trouble on Fraser of Kilmuir's estate at Valtos in 1881 was similarly monitored by the land reformers of Ireland and lowland Scotland. At a meeting of the Land League in Glasgow as early as April 1881, for example, the following resolution had been passed:

That we hereby declare our strong sympathy with the suffering crofters and farmers of the Highlands of Scotland, our condemnation of the system of landlordism by which they have for generations been plundered and persecuted, and our determination to aid them by every means in our power to obtain their just rights.<sup>123</sup>

Following the rent affrays in Valtos, the question of Irish involvement with the recurrent crofting disturbances began to disquiet newspapers such as the *Scotsman*, which described the presence of Highlanders at the 'East Nile Street' branch of the Glasgow Irish Land League.<sup>124</sup> The *Scotsman* encapsulated the fears of what might be called the 'establishment', not only of Scotland, but increasingly England as well, in its sure assertion that the Valtos rent affray and the subsequent agitation was caused by a number of Glasgow based Highlanders making their way to an 'obscure hall' in East Nile Street, off the Gallowgate, where a Sunday meeting of the Land League was being held. When it was discovered that the Highlanders had similar grievances:

They were received with open arms, a welcome that affected [the Highlanders] so much that they shortly joined the organisation. The connection between the Irish and Highland agitators has been of the most intimate nature, and the officers of the league, delighted at the acquisition of the Highland contingent, are doing their best to make the views of the malcontents on the Skye question bulk largely before the public.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> On August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1880, for example, Patrick Egan had called for a general strike against rent based on the industrial strikes which had occurred in England. 'We, therefore', he wrote, 'reiterate our call to the country to... refuse to pay all unjust rent.' *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Aug. 1880; Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 399

<sup>123</sup> *Scotsman*, 25 Apr. 1881; *North British Daily Mail*, 25 Apr. 1881; *Glasgow Evening Times*, 25 Apr. 1881

<sup>124</sup> *Scotsman*, 21 May 1881

<sup>125</sup> Highland Regional Archive, Kilmuir Estate Papers, KEP D123/30; *Scotsman*, 21 May 1881. For a lukewarm denial of the *Scotsman's* accusations, see Henry George's column, *Irish World*, 20 May

It is certain that Angus Sutherland, and J.G. Mackay, were the two most prominent Highlanders involved in Glasgow Irish politics, and, a year before Edward McHugh was despatched to Skye in order to investigate and lecture on the land laws, it was Angus Sutherland who was being mooted as the most likely man to fulfil the role.<sup>126</sup>

No emissary of the Land League visited at this stage, but the situation on the island was, subsequently, very closely monitored. Sutherland also helped to keep the Highland issue alive within the Irish Land League branches in the city. The FCS, however, was the main forum for Sutherland's speeches on Valtos.<sup>127</sup> He also used his position as Secretary of the Federation to set up the Skye Vigilance Committee. The time had certainly come for resistance, he said, and although no Highlander wished 'to break the law... it was time that, whilst they should not be law-breakers, they should be law-makers'.<sup>128</sup>

The prominent role played by Sutherland in the Valtos agitation, and the way in which he had carried the FCS into a political forum, was emphasised by the Committee of the Skye Vigilance Committee, who thanked 'the Federation of Celtic Societies, for the active interest taken by it in the condition of the Skye crofters, and to its secretary, Mr. Angus Sutherland, for the valuable information he from time to time supplied to the committee... [Angus Sutherland] would long be remembered by Skyemen...'<sup>129</sup>

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1882. George here claimed that: 'The modicum of truth in this is that the Irish Land League in Glasgow and other towns have done a good deal to rouse feelings in regard to the Highland evictions, and that the example of Ireland had undoubtedly stirred the Highland tenants...'

<sup>126</sup> *Highlander*, 16 Jul. 1881

<sup>127</sup> *Oban Times*, 14 May 1881; *Highlander*, 11 May 1881

<sup>128</sup> *Oban Times*, 21 May 1881. One of the only insights into the Skye Vigilance Committee's functions was given by John Murdoch, although this quotation must be qualified by saying that it was for the consumption of a radical, Irish American audience. Describing the history of the Highland agitation in the aftermath of the 'Battle of the Braes', Murdoch wrote that 'there was a nest egg ("Vigilance Committee") in existence from the time of the Valtos contest with Captain Fraser last year... Around this committee men from all parts of the Highlands have formed themselves into a permanent organisation, with wider objects and bolder aims than they would have ventured to think of a few months ago. Money has flowed in: they employed counsel for the defence of the Skye "suspects", they paid fines at once and let the men home to their farms'. This description, more than other sources, makes the Vigilance Committee sound like the Irish Land League, although it is possible that Sutherland's main priorities were, indeed, ensuring that there was money available to back up rent strikes. *Irish World*, 10 Jun. 1882

<sup>129</sup> *Oban Times*, 16 Jul. 1881

In the columns of 'Our Glasgow Letter', and 'Glasgow Highland News', some of the most aggressive language of the Highland agitation had so far seen was provided by 'Fionn'. The Glasgow Skye Vigilance Committee, gave a good pretext for reporting the radicalism present in the city, and even as early as July of that year, 'Fionn' reported the possibility of establishing a Scottish Land Law Reform Association. Along with Sutherland, he condemned Lochiel's apathy over Valtos.<sup>130</sup> The following week, in stark contrast to the earlier editorial reporting of the Valtos case as a comfortable compromise between landlord and tenant, 'Fionn' proclaimed it as a victory for the crofters, and spoke of the 'caving in' of Fraser.<sup>131</sup> This three week saga was completed by a report on the Skye Vigilance Committee, who reached the conclusion that the Valtos tenants' victory meant that it would be a long time before Fraser or any other tenants thought about evicting their tenants.<sup>132</sup>

For the rest of 1881 it is clear that 'Fionn' was hoping to emulate the example of John Murdoch, and indeed as Murdoch is mentioned from time to time in the column, just as 'Fionn' had written in the *Highlander*, it is clear that the veteran reformer was something of a political father figure for both 'Fionn', and Angus Sutherland.<sup>133</sup> Several of 'Fionn's' outbursts during 1881 could have come from the *Highlander* at its most radical. He encouraged the crofters to stop accepting the social status quo, and to question the actions of their landlords and their MPs. Indeed, in complaining that most Scottish MPs were also large landowners, he said that it was 'time that Scottish constituencies started freeing themselves from this incubus of social idleness, which is paralysing their energies and sapping their independence.'<sup>134</sup> On the land issue, he accused the Duke of Argyll of pure self interest in opposing the Irish Land Bill, because 'the benefits granted to Ireland cannot long be denied Scotland'.<sup>135</sup> A clarion call one month later had 'Fionn' exclaiming, 'let the people remember they are supreme, and it is not what Gladstone or Argyll but what they determine must be done. *Is Treasa Tuath Na Tighearna!*'<sup>136</sup> Towards the end of 1881, just before the

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<sup>130</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Jul. 1881

<sup>131</sup> *Oban Times*, 9 Jul. 1881

<sup>132</sup> *Oban Times*, 16 Jul. 1881

<sup>133</sup> 'Fionn's' brother, John Whyte, had been a subordinate to Murdoch in the *Highlander* office.

<sup>134</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Aug. 1881

<sup>135</sup> *Oban Times*, 24 Sep. 1881. See above, 67, for the reaction to Argyll at Parnell's Glasgow meeting.

<sup>136</sup> *Oban Times*, 22 Oct. 1881. This final quoted slogan – 'The People are mightier than a Lord' appeared frequently in the Glaswegian despatches, and in time became the motto of the Highland Land Law Reform Association. See also 'Fionn's' column in *Oban Times*, 10 Sep. 1881

annual meeting of the FCS in Perth, and just before the outbreak of lawlessness in Braes, 'Fionn' found reasons for optimism among the crofters, claiming that 'in the last year we have learned that they are an acknowledged force and can achieve their aims.'<sup>137</sup> The Valtos affray became the symbol of a great triumph for united action among the crofters, and the Glasgow Highlanders, with 'Fionn' as their mouthpiece, were quick to develop the propaganda potential of the case.

Editorial opinion, however, remained conservative. After the spring months being peppered with 'atrocious outrages... traceable to the Land League', the *Oban Times* was able to speak out strongly against the Irish agitation.<sup>138</sup> Under the heading of 'Skye – an example to the Irish', a didactic message was presented to readers: 'The Valtos tenants, who were refusing to pay their rents and whose case began to excite interest in outsiders, have now come to terms with their factor and landlord.'<sup>139</sup>

It should not be surprising that the *Oban Times* wanted to grasp an opportunity to quell what it may have perceived as a serious outbreak of agitation. Even the Glasgow and Edinburgh based Highlanders, correspondents of the paper who were at the vanguard of Highland radicalism, expressed caution. Unlike Sutherland and 'Fionn', who urged a strong, but lawful, agitation, the Edinburgh and Portree correspondents at this time exhorted the crofters to come to terms with their landlords. 'Notes from Edinburgh' expressed the hope that 'we have heard the last of this outcry against the Skye proprietor and his evicted tenants, and that Highlanders from home will stop identifying themselves with Irish insubordinates.'<sup>140</sup> A piece from Skye admitted that there may have been some over-renting on the island, 'but we don't believe it is half as bad as has been reported, and for our part don't join in the cry for the "good old times".'<sup>141</sup>

The *North British Daily Mail* suggested that although the ideals of the Valtos crofters might have been somewhat utopian, they had a good deal of public support. It also seemed certain, the article continued, 'that the British Land League will have a say in

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<sup>137</sup> *Oban Times*, 3 Dec. 1881

<sup>138</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Apr. 1881

<sup>139</sup> *Oban Times*, 30 Apr. 1881

<sup>140</sup> *Oban Times*, 25 Jun. 1881

<sup>141</sup> *Oban Times*, 21 May 1881

the matter. For they seem, by recent unanimous resolution, to have resolved to take up the cudgels, should the need arise, on behalf of these people.’<sup>142</sup>

Whilst the Valtos trouble blew over quite quickly, there remained a symbolic importance throughout the agitation. Hanham has also claimed that ‘the chief importance of the trouble at Valtos is that it became the basis of a legend and that it attracted the attention of Irish and Scottish land reformers to the possibility of a land movement in Skye. As a result, a number of land reformers went to the island, the few local radicals were stirred up, and John Murdoch set out to explore the ground.’<sup>143</sup> There is certainly some truth in this judgement. Michael Davitt wrote some months later that:

About eighteen months ago the crofters of Valtos, Kilmuir estate (landlord, Major Frazer), Isle of Skye, rebelled, against an increase of rent... No attention was paid to these hardy islanders or to their revolt against the increased rent-tax until the matter was brought under the attention of John Ferguson, of Glasgow, by resident Highlanders in that city. The Land League was immediately communicated with, and assistance promised to those of the crofters who might be evicted for holding out against the payment of the exorbitant rent.<sup>144</sup>

Six years later, in his appeal on behalf of the crofters to Irish America, John Ferguson spoke of the Valtos crofters holding their ground against ‘Redcoats and British Bayonets’.<sup>145</sup> Valtos provided a rallying point, although Hanham’s statement underestimates the extent to which many Glasgow radicals – both Scottish and Irish – as well as locals, were already agitating.

In the months after Valtos, editorial opinion in the *Oban Times* continued to paint a negative picture of an anarchic Ireland, but the provincial correspondents in Glasgow

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<sup>142</sup> Highland Regional Archive, Kilmuir Estate Papers, HRA/D123/30; *North British Daily Mail*, 17 May 1881.

<sup>143</sup> Hanham, ‘Problem of Highland Discontent’, 52

<sup>144</sup> *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882; The Glasgow Land League members certainly seem to have gained an understanding before the *Scotsman*, which claimed that ‘An attempt is being made in some quarters to get up an agitation in Scotland on the subject of the so-called depopulation of the Highlands... Skye is not, at least it ought not to be, the west of Ireland. The crofters are not bound to the soil because they have no other means of making a living within reach of them. There is not the mad competition for land there which exists in Ireland, and there are other openings for those who are industriously inclined.’ *Scotsman*, 18 May 1881.

<sup>145</sup> *Irish World*, 30 Apr. 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 14 May 1887



and Liverpool gradually began to combat anti-Irish sentiment and build up the idea of an organised Highland land agitation.<sup>146</sup> The *Highlander* had become a monthly journal in June 1881, and although there are no precise circulation figures or details of readership, there is circumstantial evidence that some former readers of the *Highlander* may have switched allegiance to the *Oban Times*. The correspondence of the *Oban Times* after June 1881 became increasingly radical, and letters began to tackle subjects such as the opinions of the Duke of Argyll on Ireland, the Valtos settlement, and Argyll estate policy relating to evictions on Tiree.<sup>147</sup> On the latter issue, 'Justice' wrote to say that 'had such a thing happened in Ireland it would have resulted in bloodshed if not murder.'<sup>148</sup> After Valtos, Angus Sutherland felt able to claim that the advice which had been given over the previous two years was now being implemented, and now showing tangible results. It also meant that, with one section of the Highland community standing up for their rights, it was vitally important that they should receive support from the rest of the Highlands and Hebrides, and the city based Gaels.<sup>149</sup>

It was reported in July 1881 that £57 had been voted from the Irish Land League to assist the Skye crofters against the landlords. The meeting in Dublin, presided over by Thomas Sexton, MP, described how evictions in Ireland had decreased as a direct result of Land League activity, before a Mr. Rowden, seconded by Rev. Harry Ryble, voted the money for the crofters.<sup>150</sup> A deputation from the Democratic Federation was present at the meeting, and whilst the *Oban Times* attributes to G.B. Clark, later MP for Caithness and leader of the Scottish Land League, the statement that 'in the north

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<sup>146</sup> See editorials such as 'Ireland is in a state of war' (*Oban Times*, 22 Oct. 1881) and 'Ireland goes from bad to worse' (*Oban Times*, 10 Dec. 1881).

<sup>147</sup> *Oban Times*, 18 Jun., 9 Jul., 3 Jul., 30 Jul., 6 Aug. 1881

<sup>148</sup> *Oban Times*, 30 Jul. 1881

<sup>149</sup> *Highlander*, 11 May 1881; *Oban Times*, 14 May, 21 May 1881. Sutherland said that 'these crofters having said they would not be evicted, should now be assisted by their countrymen in all parts of the Kingdom. In the interests of the crofters, and in the sake of justice, this assistance should be given, because the crofters of Lewis, who had refused to be evicted, were now prosperous, whereas those who elsewhere had consented were now little better than paupers.' Compare Sutherland's admiration here for the Lewis crofters, with the furore which surrounded his 1887 visit with Michael Davitt, where he was alleged to have called them 'damned sneaks'.

<sup>150</sup> *Oban Times*, 16 Jul. 1881. Some years later, Ferguson praised the *Irish World's* role in the agitation, and explained that Patrick Egan gave £200 from the funds of the Central Land League. Ferguson was given total freedom with this money, however, and said that it was repaid from Glasgow within 'a year or so'. *Glasgow Observer*, 14 May 1887. For Egan's role as financial director of the Central Land League, see Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 336, 344; *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Oct. 1882; Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 226.

and west the people were in a more miserable and degraded state than any semi-civilised race in Asia, Africa, or Australia', he was in fact referring to the north and west of Ireland, rather than Scotland.<sup>151</sup> At a supper in honour of the Federation's delegates in the European Hotel, Dublin, that evening, however, Clark spoke in terms which would before long become familiar in Scotland as well as Ireland:

Landlordism is dead – 'twill soon be buried and he wished to talk to them about how they were to get the land for the people. Landlordism, he believed, had no more right to the land than the burglar who choked a person and then took his watch had a right to the stolen property...

Clark's doctrines of land nationalisation, whilst not gaining widespread popularity in Ireland, would eventually form a part of the debate begun by the Democratic Federation and the more radical wing of the Land League of Great Britain. G.B. Clark, like Davitt a radical advocate of land reform, recalled some years afterwards his visit to Dublin with other delegates of the Democratic Federation. Having spoken at the banquet held by the Central Land League, he attended a meeting of the executive the next day. Here, he remembered:

£350 was voted to help the Skye men, and it was sent to Mr. McHugh, one of the Scottish organisers in Glasgow, and was the first money spent for an agitation in the Highlands.<sup>152</sup>

Clearly Clark's memories had become somewhat muddled over time, but McHugh was nevertheless still remembered in radical circles by then as one of the prime movers in the agitation.

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<sup>151</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 13 Jul. 1881; This close association between Clark and the Land League later made the basis of an – unsuccessful – attempt by his opponents to undermine his chances in Caithness during the 1885 General election. Mr. Don F. C. Shearer's circular to electors read, 'With regard to Ireland, Dr. Clark gave his support to the murderous and rebel portion of the Irish party at a time when the government of Mr. Gladstone were grappling with murder, outrage and rebellion in that unhappy country. He presided on the Sabbath, the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1881, at a section of a monster meeting in Hyde Park, held to denounce the Government for their efforts to put this down, when Mr. Gladstone was spoken of as William Judas Gladstone, Mr. Bright as Breakfaith Bright, the Quaker, and other members of the Government, in the vilest terms. Indeed, wherever it was possible to injure the Government there Dr. Clark had his finger in the wretched pie.' *John O' Groat Journal*, 2 Dec. 1885

<sup>152</sup> G.B. Clark, 'Rambling Recollections of an Agitator', *Forward*, 16 Jul. 1910

It was also around this time that an ‘Irish priest’ – whether a literal or metaphorical priest is not clear – was said to have been in Valtos. The *Highlander* captured something of the hysteria which must have prevailed when it reported ‘a letter in several papers recently charging some Irish priest called Fr. O’Kelly of availing himself with recent landlord / tenant agitation in Valtos to convert Skyemen to Roman Catholicism.’<sup>153</sup> By August 1881, however, the fuss seems to have died down:

VALTOS GU BRAITH: The famous land agitation has completely cooled down... we have not been able to trace the mythical Irish priest, who was so ready to convert the Valtosians.<sup>154</sup>

It is possibly these kind of rumours which led to Devine referring to the alleged ‘Fenian conspiracy’, and Hunter to the ‘mythical creation’ of Irish agitators.<sup>155</sup> No reports back up the existence of peripatetic Irish ‘priests’, and although a sum of money may well have been donated to the crofters from Dublin, there are few clues as to who received it or to what use it was put. Nevertheless, the same month had seen J.G. Mackay lecture before Ferguson, McHugh and their colleagues in Glasgow on ‘The Irish and Scotch Celts – their common history and objectives’.<sup>156</sup>

Along with Sutherland, Scottish voices provided some of the most vocal support for radical land reform in the controversy which embroiled the Glasgow Branch of the Irish Land League during late 1881. Earlier in the year, the Branch had come out firmly in favour of a measure of land nationalisation, far in advance of most leading members of the Irish Parliamentary Party. August 1881 saw John Ferguson, at a meeting chaired by James Shaw Maxwell, begin to refine the principles, as he saw them, of the definition of ‘The Land for the People’.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *Highlander*, Sep. 1881

<sup>154</sup> *Oban Times*, 27 Aug. 1881

<sup>155</sup> T.M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters’ War* (Manchester, 1994), 225; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 137

<sup>156</sup> *Highlander*, Aug. 1881

<sup>157</sup> *Irish World*, 10 Sep. 1881. Ferguson claimed that ‘the doctrine of peasant proprietary which was taught then did not find favour with some of us, and there were some – and some who are here today – honest, earnest, working men, thought that we should go to the very furthest stretch of the principle at once, and thought that peasant proprietary was something inconsistent with the principle of our reform, and opposed to our ultimate end – namely, the nationalisation of the land. I had a large amount of sympathy with them. I ventured to ask them to wait a little, to let us work, and then see if we were inconsistent in our object of working for the land for the people... even the press of Glasgow will be unable much longer to prevent the truth stealing into their columns...’

He claimed that, back in 1879, no-one believed that a measure of peasant proprietary could be gained from the Government, but by 1881 'everyone' was for it, including Gladstone and the press. The fact that they had convinced the masses of the validity of their claims, however, should have been a platform for further reforms, not for complacency. Ferguson countered the belief that the Irishtown programme had demanded only an extension of the rights of tenant farmers, giving a much wider application for his principles.<sup>158</sup>

Ferguson explained further why owner-occupation was inconsistent with 'the land for the people' doctrine:

If I admit the right of any man to be the absolute owner of an acre, I admit his right to owner of a hundred miles, like Sutherland, and then the right follows to evict a village, a province or even a nation. If I admit this, I admit the right of 'The Wolf of the Galtees' to clear the mountainside of its once happy people, and of the Duke of Sutherland to turn hundreds of Highland farms into deer forests.<sup>159</sup>

The *Irish World*, which was a firm ally of the left wing Davitt / Ferguson axis, gave great prominence not only to Ferguson's speeches at this time, but also stressed the presence of Scots amongst the radical movement in Glasgow. This is consistent with the attempt by the Glasgow Land Leaguers to display the universality of their message. In front of a crowd of 'thousands' at a meeting of Govan Road, Ferguson

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<sup>158</sup> He admitted that 'the many, who did not give it much attention, thought that it meant only the "peasants", but those who thought over the matter knew that it meant the whole people... I deny the right of any individual, or of any class, to own as Property Absolute the soil of the nation... Under this system the nation would grow richer and richer; every man would grow better; wealth would be more general; the child of the dock labourer of Glasgow, Liverpool and Dublin would have a heritage in the state, instead of, or as well as, the privileged classes.' A week later, in front of another mixed Scottish / Irish audience, Ferguson restated the same principles: 'only a hundred years ago the man was an infidel and an anarchist who denied the right of man to hold property in man. The French Revolution took the head off that idea, as it did off the king! Today men wonder how their grandfathers could have believed in slavery.' *Irish World*, 17 Sep. 1881

<sup>159</sup> *Irish World*, 17 Sep. 1881; The 'Wolf of the Galtees' was Patten Bridge Smith. Smith was the agent of Nathaniel Buckley, a wealthy English industrialist who owned land on the slope of the Galtee Mountains in Tipperary. 1876 saw two failed attempts on Smith's life, and in 1877 he sued a local Fenian, John Sarsfield Casey, after a series in the press detailing Smith's alleged oppression. Defending Casey, Isaac Butt did his utmost to bring the details of the details of the case to public attention. The *Freeman's Journal* took the opportunity to send a young journalist to negotiate. This is where the journalist, William O'Brien, first made his name in nationalist circles. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 208-9; Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 142; S. Warwick Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War* (Dublin, 1990), 29-34

gave a clear message that they would not accept the 1881 Irish Land Act. 'The great object', he said,

was to make the land not for a class, but for the nation; they did not want 10,000 landlords of Ireland, no more than they wanted 30,000 owners of Great Britain... Natural Agents should be free: the air, the sunshine, the land... I want to ask you, the people of Glasgow, the electors of Glasgow, to promise me now that whenever you get a chance you will work each one of you as ten men to put out any follower of that wretched, hypocritical, bloodthirsty miscreant, Mr. Gladstone...<sup>160</sup>

The *Irish World* again stressed the broad nature of support for such measures, and described how 'Mr. A. Stewart, who was introduced as one of the Scotch members of the Glasgow Branch of the Land League formally proposed the motion seconded by Mr. Ferguson. A young gentleman standing on the platform named Archibald MacDonald, on the completion of Mr. Stewart's speech, spontaneously seconded the motion by saying enthusiastically, "I, as a Highlander and a Scotchman, have much pleasure in seconding the resolution."<sup>161</sup> Glasier's assertion about Sabbatarianism highlights the radicalism of the city Highlanders who attended the Sunday meetings of the Irish Land League:

For while the Sabbatarian ban, then still stringent in Scotland, kept away the more timid of the intellectual élite, it ensured, on the other hand, that the audiences which attended the Sunday Society lectures were for the greater part composed of men and women whose minds had been aroused from orthodox sloth and were prepared to take unconventional paths.<sup>162</sup>

After the formation of the LLGB in 1881, Edward McHugh was appointed as the paid Scottish organiser. In November of 1881 McHugh and Richard McGhee, along with the advanced section of the Glasgow Branch, constituted themselves as the 'Michael Davitt Branch' of the National Land League of Great Britain and Ireland. John Bruce

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<sup>160</sup> *Irish World*, 24 Sep. 1881; In a letter to the editor of the *New York Daily News* Davitt spoke somewhat snidely about the 'Parliamentary interpretation of the word "people" as meaning five hundred thousand tenant farmers'. (Quoted in *Irish World*, 9 Dec. 1882)

<sup>161</sup> *Irish World*, 24 Sep. 1881

<sup>162</sup> J.B. Glasier, *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement* (London, 1921), 25. Guest lecturers of the Sunday Society included Henry George, Alfred Russel Wallace and J.S. Blackie, who attracted large crowds to Glasgow City Hall.



Glasier read the constitution and rules to the first meeting of the branch on 13<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>163</sup>

The influence which Scotsmen had on this branch of the LLGB was displayed soon afterwards when, led by Glasier and Shaw Maxwell, the radicals ignored the exhortations of John Ferguson and Edward McHugh, and adopted William O'Brien's 'No Rent Manifesto'. Originally a proposal made by James Fintan Lalor in the late 1840s, along with the establishment of a peasant proprietary, the 'No Rent' plan had lain dormant for a long time before it was revived by Parnell's close associate William O'Brien and other Land League leaders. Although Parnell had been against such an extreme measure as tenants withholding their rents, even voting against it in a meeting as late as October 1881, the plan was adopted, and the Government clamped down on the Land League almost at once.<sup>164</sup>

In spite of the optimistic tone of O'Brien's *United Ireland*, the 'No Rent' plan failed miserably in Ireland. As John Ferguson had seen the adoption of the 'No Rent Manifesto' lead to the suppression of the League in Ireland, he naturally feared that embracing the tactic in Scotland and England would lead to similar consequences for the LLGB.<sup>165</sup> However, not only did Glasier's 'Michael Davitt Branch' adopt it, they also called for the total abolition of private ownership in land, and the right of the Irish people to declare an independent republic.<sup>166</sup> As a result, the branch was cut off

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<sup>163</sup> 'The Irish Land League in Glasgow', *Glasgow Herald*, 14 Nov. 1881

<sup>164</sup> Parnell, nevertheless, authorised the No Rent Manifesto. Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War*, 59; *United Ireland*, 5 Nov. 1881. The language used in the Manifesto had been dramatic and stirring: 'Landlordism is already staggering under the blows which you have dealt it amid the applause of the world. One more crowning struggle for your land, your homes, your lives – a struggle in which you have all the memories of your race, all the hopes of your children, all the hopes of your imprisoned brothers, all your cravings for rent-enfranchised land, for happy homes and national freedom to inspire you – one more heroic effort to destroy landlordism at its very source and fount of its existence and the system which was and is the curse of your existence will have disappeared forever. The world is watching to see whether all your splendid hopes and noble courage will crumble away at the first sign of a cowardly tyranny.' *Freeman's Journal*, 19 Oct. 1881

<sup>165</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 8 Oct. 1887. He claimed that 'I differed with the old No-Rent Manifesto, not upon Archbishop Croke's ground, that it was "immoral", but as "expedient" – right in principle, wrong in time.' Interview with Ferguson in *Glasgow Observer*, 2 Oct. 1886. See also University of Birmingham Library, Joseph Chamberlain Papers, JC 8/6/3G/1, John Ferguson to Cameron, 8 Dec 1881. 'I am a reformer not a Revolutionist, I have denounced violence and intimidation from the very first. I caused the Glasgow Branch to rescind a resolution in favour of boycotting passed in my absence. At the present moment I'm keeping the Glasgow Branch of the British League from having anything to do with the "No Rent Manifesto" which I wrote against in the Irish papers.'

<sup>166</sup> In 1882, when a convention of English and Scottish branches of the LLGB was called, the Michael Davitt branch sent two delegates. Michael Clarke and Shaw Maxwell attempted to move a resolution to

for around six months by the executive until, with the advent of the Irish National League, they reunited with Ferguson as the 'Home Government Branch'.<sup>167</sup>

Just as Angus Sutherland was making a determined effort to politicise and radicalise the crofters of his native county, Henry Whyte and other urban Gaels were increasing their media profile. In spite of the continuing disparity of opinion between the *Highlander* and the *Oban Times*, it was during the winter months of 1880-1881 that the seeds of consensus appear to have been planted. The provincial correspondents of the *Oban Times* took a lead in matters relevant to the Highland land agitation which the editors were not quick in following up.

The attitude of the regional correspondents, therefore, often sat uneasily with the intransigent editorial line, and as is seen in the instance of J. MacDonald, some readers felt compelled to criticise the paper for not giving more support for land reform. The bold proclamations from Glasgow and Liverpool developed so quickly, however, that by the close of 1882 the land agitation was being attributed mainly to urban Gaels. 'The land agitation', ran an editorial at the time, 'in the Highlands is gaining volume... but the agitation on the spot is nothing to the seething in the large centres of population. Landlords should be careful not to abuse their rights.'<sup>168</sup>

The Glasgow Land League, and its successor LLGB would exert still greater influence on the Highland land question in the Spring of 1882, but throughout 1881 it maintained an interest in affairs in Skye. Soon after the report of the *Scotsman* showing the links between the Glasgow Irish and Highland Radicals, it was reported that the Land League members had called on Charles Cameron, MP to 'stop evictions in Ireland and Scotland', and also that they were 'in regular correspondence with some of the Kilmuir tenantry.'<sup>169</sup> As the Valtos agitation cooled down, and order was

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commit the League to the advocacy of land nationalisation. Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left', 82-84

<sup>167</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 8 Oct. 1887

<sup>168</sup> *Oban Times*, 4 Nov. 1882

<sup>169</sup> *Scotsman*, 23 May 1881, 2 Jun. 1881. The *Scotsman* thereafter set out to expose the 'lies of the agitators', supporting Fraser and advocating that 'new blood' be put on the Kilmuir estate. See, *Scotsman* 18 Jun. 1881. Fraser expressed deep gratitude to the reporter of the *Scotsman* who, he believed, had 'exposed the machinations of the agitators'. HRA, KEP D123/2 (e), Fraser to MacDonald, 2 May 1882. Charles Cameron was known as something of a Radical MP, and was the owner of the *North British Daily Mail*, a paper which had been generally supportive of the crofters.

apparently restored, the following months saw increasing unrest in Ireland, and subsequent government coercion seemingly serve as a warning to any crofters wishing to carry out a concerted rent strike, or any other Land League tactic.

### **The outbreak of the Braes disturbances**

A small and seemingly innocuous piece from the newspaper's Portree correspondent in December 1881 gave a further indication that there were people ready to follow the example of Ireland and Valtos.<sup>170</sup> This episode marked the start of the agitation which would result in the 'Battle of the Braes', and it also marked the start of a decidedly contradictory era within the pages of the *Oban Times*, a wide gulf of opinion opening up between the paper's editors and that of many of its readers and correspondents.

In April 1882, a week after a small article from Portree regarding the deforcement of a sheriff's officer in Braes, readers were presented with a series of articles about the state of Skye.<sup>171</sup> The *Oban Times* was unreserved in its censure of the Braes crofters, saying that 'the Braes struggle can only have one ending... the discomfiture of the strikers. These feelings and sentiments must be knocked out of the crofter class.' This line did not soften for some time, although an editorial comment at the end of a piece entitled 'the Truth About Skye' by J. MacDonald proved that the paper was sensitive to the accusation that it had maligned the crofters.<sup>172</sup> This was the time of the Phoenix Park murders in Dublin, and the *Oban Times* suggested on several occasions that if the Irish Land League were not directly responsible, there was at least reason to doubt the sincerity of the League's condemnation of such violence.<sup>173</sup> The issues were linked in a reply to a further attack from J. MacDonald complaining about the lack of sympathy in the paper for the crofters, as the editorial comment noted that Phoenix Park should serve as a warning of the final consequences should people start to break the law. Soon afterwards, readers were told that 'Cromwell and King William knew how to rule Ireland.'<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> 'Rents of Snizort and Portree districts of Lord MacDonald's estates. Three townships in Peinchorran, Balmeanach and Gedintailor have struck against paying any rent until some hill pasture that was taken from them seventeen years ago is given back to them... the whole affair has caused a great sensation in the parish'. *Oban Times*, 17 Dec. 1881

<sup>171</sup> *Oban Times*, 15 Apr. 1882

<sup>172</sup> *Oban Times*, 6 May 1882

<sup>173</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 May 1882

<sup>174</sup> *Oban Times*, 20 May 1882

By the summer of 1882, however, after Edward McHugh and the LLGB had been seconded to go to Skye, the Highland agitation was in full force, with a degree of Irish assistance (mainly from Georgite reformers rather than simply Irish nationalists, although many were both). Angus Sutherland had proved adept at championing the crofters' cause, as is seen by his high profile involvement with all of the major incidents which have been seen as instigating the Highland land agitation. Sutherland also spoke, alongside Michael Clark and J. Bruce Glasier, at a meeting of the Glasgow 'Michael Davitt' Land League, directly after the 'Battle of the Braes'.<sup>175</sup>

It was the Braes discontent which first brought the Highland land question to widespread prominence, not only among displaced Highlanders but also Irish and other sympathisers outside of Glasgow. Contrary again to the cautious editorial line, 'Fionn' proclaimed that 'The heather is on fire!'.<sup>176</sup> And whilst the *Oban Times* reported the murder of a bailiff in Limerick and the incarceration of Parnell, Dillon and O'Kelly in Kilmainham, 'Fionn' wrote of Celtic solidarity, and the sympathetic attitude of the Irishmen in Glasgow towards the crofters' struggle. but before that there was yet another chance to fan the flames of agitation in Glasgow. The reason why 'The Battle of the Braes', which Davitt referred to as the 'Scotch Irishtown' was able to become such a cause célèbre was that there was already a fairly efficient, if not, at this stage, very experienced, organisation based in Glasgow.<sup>177</sup> These men were ready to take any opportunity to present landlord excesses to the wider public. Almost immediately, Sutherland was calling for a meeting to discuss the Braes affray. He claimed he knew all the details of the case 'as well as anyone', suggesting that he had developed links with crofters on Skye since his involvement with the Skye Vigilance Committee the year before, and added that 'in the light of what was now a considerable experience of landlord oppression in the Highlands, he was bound to say that there were worse features in this case even than in the Valtos threatened evictions which they were so successful in preventing last year.'<sup>178</sup>

At a meeting of the FCS, held in Paisley shortly after the 'Battle of the Braes', Angus Sutherland argued that even those who had not yet been persuaded by his arguments

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<sup>175</sup> *United Ireland*, 6 May 1882

<sup>176</sup> *Oban Times*, 22 Apr. 1882

<sup>177</sup> *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882

<sup>178</sup> *Oban Times*, 22 Apr. 1882

could not oppose the radical wing of the Federation any longer. Indeed, the whole idea of the amelioration of the crofters' conditions could not be avoided.<sup>179</sup> It was nothing short of the duty of the committee to give a lead to the constituent societies on these matters.<sup>180</sup>

There was also room for a celebration of the increased self-assertion on the part of the crofters, in that there was a 'spirit among the Highland crofters that has been deplorably absent from their history for the last century – namely, that they have at least equal rights with sheep and deer.' In denying that the FCS was unable to take up political matters, and attempting to prevent the Farmers' Alliance becoming the crofters' champion, Sutherland also set out a plan for a second phase of the agitation, involving not just action in the cities, but increased activity in the Highland parishes themselves.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *Oban Times*, 17 Jun. 1882. They assembled, said Sutherland, 'in a distinctly representative capacity, and I consider that we would be false to the trust reposed in us if we gave forth an uncertain sound on this important subject. Indeed, from the nature and import of the resolutions before us, we cannot give this question the go by. It is the express desire of the Associations referred to that we take some steps towards the improvement of the condition of the crofters.'

<sup>180</sup> Even Sutherland admitted, however, that 'I have heard objections urged against the Federation taking up the question of the Highland crofters' grievances; but all these objections seem to me to be based either upon a fallacy or upon a strange and most unpardonable misconception of the functions and objects of the organisation. If we are not to advocate the cause of the Highland crofters, whose cause, then, are we going to advocate? Is it that of the Highland landlords, who are so useful to the country, and yet so utterly helpless? But perhaps it may be said that our proper function is to help neither the one nor the other, but to remain passive – in other words, to do nothing. Gentlemen, I very much mistake your sentiments if that be your view of the matter. I really think you have no desire to act this inglorious part. I hoped it never can be said your oppressed countrymen stretched out their hands to you for help, and found you deaf to their appeal. Too often, alas, have the poor Highland crofters found their bitterest detractors among those who sprung from their own class.'

<sup>181</sup> 'Your several societies', he said, 'and yourselves individually, have more or less influence in the districts which you represent. Several, or all of you, visit friends there every summer or autumn. Societies similar to your own could easily be formed in these districts, and they could be affiliated to this Federation. By this means Highlanders at home and abroad could be united in action as well as sentiment, and what might not then be possible to us? The extension of the Franchise cannot now long be delayed, and our people could then aspire to be represented in parliament – a thing hitherto unknown in their history (Applause). There is no doubt a great deal yet to be done before we reach that stage, but we must go on as we have been doing, laying our foundation deep and sure, but never for a moment losing sight of the end we have in view – the amelioration of the condition of our people. (Loud applause). In terms of the resolutions already submitted to you, I beg to move that 'seeing the magnitude and urgency assumed by the land question in the Highlands, it is expedient that the Federation of Celtic Societies should now undertake the guidance and control of the movement for the amendment of the Land Laws'. This is a clear indication of the emergence of a grassroots crofters' movement.



Therefore, after many months, and indeed years, of carefully worded suggestions regarding a study or a revision of the Highland land laws, the re-eruption of the agitation on Skye gave Sutherland a chance to make an unequivocal statement of aims. Whilst his mentor, John Murdoch, and colleague in the Michael Davitt branch of the LLGB, Edward McHugh, visited Skye to educate the crofters, Sutherland made a plea to the FCS that their organisation should 'now undertake the guidance and control of the amendment of the land laws.' Although Sutherland knew that there were 'a few individuals determined to resist, and to use all the powers conferred upon them by iniquitous laws to crush an awakening people', he was quite clear that the people should not be cowed by listening to spurious legal arguments on the part of the landowners.<sup>182</sup>

Along with 'Fionn' in Glasgow, the Liverpool correspondent of the *Oban Times* was one of the prime movers in its transformation into a champion of radicalism. The Highlanders of Liverpool did not have the same degree of direct involvement in the 'Crofters' War' as their Glasgow counterparts – mainly due to distance – and they have therefore received little attention from historians.

As an increasingly important city, Liverpool played host to a growing number of migrants during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As early as 1767, the Highlanders in the city had means enough to contribute towards the building of a Gaelic chapel for their fellow Gaels in Glasgow.<sup>183</sup> The largest migrant group was, of course, the Irish, who even by 1841 were said to number 49,639 (17.3%) of the population. This figure accelerated after the Great Famine when, in the words of prominent Liverpool-Irishman John Denvir, 'Liverpool was the gate through which most of our people sought to fly from the dread visitation'.<sup>184</sup>

By the time Denvir wrote, in 1892, he felt able to claim that the Irish of Liverpool numbered a third of the population and political organisation was so refined that, in T.P. O'Connor, Liverpool was 'the only place in Great Britain to be able to return a

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<sup>182</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Dec. 1882

<sup>183</sup> Withers, *Urban Highlanders*, 165

<sup>184</sup> J. Denvir, *The History of the Irish in Britain from the earliest times to the fall and death of Parnell* (London, 1892), 252

Nationalist to Parliament against all-comers'.<sup>185</sup> However, it had been as recently as the 1870s that the Liverpool-Irish had started to become politically self-aware.<sup>186</sup> The second half of the nineteenth century had also, however, seen an influx of Highlanders to Liverpool, and it appears that, in terms of radicalism and advocacy of co-operation with the Irish, the leaders of the Liverpool Highland Society in the late 1870s were just as advanced as Henry Whyte, Angus Sutherland and other Glasgow agitators.<sup>187</sup>

The Liverpool Highland Society has been identified as a 'very radical body', and was one of the organisations which took part in the inaugural meeting of the FCS in 1878.<sup>188</sup> Like the politicisation of the FCS by Angus Sutherland and like-minded colleagues, the radicalism of the Liverpool Highland Society was due to the influence of four men: Councillor Ronald MacDougall, Mr. J. Mackenzie Macleod ('Lochbroom'), Mr. John Lamont and Mr. Alexander MacDonald. In spite of the anonymity of the Liverpool correspondent of the *Oban Times*, the views expounded in his columns are in total accord with what can be discerned of the opinions of these four men.<sup>189</sup> It is also important to note that it is unlikely that there was no dissent from less radical Liverpool Highlanders, but no record of their opinions remain other than the controversy over land nationalisation which arose in 1884.

A rough, almost certainly too high, estimate by Ronald MacDougall in 1885 put the number of people with 'Highland blood' in Liverpool at 25,000 – much less than the Irish but nonetheless a potentially significant political body.<sup>190</sup> With the Irish in the city – as in Glasgow – extolling the benefits of political organisation, it is not surprising that the leaders of the Liverpool Highlanders should set out to follow their example. Indeed, the Liverpool Highland Society even had a separate 'political

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<sup>185</sup> Denvir, *History of the Irish in Britain*, 434; L.W. Brady, *T.P. O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish* (London, 1983), 77

<sup>186</sup> Brady, *T.P. O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish*, 23

<sup>187</sup> Except in quotations, I have referred to the organisation as the 'Liverpool Highland Society' throughout, even though it is also variously referred to as the 'Highland Society of Liverpool' and 'Liverpool Society of Highlanders' in contemporary sources.

<sup>188</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, Nov. 1878; This radicalism is attributed by Hanham, the only secondary source to mention the Liverpool Highland Society. Hanham, 'Problem of Highland Discontent', 40

<sup>189</sup> In the absence of any other evidence, indeed, it is possible to suggest that the 'Liverpool Correspondent' could have been more than one of this group, or indeed all of them, or some kind of 'committee' opinion.

<sup>190</sup> MacDougall's methodology was far from scientific – he simply went through the entire Liverpool electoral roll, found the people with surnames which identified them with a clan, and multiplied by five (the number of people he presumed would be in the family).

committee', to prevent matters relating to the agitation from being subsumed by cultural concerns.<sup>191</sup>

Before regular correspondence began to appear in the *Oban Times*, the Liverpool Highlanders had already made their fellow Gaels aware of the preparedness for any agitation. Mackenzie Macleod, in a letter to a FCS meeting in Glasgow in 1881, spoke of the noble virtues of the Highlanders and asked:

Shall we stand by while we inherit such a heritage, and see our race swept from off the face of the earth by a law – guilty in its inception and ruinous in its applications?<sup>192</sup>

The next FCS meetings – in Perth and Paisley – saw Ronald MacDougall stressing the interest shown in Highland issues in Liverpool, and a 'most patriotic' letter was read from Mackenzie Macleod, who was secretary of the Liverpool Highland Society.<sup>193</sup> Emphasising the role of the Liverpool men, it was decided that the next annual meeting of the Federation should be held in the city.<sup>194</sup>

Although 'Lochbroom' presumably traced his Highland roots back to Ross-shire, and Alexander MacDonald's ancestry are uncertain, the other two prominent Liverpool Highlanders had connections with Argyllshire.<sup>195</sup> In Councillor MacDougall's case, his grandfather had worked in the Easdale quarries, linking him – at least emotionally – to the same area as 'Fionn'. John Lamont had been 'expatriated from Argyllshire' before he was old enough to keep what he had learned of Gaelic. It was his experiences as a sailor, when he had witnessed Highland emigrants in terrible conditions during the bleak years of the 1840s, that seem to have made Lamont more politically aware. What is clear is that all men had close friendships not only with Irish politicians in Liverpool, but also labour activists. Like the Glasgow radicals, they

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<sup>191</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Sep. 1885

<sup>192</sup> *Oban Times*, 14 May 1881

<sup>193</sup> *Oban Times*, 24 Dec. 1881, 17 Jun. 1882

<sup>194</sup> For a report of the meeting, see *Oban Times*, 13 Jan. 1883

<sup>195</sup> For a brief tribute to Mackenzie Macleod from the Highland Land League of Ross and Cromarty, see *Highland News*, 15 Jun. 1889; For controversy over his omission from Joseph Macleod's *Highland Heroes of the Land Reform Movement*, see *Highland News*, 15 Sep. 1917

became involved in Highland agitation through their personal connections with the area, but felt part of a much wider struggle.<sup>196</sup>

The Irish connection is one highlighted by the Liverpool correspondent throughout his appearances in the *Oban Times*. Referring to a letter which the Liverpool Highland Society sent to Gladstone about evictions in Leckmelm and Valtos, the correspondent commented that 'our countrymen are similarly situated to our brethren in Mayo and Connaught [sic]'.<sup>197</sup> A few weeks later, amidst the frenzy of press activity which followed the 'Battle of the Braes', the Whig press of the south of Scotland was contrasted unfavourably with the support received by the crofters from Ireland and England. Indeed, with the establishment of a defence fund for the Skye crofters, the Liverpool correspondent wrote that:

It should be noted that many of the best friends we have in the city are Irish... the Irish and Scotch Gael have always pulled together in the face of danger in the past, and let us hope that they will always do so in the future.<sup>198</sup>

The years 1878-1881 had seen a group of Glasgow-based agitators slowly build up support for land and social reform in the Highlands. It was indeed a propitious time for such a movement to develop, with Pirie's evictions in Leckmelm occurring at a time when the Irish land question was coming to widespread prominence. Although these events served to concentrate radical minds on the land, perhaps the most important influence on these agitators was the appearance of George's *Progress and Poverty*.

With stories of agrarian atrocities from Ireland appearing daily, it is understandable that many contemporaries should fear the influence of Irish agitators. These fears meant that any suggestion that activity reflecting the Irish Land War could occur in Scotland might kill off the Highland agitation almost before it had started. As it has been demonstrated in this chapter, the crofters were not only receiving conservative messages from landlords and politicians, they were also warned against imitating the

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<sup>196</sup> *Oban Times*, 19 Sep. 1885. Both men were stressing their roots to a meeting of farmers in Oban, one of the most important centres in Argyllshire.

<sup>197</sup> *Oban Times*, 8 Apr. 1882

<sup>198</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 May 1882

Irish by some elements within the FCS and also from such publications as the *Oban Times*, often perceived as a model of radicalism.

In such a climate, progress could only be made gradually, and by dissociating the Highland agitation from Ireland as much as possible. The benefit *Progress and Poverty* could bring to the agitation, with its universal application and relative distance from 'Fenianism', was almost incalculable. In the cities, Angus Sutherland, John Ferguson, Edward McHugh and others began to preach land nationalisation. With the Leckmelm and Valtos incidents having allowed the reformers to score propaganda victories.

With confidence, and support, growing in the cities, it was decided that the time was ripe to send an envoy to visit the 'disaffected areas' of the Highlands. Significantly, Henry George himself indicated at this time that 'I have all along advocated the policy of carrying the anti-landlord agitation all through England and Scotland. The times are ever more ripened for that even now'.<sup>199</sup> As a well organised body with healthy finances, the LLGB took the responsibility, but rather than Angus Sutherland, it was the Irishman Edward McHugh who was sent to Skye. Before the end of 1882, Michael Davitt would tour Scotland, and Sutherland would step up the agitation in his native county, underlining that this was a radical, rather than an Irish nationalist, mission. They were not aiming solely for a solution to the Highland land issue. These followers of Henry George hoped for similar progress to be made in Ireland, if possible, and certainly in lowland Scotland, and industrial Britain in general. While propaganda work commenced in the cities, however, the Highlands and Islands presented a perfect opportunity to keep the land question alive in an area which was, at this stage, not distracted by Home Rule politics, and which offered what was described as a prime example of inequitable land distribution.

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<sup>199</sup> *Irish World*, 18 Feb. 1882



### CHAPTER THREE: EDWARD MCHUGH ON SKYE, 1882

Why prosecute the man or woman,  
Who steals a goose from off the common?  
And let the greater felon loose,  
Who steals the common from the goose.<sup>1</sup>

As noted in the introductory chapter, Edward McHugh's position as one of the prime movers in the Highland land agitation was mentioned in several contemporary sources. Having disappeared into obscurity, McHugh's presence on Skye after the 'Battle of the Braes' has been recorded by several, more recent, works, as will be discussed further below. Although the presence on the island of an agent of the National Land League of Great Britain (LLGB) has been seen as irrefutable proof of an Irish Nationalist mission in the Highlands, such an interpretation is misguided.

By looking in detail at McHugh's movements on Skye, and the material he used, several of the themes opened up in the previous chapter will be continued. The authorities quoted by McHugh in his speeches, and the pamphlets he distributed, confirm that any 'Irish' activity in the Highlands reflected the Georgite interests of the left wing section of the LLGB's Glasgow branch. What will also be highlighted is the way in which McHugh and his colleagues, including John Murdoch, seem to have been sensitive to the need to play down Irish involvement by instructing the crofters to deny any LLGB influence.

This chapter will also highlight the problem of sources in relation to the Irish impact on the Highland land issue. Highland newspapers initially displayed a marked fear of McHugh's ability, but eventually came to mock him. This was the general opinion also of official reports on the area during the summer of 1882, and the main reason why McHugh's mission came to be portrayed as a failure. On the other hand, the use made of the American *Irish World* by McHugh and Murdoch for propaganda gives a hitherto unconsidered perspective on their activities. Whilst both sides of this evidence might be considered equally unreliable, the important aspect of this chapter

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<sup>1</sup> McHugh recited this 'old verse', summing up his feelings on the land issue, at a public meeting in the Lovaine Hall, Newcastle-on-Tyne, in November 1902. *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 10 Nov. 1902; *Land Values*, Dec. 1902.

is that it places McHugh's work in its correct context, and thus enables a clearer judgement on whether he might be considered a success or a failure.

### **McHugh and Murdoch sent to Skye**

At a meeting of the Skye Vigilance Committee, which had monitored events on the island since the Valtos rent strikes, several speakers had stressed that the Skye agitation predated the Irish Land League. Even though close links existed between individual members of the Vigilance Committee and Glasgow Land League, they insisted that it was simply the 'worm turning when trampled upon, and was the natural instincts of the people asserting themselves.'<sup>2</sup> The encouragement gained from the Valtos experience, where rent reductions were ultimately gained, coupled with an awareness that many newspapers were now sympathetic with the crofters' condition, meant that the Braes agitation gained momentum quickly. After the news that crofters had been imprisoned over the affair, it was again Angus Sutherland who orchestrated the cries of indignation.<sup>3</sup>

With a good Irish representation at the meeting, Sutherland was using the language of the Irish Land League, recently suppressed. It was a tribute to his skill as an agitator, and his ability to exploit situations in order to gain propaganda victories over landlords, that the FCS, which had so recently been frustrating his ideas of progress, were by now able to mimic the rhetoric, if not the organisation, of the Irish agitators. Not everyone within the Federation was pleased by this stance, but, as will be seen, Sutherland was prepared to leave behind anyone who did not share his vision. It did not make him universally popular, but it did ensure a degree of efficiency in honing a responsive and radical land reform body.

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<sup>2</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 20 Apr. 1882

<sup>3</sup> *Oban Times*, 6 May, 13 May 1882. In a neat irony, given the later tension between the two, it was John Mackay of Hereford who was asked to be Sutherland's counterpart in organising protests in London. At the Glasgow meeting, at which both Sutherland and 'Fionn' represented the Federation of Celtic Societies, Sutherland moved that 'That this meeting cordially approves of the action hitherto taken by the Committee, and commends the case of the Highland crofters to the sympathy and practical support of the enlightened and generous throughout the world.' The simple English of that, he remarked, was that they appealed to the public for subscriptions in the aid of the Highland crofters. There might not be very much money required for the defence of the "Braes Men", but they must look after the cases of eviction which were being threatened.'

In visiting Skye at this time, Alexander MacKenzie had written that the crofters were already organised to form a united body against backsliders, pledging to a book and considering this to be a point of honour.<sup>4</sup> This contrasts sharply with MacKenzie's bold assertion in his short lived *Invernessian* newspaper a year earlier that, contrary to what John Murdoch – a man who might most charitably be called MacKenzie's 'rival' – might say, there was no land league being formed in the Highlands:

We shall go further and unhesitatingly assert that, for various reasons, a league in the Irish sense has not the slightest chance of ever being organised in this country. and we are not sorry for it.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst it can be argued that a land league in the Irish sense never did grow up in the Highlands, that being a body which was strongly organised from the centre but spread throughout the country in local branches, MacKenzie's contrasting opinions indicate that the organisation of the crofting community must have begun over a relatively short period of time between mid-1881 and early 1882. In other words, around the time when the Irish Land League had its first direct contact with the region.

Edward McHugh and John Murdoch arrived in Portree on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1882, and McHugh proceeded the next morning to Braes, where he began to make enquiries into the situation of the crofters there.<sup>6</sup> He was greeted by Mhari Mhor nan Oran, the Skye poetess.<sup>7</sup> The *Oban Times* hinted that McHugh's visit would not be confined merely to the agricultural classes on Skye, by stating that the envoy planned to 'hold a public meeting of the inhabitants [of Portree] and address them on the land question'.<sup>8</sup> The *Oban Times*, furthermore, was 'perfectly convinced that the discontented crofters in this island only require the services of a really capable person with good powers of organisation to make them into a formidable body.' Few who knew McHugh either at this stage, or during his subsequent career, would have

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<sup>4</sup> A. MacKenzie, *History of the Highland Clearances* (Inverness, 1883), 417

<sup>5</sup> *Invernessian*, Apr. 1881. This comment is not inconsistent with MacKenzie's later pronouncements. Although he himself eventually supported Home Rule for Ireland, his stance on land reform was much less radical than, say Angus Sutherland. MacKenzie was much closer to the moderate style of Charles Fraser Mackintosh, Professor Blackie, or John Mackay of Hereford. Furthermore, his prophecy about a Land League 'in the Irish sense' never being established in Scotland proved to be true. In 'the Irish sense', the league was a nation-wide political movement, embracing also emigrant communities.

<sup>6</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 27 Apr. 1882

<sup>7</sup> *Scotsman*, 28 Apr. 1882

<sup>8</sup> *Oban Times*, 29 Apr. 1882

doubted that he was, indeed, just such a 'capable person', but the correspondent simply thought that, in alienating public opinion by their association with the Irish agitation, the crofters would be done more harm than good by the visit.

McHugh's subsequent movements, for the month of May at any rate, are somewhat vague, although it seems clear that he went around the island unhindered, and that he spoke to sizeable and receptive audiences. In spite of the concerns of the *Oban Times*, and their warning to the crofters about getting mixed up in Irish revolutionary matters the police authorities, at least initially, do not appear to have seen McHugh as a threat. This is surprising given the zeal with which Sheriff Ivory undertook other coercive measures to deal with what he saw as the crofter insurrection. In a letter to the Sheriff at the end of May, Graham Spiers, the Sheriff Substitute in Portree, complained that:

It looks as if our troubles are not over yet... a brute is going about the island, and has been doing so for a while. McHughes is his name - a land leaguer. He has been here for some time and has been all over the island preaching his vile dictums. He has printed pamphlets but I have not yet got any... He keeps within the law and does a lot of harm. He is said to be a tea-totaller so there is no chance of finding him soused and making a row, or he would get sixty days.<sup>9</sup>

This letter was instructive in two ways. Firstly, it seems as if there might have been some concerted effort to keep the 'land league' literature away from the authorities. It seems remarkable that when contemporary sources were speaking of 'considerable quantities' and 'any number' of such pamphlets being freely available on the island, the Sheriff Substitute did not have the ability to obtain any of them.<sup>10</sup>

An apparently inexplicable denial of the Irish presence on Skye was related by John Murdoch when he stood before the Napier Commission the following year. He and McHugh had encountered Donald MacDonald, or 'Tormore', as he was often known, and the following exchange was said to have taken place:

I asked him, 'How have the people become so bad?' 'Oh, Irish Land League literature', he said... 'I am glad', I said, 'that you have mentioned land league literature, for I have been on the lookout for it ever since my visit to the island at the end of April, and I have not

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<sup>9</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers GD1/36/1/4 31 May 1882, Spiers to Ivory

<sup>10</sup> *Oban Times*, 29 Apr. 1882; *Northern Chronicle*, 3 May 1882

yet been able to discover any trace of it... You have, no doubt, read some of this literature?' 'No', he said. 'Have you seen any of it?' 'No.' 'Has anyone who has read it told you about it?' 'No.' 'Then, can you tell me anything at all about it?' 'No.'<sup>11</sup>

Later, several individuals reported seeing specific pamphlets – Lachlan Macdonald of Skeabost, for example, as well as the 'Uig Resident' who wrote to the *Inverness Courier* in November 1882, and MacNeill when writing his 'Confidential Report' in 1886.<sup>12</sup> The inability of the authorities to find apparently abundant tracts might be considered in the light of subsequent denials of people in several districts of Skye that they had even seen McHugh.<sup>13</sup>

The second point to arise from Spiers' letter was that it showed how McHugh's presence, after a month on the island, was becoming a source of concern and frustration for the authorities. And yet, some three weeks earlier, certainly before he could have done a 'lot of harm', the *Northern Chronicle*, in spite of being noted for its pro-landlord and Conservative opinions, printed a fulsome description of the Irish agitator, and, indeed, praised his ability:

Mr. MacHugh, from the Irish Land League, is busily engaged instilling Irish views into the minds of the people. He is both active and clever; in fact, the right man to raise an agitation in any place. He distributes tracts and pamphlets, narrating the Irish movement from the beginning of the Fenian outrages, and if anyone doubts his

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<sup>11</sup> *PP*, 1884, xxxiii-xxxvi: *Report of Commissioners of Inquiry into the condition of the crofters and cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, (hereafter, *Napier Commission*), q.44463; MacDonald was appointed factor for Sir John MacLeod in 1863, and held the factorship of Lord MacDonald's estate from 1873-1880. Although he held several large farms, he was considered a factor as much as a farmer. For a discussion of the many posts held by MacDonald, including being factor on all but eight estates, bank agent, solicitor, distributor of stamps, tax collector, captain of volunteers and clerk of school boards in Portree, Stenscholl, Kilmuir, Duirinish, Strath and Bracadale see *Napier Commission*, qq. 8395-8407. For a similar, earlier relation of this story by Murdoch, see *Irish World*, 19 Aug. 1882

<sup>12</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, Jul. 1882; *Inverness Courier*, 4 Nov. 1882; NAS, GD 40/16/32, *Confidential Reports to the Secretary of Scotland on the condition of the Western Highlands and Islands*, Oct. 1886 (Hereafter, *Confidential Reports*), 3;

<sup>13</sup> See below, 115, and Appendix C. The documents were eventually secured by Sergeant MacDonald on his under cover visit to the Kilmuir estate at the start of July, two months after McHugh had arrived on the island. The *Inverness Courier* reported that 'during the last summer the friends of the Land League were busily at work, and not only did they instil their ideas into the minds of the people... they supplied them with "literature" on the subject. The "trail of the serpent" is all over the island...' *Inverness Courier*, 2 May 1882



gospel, he is equipped with parliamentary blue books and invariably comes out victorious.<sup>14</sup>

As will be seen below, this description is consistent with that attributed to McHugh for the rest of his life. The report also gave a glimpse of the nature of McHugh's lectures, in describing how he was 'in favour of buying up all the lands in Britain by the government, and then let the same to the peasantry on the same scale as a person buys a house from one of our building societies.'

Another theme which emerges is of McHugh's ability to speak with great clarity over a long period of time, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1882 he spoke to large meetings for over two hours each at Glendale and in Dunvegan.<sup>15</sup> The encroachment of English history into McHugh's speeches is another clear indication that he took a 'classical' or 'historical' approach to the land problem.<sup>16</sup> Again, Davitt and Ferguson can be seen using the same tactic. In *The Land for the People*, John Ferguson referred to the 'yeomen freeholders of England', and how they:

In early ages exhorted Magna Carta from King John, sustained their country's honour at Cressy and Agincourt, and in later times were numerous enough to send up to Westminster from one county alone 3,000 mounted men to see Hampden righted. Feudalism has broken down this manly class, and thereby grievously injured England and Ireland.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 10 May 1882; McHugh was not averse to using maps, diagrams or charts to explain his points, and is one of the reasons why he would 'invariably' emerge victorious in arguments. See, e.g., *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 14 Aug. 1903, which described a speech by McHugh in the following glowing terms: 'Mr. McHugh's style of address is extremely clear and lucid, and at once rivets attention. His diagrams in themselves are worthy of careful study.' The diagrams in question were used to 'the laws which govern the production and the distribution of wealth.' *Land Values*, Sep. 1903.

<sup>15</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 7 Jun. 1882; *Inverness Courier*, 8 Jun. 1882. Here, 'Mr. Machugh urged that as the land of the country was the common property of the whole people, it was immoral to hand over the profits resulting from its use to an idle, useless, class, and he called upon the workers of society to organise them in defence of their inalienable natural rights.'

<sup>16</sup> Although there is also evidence that he was aware of specific local issues to fit into his overall, universal, pattern. See, for example, *Irish World*, 19 Aug. 1882, for McHugh's condemnation of the Waterstein crofters being deprived of a harbour.

<sup>17</sup> J. Ferguson, *The Land for the People: An appeal to all who work by Brain or Hand* (Glasgow, n.d. (1881?)), 10. Davitt, like McHugh, made reference to Charles II in his appeal to a Highland audience in 1882. Apparently using the same sources as Ferguson – he stayed with Ferguson as his house, 'Benburb', in Lenzie throughout his visit, and was accompanied at the lecture in Inverness by Edward McHugh, acting as chairman – Davitt spoke of the clan system of tenure in Ireland and Scotland, but also reminded his listeners that 'in England the land, until the time of the Long Parliament, had to meet the chief burden of taxation – such as the support of the army, the Royal family, and other state

The similarity of the sources and the overall message delivered by Ferguson, Davitt and McHugh both helps to explain why contemporaries feared that McHugh was spreading 'Fenianism' among the crofters, and also that such fears were groundless, given the social crusade the men were undertaking. Soon after the meeting in Glendale, another lecture of over two hours on the land question was delivered by McHugh in Milovaig, at which he again quoted from Froude, Spencer, Mill, Carlyle, Emerson and Henry George – all standard authorities used by British and Irish Radicals and land reformers. Thereafter, he was invited to address the crofters of Glendale (again), and Mugeary, and arrangements were put in place for 'other meetings in several parts of the island'. On 24<sup>th</sup> June, he was reported to have left Skye, crossing the Minch for Uist. He cannot have spent much time there, as he was back in Skye by the end of the month.<sup>18</sup>

The Land League had made early contact with Skye at around the time of the Valtos rent strike, presumably from those radicals in Glasgow who would go on to form the 'Michael Davitt' branch of the League. These men stressed organisation, and the power of the 'No Rent Manifesto', and this full scale tour by McHugh seems to have been a sure attempt at refining the knowledge of the crofters, and defining a solution to the problems they faced. Returning to Glasgow in order to address a meeting of

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concerns. These were the conditions upon the performance of which the administration of the land was left in the hands of that class which has, through the medium of a land-owning and lawyer House of Commons, and a landlord House of Lords, succeeded in removing almost all taxation on such property, and placing it on the shoulders of those who derive no direct interest from the land, but who give it all the value it possesses – namely, the industrial community.' *Northern Chronicle*, 8 Nov. 1882. This report contains a garbled account of Davitt's sources, which nevertheless sound similar to those advocated by Ferguson and McHugh. 'Having also boldly claimed as authorities favouring his views, John Stuart Mill, Arthur Arnold, John Anthony Proude, Bishop Mully, and Mr. MacDonnell...' see below, 106, note 56.

<sup>18</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 27 Jun. 1882; 29 Jun. 1882; John Campbell, before the Napier Commission at Glendale, also stated that McHugh went to Uist. *Napier Commission*, q. 7223. Further evidence of McHugh's brief visit to the Long Island appears in a letter from John Murdoch to J.B. Glasier, in which Murdoch complained about conditions in Harris: 'Yet if you watch the papers you will find that they are greatly blessed in having a rich benevolent lady over them! No wonder altho' Lord Dunmore, who owns South Harris, asked to keep McHugh's eyes from falling on the desolations which his father had made and which he sanctions. Lady Scott whose husband died more than a year ago has the whole of N. Harris with the exception of very small bits of the skirts – as a deer forest.' Clearly some of the landowners in the Outer Hebrides were aware of McHugh's presence, and were keen to keep him away. University of Liverpool, Sidney Jones Library, J.B. Glasier Papers, GP/1/1/19 John Murdoch to Glasier, 17 Mar. 1885. I am indebted to Dr. Elaine McFarland for this reference. See below, 120, for alleged threats against McHugh if he dared to visit Harris.

over 3,000 people on Highland evictions, John Murdoch stressed the broader factors involved in the Skye agitation:

People at first said that this agitation was a repetition of the no-rent agitation in Ireland, but it was being found out that it was a Scotch question and an English question. They were engaged in a noble warfare not only to keep people alive but to give them an opportunity of being educated and becoming a grand, moral, and intellectual, and spiritual race in accordance with the constitution which God had given to them.<sup>19</sup>

The solutions offered by McHugh in order to grant these opportunities can be examined in more detail by looking specifically at the pamphlets he distributed and quoted in his lectures.

Whilst the newspapers which reported McHugh's movements on Skye only tended to speak in general terms about the message he was bringing, it is possible to examine in more detail the material he used. The newspapers at the time recorded that Skye was almost flooded with so-called 'Land League Literature', in spite of Sheriff Spiers' apparent difficulties in obtaining any, and blamed this on McHugh and the earlier Glasgow agitators. The *Northern Chronicle* carried a report from the *Scotsman*, whose reporter, having talked with the Skye crofters, remarked that:

It is easy to see how the pernicious No Rent doctrine has been propagated... in this place, where it is almost impossible to get an Edinburgh or a Glasgow newspaper... there are any number of Land League organs, both Irish and American, in circulation.<sup>20</sup>

Even before McHugh's trip to the island, the *Glasgow Herald* had reported, somewhat anxiously, that in the district of Edinbane, 'there is a large demand for Irish literature of an inflammatory character, and the sentiments therein are freely imbibed by the people.'<sup>21</sup>

### **Material used by McHugh**

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<sup>19</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 May 1882

<sup>20</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 3 May 1882

<sup>21</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 24 Apr. 1882

McNeill's report in 1886 had suggested that publications of 'socialistic tendency' left by McHugh were still circulating freely around the island. In spite of the apparent inability of the local constabulary to lay their hands on said documents, a Skye landlord, Lachlan MacDonald of Skeabost, identified four of these 'Land League', or 'socialistic' papers. They were, *Land for the People*, by John Ferguson; *A Plea for the Nationalisation of the Land*, by G.B. Clark; Henry George's 1881 tract relating to the Irish land question; and a letter from Bishop Nulty of Meath.<sup>22</sup>

In a letter to Patrick Ford, editor of the *Irish World*, in New York, which McHugh wrote from the Portree Hotel on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1882, the emissary confirmed that Skeabost had indeed identified some of the texts he had been using correctly:

I came here immediately after the 'Battle of the Braes' in April on behalf of the National Land League of Great Britain, armed with a bundle of pamphlets:- Dr. Nulty's letter to Cowen; Report of the Durham Miners' delegates on the state of Ireland; Democratic Federation Report; Cleveland Miners' Report; Nationalisation of the Land, by Dr. G.B. Clark, 'The Land for the People', by John Ferguson, 'The Irish Land Question: What it involves and how it alone can be settled', by Henry George; and Sexton's splendid speech, 'The Land League Vindicated', etc.<sup>23</sup>

This is one of the earliest examples of a common cause being forged between the workers of England (represented by the miners) and the Land Leaguers. Later in the year, Michael Davitt referred to the support given in favour of land nationalisation by the Trades Union Congress in Manchester.<sup>24</sup> The industrial towns of the north of England were, like Glasgow, starting to emerge as areas where the links between urban and rural aspects of the land question were strongest. Not only had the Durham miners and Newcastle MP, Joseph Cowen, taken an interest in Ireland, but Cowen's newspaper, the *Newcastle Chronicle*, published a series of articles following the progress of three 'English democrats' around Ireland.<sup>25</sup> The account of conditions in Ireland echoed those given a month earlier by G.B. Clark and the Democratic Federation, as the three men encountered rack-renting, extreme poverty and a cowed people.

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<sup>22</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, Jul. 1882

<sup>23</sup> *Irish World*, 12 Aug. 1882

<sup>24</sup> Speech at Glasgow. See *Glasgow Herald*, 26 Oct. 1882

<sup>25</sup> These accounts were reproduced in digest form in *Irish World* 10 Sep. 1881, 24 Sep. 1881

It was also unsurprising that McHugh should include work by John Ferguson. Ferguson was, of course, a good friend and ally of McHugh, and would be for the rest of his life. His work *The Land for the People: An Appeal to all who work by Brain or Hand* appeared in 1881, and shared many of George's beliefs. Whilst it can be seen now that McHugh's use of Ferguson's tract placed him outside mainstream Irish politics, it only served to heighten the fears of some contemporaries that this was an Irish nationalist mission. *The Land for the People* put forward a solution to the land question thoroughly internationalist in character, and contained many theories which must have appealed to the Skye inhabitants – crofters and town-dwellers alike.

In its report of the Irishtown meeting, the local newspaper, the *Connaught Telegraph*, stated that shopkeepers had an interest in the land question second only to the tenants.<sup>26</sup> The theme of a symbiotic relationship between town and country is dealt with at some length in *The Land for the People*. Indeed, one of the stated aims of the pamphlet, alongside 'How to lift Ireland from a prostrate nation to a proud position', was 'How to save British commerce from destruction, and to expand it indefinitely.' Ferguson bemoaned the fall of British exports, and looked to a resolution of the land laws as a way of rectifying the situation:

And our home trade is dying also. We have no dense and prosperous country population around our cities, as Belgium has, to use those goods today... The raisers of wealth from the soil have gone, and the shopkeepers wonder how the demand for goods had diminished. It begins to now appear that though sheep and cattle may give as much rent to the landlord upon the grazing system after the farmer has disappeared, yet they are not so useful to the community at large as farmers were, who not only paid rent, but supported themselves and their labourers, and thereby sustained the commerce of the town.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 26 Apr. 1879; Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 296. Moran, following Bew, suggests that one of the main factors behind the tenant movement in Mayo was the decision by shopkeepers to withdraw credit facilities in 1879. See G. Moran, 'James Daly and the rise and fall of the Land League in the west of Ireland, 1879-82', in *Irish Historical Studies*, cxiv (1994), 192; P. Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-1882* (Dublin, 1978), 56

<sup>27</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, 5; along with Ferguson, other radicals linked the land question in the countryside with the housing crisis in the cities. The housing problem had led to Government reports in 1882 and 1885, and was acute in Glasgow. See J. Mavor, *My Windows on the Street of the World*, (2 Vols. London, 1925) i, 153; J.B. Glasier, *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement* (London, 1921), 98-9; *Justice!*, 22 Mar. 1884; *Voice of the People*, 13 Oct. 1884; *Christian Socialist*,



Clearly, the passage could have just as easily been written specifically with the Scottish Highlands in mind as Ireland. It also suggests that McHugh made an effort to bring the philosophy of land reform to a wider audience than simply the crofters of Skye. Spiers, for example, reported to Ivory that McHugh had been in Portree 'talking to the market people the whole evening.'<sup>28</sup>

It appears that in the preceding years the subsistence economy of the former times had in part made way for a degree of trading, spurred on by seasonal migration to the cities of the south. John Stewart, the proprietor of Ensay, and formerly a farmer on Fraser's estate at Duntulm, informed Charles Fraser Mackintosh in front of the Napier Commission that 'men who contented themselves with home luxuries at first must now have tea and all those extravagant outside luxuries or foreign ingredients...'<sup>29</sup>

Fraser Mackintosh replied that this 'improved food and extravagance in dress' surely pointed to an increased standard in living in recent times.<sup>30</sup> A subsequent witness, John Robertson, a Portree drapery and grocery merchant, told of how he 'had great difficulty', in recovering money owed to him for goods when the herring fishing was poor, and he added that 1881 and 1882 were particularly bad years.<sup>31</sup> He also confirmed that there was a considerable amount of sympathy for the plight of the crofters amongst the 700-800 inhabitants of Portree.<sup>32</sup>

Roderick MacMillan, like Robertson a draper and grocer in Portree, explained that he, too, took 'a deep interest in the crofter question.' Generally backing up the points made by Robertson, MacMillan also believed he knew the cause of the impoverished state of the crofters.

In my younger days, crofters from the east side of that parish [Kilmuir] had only to state in any shop in Portree that they came

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Sep. 1885. The general trade depression also led to the formation of a Commission on the Depression of Trade (1885).

<sup>28</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/4, 31 May 1882, Spiers to Ivory

<sup>29</sup> *Napier Commission*, q.8951; T.M. Devine, *The Great Highland Famine: Hunger, Emigration and the Scottish Highlands in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1988), 285

<sup>30</sup> *Napier Commission*, q.8952

<sup>31</sup> *Napier Commission*, qq.9009-9010.

<sup>32</sup> *Napier Commission*, q.9085

from that district, and goods would be given on credit with pleasure... Now their credit, with a few exceptions, is entirely gone. The impoverished state of the Isle of Skye is clearly attributable to the uneven division of the land...<sup>33</sup>

These opinions were, of course, being aired one year after Edward McHugh had been present among the people of Portree. Nevertheless, it at least suggests that there was a receptive audience for the LLGB's envoy not only in the country but also in the town.<sup>34</sup> To these people, John Ferguson's work would have made compelling reading. It also displays why Skye was seen as a perfect place to propagate these views, with the island, in many ways, representing a microcosm of Ferguson's view of Great Britain.<sup>35</sup>

As would be expected from an astute observer of the political scene in Britain, Ferguson seems to have been fully alive to the possibilities of stirring an agitation in the Scottish Highlands. Addressing a generic 'British Sadducee', he stated:

...but, Sir Sadducee, your prophets, to whom you have turned a deaf ear, have told you, first, that if you go on sweeping the people from Highland mountain, Irish valley and fertile English plain, the very supply of labour by which your towns are sustained will be exhausted, man deteriorates under urban conditions of life...<sup>36</sup>

In claiming that 'Twelve men own a quarter of Scotland', Ferguson alluded to the fact that:

A portion of Scotland, comprising some 2,000,000 acres, equal to three or four Irish counties, has been turned into deer forests; and

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<sup>33</sup> *Napier Commission*, q.9398

<sup>34</sup> Suggestive of a theory not dissimilar to the 'rising expectations' theory put forward by J.S. Donnelly Jr. to explain the outbreak of the 'Land War' in Co. Cork, it seems that the merchant class of Skye were as keen as the crofters to see a resolution of the rent and land hunger issues. J.S. Donnelly Jr., *The Land and the People of Nineteenth Century Cork* (London, 1975), 249

<sup>35</sup> John Murdoch made a similar point to this in the *Irish World*, but from a political, rather than an economic, standpoint. He wrote that 'in one sentence, Skye is Ireland on a small scale. Portree is a sort of shoddy Dublin. The factor, the sheriff, the fiscal, the sheriff officer, the postmaster, the hotel keeper, and creatures who think themselves something because they are on visiting terms with the functionaries, may be taken to represent the permanent officials in Dublin Castle and their following'. The emotive terms used by Murdoch for his American readers continued, with this piece concluding: 'In conclusion, Skye thanks God for Ireland, and Ireland may yet thank God for Skye'. This brings into sharper focus the way in which connections between Irish and Highland agitations were played down in the British press. *Irish World*, 10 Jun. 1882

<sup>36</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, 5

the glens that once supported thousands of families have become a savage wilderness only used as a place of amusement for feudal lords and successful merchants, who have been admitted to their society and have acquired their habits.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the tract was an attempt – given that it was initially written for an Irish audience – to gain wider Irish sympathy for the plight of parts of Britain, including the Scottish Highlands, and therefore bringing a unity to the ‘democracies’ of the different countries. Ferguson was writing with the Leckmelm, and more recently Valtos, evictions and rent strikes fresh in his mind, and it is certain that *The Land for the People* was written with the objective of starting a Britain-wide land reform movement. The first phase of the campaign had finished, with the tenants of Ireland well versed in the arguments of land reform:

Doctrines hitherto known to be true in halls of learning only, became accepted in the cabins of Connaught, and the truths of Economic Science have given new hope to the Irish peasant.<sup>38</sup>

The document also aims to give hope to the Scottish peasant, and extols the virtues of the land systems in Belgium, Switzerland and Norway – lands, believed Ferguson, with fewer natural advantages but more wealth than Britain and Ireland – as examples of what might be achieved. The work contained several references to the Irish Land League, and enough criticism of Gladstone’s Land Bills of 1870 and 1881 to worry the authorities and the landlords that violent agitation was being exhorted, especially with the Phoenix Park murders casting their long shadow over the Irish movement in Britain and the rest of the world. In general, though, it sought to show how the resolution of the land question was merely a prelude to an increased prosperity for most levels of society, and a benefit to the nation in general. This is a theme McHugh, Ferguson, and indeed Davitt, would continue for the rest of their lives. In a clear allusion to Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*, Ferguson argued that:

As society grows richer there should be less poverty. New York, London, Glasgow are the richest cities in the world. Each year these cities add enormously to their wealth, but they also add a deeper stratum of poverty and misery. The reason is obvious. The whole

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<sup>37</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, 7

<sup>38</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, 7

tendency of wealth is, as society is organised, to flow into the hands of landlords.<sup>39</sup>

Subsequently, Ferguson advocated a tax of ten shillings per acre on the nation's land, and whilst not wishing that the landlord should be wronged, this he considered necessary to 'save the nation'.<sup>40</sup> Whilst accepting that inequality was inherent in society, and must exist, Ferguson pleaded in *Land for the People* that 'such should be natural, not artificial, and that the distinction of society should be the result of useful services, not the accident of birth.'<sup>41</sup>

Finally, as a riposte to those who would inevitably try to denounce the land reformers as dangerous and subversive agitators, he added:

The 'light has spread', and the social revolution has begun. It is a revolution of the brain, not of the barricade; it is a revolution in which Radicalism and Religion join, and the weapons of their warfare are passive resistance to tyranny and the ballot for reform. Its soldiers shoot ideas into men, not bullets; it seeks to expand men's brains, not to scatter them; it abhors violence in a government and a people.<sup>42</sup>

Whilst Ferguson hinted throughout this pamphlet at the possible establishment of a peasant proprietary, Parnell's preferred resolution of the land issue, his beliefs on the taxation of land values, heartily shared by McHugh, were far in advance of the parliamentary party. On the day McHugh was discussing the implications of the land question, along with John Murdoch, in Portree, Michael Davitt was setting out his own definition of 'The Land for the People' during his celebrated speech in Liverpool. This theory supported land nationalisation which, as will be seen, put him at odds with the mainstream of Irish nationalism. And yet, it was just this brand of advanced land reform which McHugh was advocating on Skye.

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<sup>39</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, 23

<sup>40</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, 25

<sup>41</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, 30

<sup>42</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, 31

Dr. Thomas Nulty, Bishop of Meath, has been referred to as ‘one of the most outstanding clerical supporters of the Irish Land League.’<sup>43</sup> He was so highly thought of that he had even been paid the honour of having land league branches named after him, such as the one in Brooklyn. He had been vociferous in his attacks on landlordism, and had found an ally in the radical English MP, Joseph Cowen. Cowen himself had been an advocate of land reform from an early stage.<sup>44</sup>

The letters Nulty had written both to Cowen and to his flock set out a highly advanced principle of land nationalisation, reiterating ideas laid down by the likes of John Stuart Mill on the God-given nature of land.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Henry George himself used the writings of Bishop Nulty to defend his own works against the charge of communism. In clarifying Nulty’s position, George stated that ‘the long existence of private property in land he declares no more justifies it than did the long existence of slavery justify property in human flesh and blood.’<sup>46</sup>

Nulty’s contention that compensation should be given for improvements on the sale of a holding had been covered by the 1881 Irish Land Act, and would become one of the central planks of the demands of land reformers in the Highlands. He went further than that, however. George explained that ‘the value of a land which arises from the growth of the community and not what any particular individual has done (that is to say, rent in the strict sense of the term), belongs to the whole community, and ought to be taken by taxation for the use of the whole community.’ Again, there is a clear application of this principle in the local circumstances of the Skye crofters. Like John Ferguson, however, Nulty was keen to stress the universality of these principles, that

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<sup>43</sup> T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), 523; For further expositions of Nulty’s principles, see, e.g., *Single Tax*, Jul. 1896, Apr. 1901, Jun. 1901.

<sup>44</sup> Even before the Highland agitation had begun in earnest, John Murdoch, writing under the pseudonym ‘Highlander’, had stated that ‘the cordial thanks of the oppressed peoples of England, Ireland and Scotland are due to Joseph Cowen, whose manful, fearless and uncompromising eloquence will be gratefully remembered when the hateful work of Gladstone’s Coercive Government will be scornfully pointed to as one of the foulest blemishes on the page of modern legislative history.’ *Highlander*, 16 Feb. 1881

<sup>45</sup> *Irish World*, 25 Mar. 1882; Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 523. Nulty claimed that: ‘The land of any country is the common property of the people of that country, because its real owner, the Creator who made it, has transferred it as a voluntary gift to them. *Terram dedit filius hominum*. Now, as every individual in that country is a creation and child of God, and as His creatures are equal in his sight, any settlement of the land of a country that would exclude the humblest man in that country from a share in the common inheritance would not only be an injustice and a wrong to that man, but, moreover, would be an impious resistance to the benevolent intentions of the Creator’.

<sup>46</sup> *Irish World*, 25 Mar. 1882 contains all of George’s comments on Nulty’s letter recorded here.



they would improve Britain as well as Ireland, factory workers or merchants as well as farmers and smallholders. It also appears that Land Leaguers in Britain, such as Ferguson and McHugh, were much keener than those in Ireland to publicise the Bishop's teachings. Whilst Henry George bemoaned the fact that little was known in Ireland of Nulty's theories outside what had been reported in the *Irish World*, the Irish Land League of Great Britain had published 20,000 copies of Nulty's letter to Joseph Cowen. The Democratic Federation, in turn, had printed 28,000 copies of Cowen's speech.<sup>47</sup> A prominent member of the Democratic Federation delegation which had toured Ireland in the summer of 1881 had been Dr. Gavin Brown Clark, later MP for Caithness in the crofter interest, and President of the Scottish Land League.<sup>48</sup>

Clark's *A Plea for the Nationalisation of the Land* was written specifically to add weight to the growing agitation on the subject centred around Alfred R. Wallace's Land Nationalisation Society, of which Clark was a member.<sup>49</sup> In his preface, written on the last day of 1881 at his home in Dulwich, London, Clark expressed a desire that legislation on the subject should arrive at the earliest opportunity. *A Plea for the Nationalisation of the Land* differs from the other pamphlets offered by McHugh to the Skye crofters in that whilst the initial stimulus for writing it was the same – 'two or three bad seasons have reduced the rack-rented cottier tenants of Ireland to a condition of semi-starvation' – Clark had much more specific and detailed concerns about the position of landlordism in Scotland.<sup>50</sup> Like Ferguson he emphasised the fact that the land in Scotland was to a great extent concentrated in the hands of a few private landlords. When McHugh pointed out what Clark had to say on Highland evictions, it can not have failed to strike a chord with the crofters of Braes, Kilmuir and Glendale:

When anyone reads the history of the Highland evictions during the present century, it must rouse feelings of great indignation within

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<sup>47</sup> For more on Cowen's views on the Irish land issue, see *Highlander*, 3 Nov. 1880; *Northern Chronicle*, 16 Feb. 1881, for Cowen eulogising Michael Davitt.

<sup>48</sup> For details of Clark's career, see E.A. Cameron, *The Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh, Croftier MP* (Aberdeen, 2000), 205-212; See also Clark's own, rather unreliable, memoirs, 'Rambling Recollections of an Agitator', *Forward!*, Jun.-Oct. 1910

<sup>49</sup> Although Alfred Russel Wallace was the President, he was not the originator of the Land Nationalisation society, and was indeed a reluctant President. For biographical details, see H. Clements, *Alfred Russel Wallace: Biologist and Social Reformer* (London, 1983); A.R. Wallace, *Letters and Reminiscences* (2 Vols. London, 1916)

<sup>50</sup> G.B. Clark, *A Plea for the Nationalisation of the Land* (London, 1882), 5

them, as atrocities took place during the Clearances equal to any perpetrated by the Russians in Poland, the Austrians in Italy, or the Turks in Bulgaria... the only occurrences in any way approaching them in barbarity were the evictions in Ireland during the first famine...<sup>51</sup>

After setting out the analogy with Ireland, Clark, having denounced the ‘Bigoted Tory’ Walter Scott, points out that evictions were not only harmful to the local economy but also to the state as a whole. Quoting from Hugh Miller, Alexander MacKenzie and Donald Sage – standard anti-Clearance, anti-landlord polemicists – Clark linked the Clearances to the circumstances of the day.<sup>52</sup>

If the appearance of an envoy of the LLGB to inquire into the circumstances would not boost the confidence of the crofting community on Skye, then the knowledge that their case was being discussed in prominent Radical circles in London could strengthen their resolve and make them feel part of a wider struggle. This struggle, however, was not merely alongside Irish smallholders, as has often been assumed, but part of a much wider assertion of workers’ rights. ‘As Henry George has so well shown in his *Progress and Poverty*’, wrote Clark, ‘artisans also suffer from the system – landlordism keeps their wages low and food dear.’<sup>53</sup> Again, Ferguson’s arguments are backed up to include the wider community, a theme common to all of the material used by McHugh.

Having discussed landlordism in Scotland, Ireland and England, therefore, and established that landlords were little more than illegal usurpers, Clark set out a plan for the resolution of the issue, taking great care to explain that nationalisation of the land did not equate with Socialism or Communism.<sup>54</sup> Quoting Herbert Spencer, Clark argued that:

Such a doctrine is consistent with the highest state of civilisation, may be carried out without involving a community of goods, and need cause no very serious revolution in existing arrangements. The change required would simply be a change of landlords; separate ownership would merge into joint stock ownership of the public, instead of being

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<sup>51</sup> Clark, *Nationalisation*, 9

<sup>52</sup> Clark, *Nationalisation*, 11

<sup>53</sup> Clark, *Nationalisation*, 18

<sup>54</sup> Clark, *Nationalisation*, 27

in the possession of individuals; the country would be held be the great corporate body – society...<sup>55</sup>

As with many other radical authors of this time, Clark made judicious use of respected political economists, Spencer and John Stuart Mill, for example, to back up his arguments. Likewise, John Ferguson had claimed that he would show how society could be improved ‘upon principles laid down by the best economic thinkers – Cobden, Mill, Cliffe Leslie, Kay, Laveleye, etc. etc.’<sup>56</sup> John Stuart Mill’s maxim that ‘the land of every country belongs to the people of that country’ was a cornerstone of every reformer on the land issue, including Henry George.<sup>57</sup> The various complex economic arguments involved were certainly taken in by at least a section of the crofting community, as can be seen in the ensuing correspondence in the following months, and the reception given to Michael Davitt when he reached Inverness that November.

McHugh was the ideal man to present the arguments in a clear and interesting manner, and also to answer any questions arising from his lectures. One of his obituaries later noted that:

His audience, whether it numbered fifty or five thousand, felt they had in the speaker no platform demagogue but a man who knew his case, was careful of his facts and possessed in as captivating way the art of presenting the facts so that they would speak for themselves... He hated any kind of injustice; he looked it and spoke it with a fierce conviction that few could equal and none could surpass.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Clark, *Nationalisation*, 29

<sup>56</sup> Ferguson, *Land for the People*, Preface. Ferguson also stressed this in private correspondence from the time. University of Birmingham Library, Joseph Chamberlain Papers, JC 8/6/3G/1, John Ferguson to Cameron, 8 Dec 1881. ‘My doctrines are well known Reform of the Land Laws upon the lines of Cobden, Mill, Cliffe Leslie etc. Home Rule within the Empire and the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament. Reform by cultivating British opinion. No sympathy with intimidation or violence.’ I am grateful to Dr. Ewen A. Cameron for this reference. The Cameron to whom Ferguson was writing was possibly his business partner, but could also be Charles Cameron, Glasgow MP and proprietor of the *North British Daily Mail*. For other works by these political economists, see T.E. Cliffe Leslie, *Land Systems and Industrial Economy of Ireland, England and Continental Countries* (London, 1870); T.E. Cliffe Leslie, *Essays in Political and Moral Philosophy* (Dublin, 1879); J. Kay, *Free Trade in Land* (London, 1879); E.L.V. de Laveleye, *Primitive Property* (Trans. G.R.L. Marriot, London, 1878)

<sup>57</sup> H. George, *Progress and Poverty: An inquiry into the cause of industrial depression and of increase of want with increase of wealth* (1943 edition (London, 1943)), 258

<sup>58</sup> *Land Values*, May 1915

Whilst his oratorical skills were undoubtedly honed over the three decades following his arrival on Skye, there is little evidence to doubt that McHugh was a natural teacher, just as the editorial in the *Northern Chronicle* had feared. There is nothing to suggest that he mentioned Irish nationalism, and indeed Ireland in general was only mentioned as part of a broader social question. He was not, as a Bracadale correspondent of the *Northern Chronicle* wrote in June 1882, ‘paid for teaching Fenianism.’<sup>59</sup>

The same newspaper had also already run an editorial, which, with a high Tory patrician tone, asserted that ‘it is wonderful what countenance he gets for this proposition [land nationalisation] from the less intelligent people.’<sup>60</sup> However, even if there were those who did not fully understand, or agree with, McHugh’s teaching, few would be left in any doubt as to the Universal nature of the land struggle. Having heard Ferguson’s descriptions of the contented tenancies of central and northern Europe, G.B. Clark’s solution lay even further afield.

If the land could first be re-appropriated by the state, Clark was then in favour of basing the land tenure of Great Britain and Ireland on the ‘Bombay Settlement’ in India. ‘I spent a couple of years in that Presidency’, he wrote, ‘and I consider the settlement carried out there to be the nearest to perfection that I have seen.’<sup>61</sup> This, he contended, could be accomplished by ‘recognising as tenants those who hold the right to the property that labour had added to the land.’ He further advocated that that no man should have more than one farm (to guard against sub-letting and subdivision), and also that it was unwise to fix the size of a farm. Again, the needs of agricultural labourers and artisans were stressed. Not only, therefore, was McHugh telling the crofters what they had to struggle against, such as high rents and lack of land, he was also offering them goals to which they could aspire, which they could debate, which they could even reject. What was important was that the issues were out in the open, and would remain discussed long after McHugh had returned to Glasgow.

Nevertheless, in spite of the ‘internationalism’ of the doctrines propounded, the opponents of the land agitation in the Highlands were still able to claim that the

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<sup>59</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 14 Jun. 1882

<sup>60</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 10 May 1882

<sup>61</sup> Clark, *Nationalisation*, 36

murderous hand of Fenianism had descended onto the region. The tracts under discussion had been penned by a man perceived as an implacable Home Rule agitator (Ferguson), a Radical Irish priest (Nulty), and a London-based Scottish Radical who only twelve months earlier had been a guest of honour at an Irish Land League banquet in Dublin (Clark). The fourth author fell into the same bracket, an American land reformer and enemy of the British government whose ‘articles in the *Irish World* identified him in English eyes with the party of lawlessness.’<sup>62</sup> Indeed, he had twice been arrested without charge in Co. Galway during the same summer McHugh spent on Skye.<sup>63</sup>

Henry George was, however, totally opposed to nationalism of any shade, and denounced the anti-English resolutions often passed at Irish Land League meetings as ‘the very madness of folly’.<sup>64</sup> Later to undertake tours of the Highlands himself, arranged by Edward McHugh, George had already made an impact on Scotland, at a meeting in Glasgow on St. Patrick’s Day, 1882. Six weeks before leaving for Skye, McHugh met for the first time the man whose *Progress and Poverty* would continue have such a profound influence on his life. The people of Skye were to have the benefit of hearing not only one of the closest disciples of the ‘Prophet of San Francisco’, but a man who perhaps more than any other was able to project George’s views with the utmost clarity.

Whilst its very title marks Henry George’s *The Irish Land Question: what it involves and how it alone can be settled* out as the one most directly involved with Ireland, its message, again, was intended to carry a universal application. As has been seen, all of the texts used by McHugh owed something to George’s writings, and in this tract it was George himself who took ideas from *Progress and Poverty* – already a book which dealt extensively with Ireland – and applied them for an Irish audience.

What I urge the men of Ireland to do is to proclaim, without limitation or evasion, that the land, of natural right, is common property of the whole people, and to propose practical measures

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<sup>62</sup> E.P. Lawrence, *Henry George in the British Isles* (Michigan, 1957), 15

<sup>63</sup> C.A. Barker, *Henry George* (New York, 1955), 370; A. Birnie, *Single Tax George* (London, 1939), 97

<sup>64</sup> H. George, *The Irish Land Question: what it involves and how it alone can be settled. An appeal to the land leagues* (New York and London, 1881)



which will recognise this right in Great Britain as well as in Ireland.<sup>65</sup>

McHugh's use of *The Irish Land Question*, would appear to have had a threefold purpose. Firstly, naturally, it was used to hammer home the 'Land for the People' message to the people of Skye. Secondly, as with other pamphlets, it would reassure those listening that they were part of a world-wide fight to assert workers' rights, especially over the land issue.<sup>66</sup>

George's call for 'fraternity' leads to the third reason why McHugh considered this an ideal teaching tool on Skye. As has been seen, there have been those who believed that McHugh being an Irish Catholic would automatically lead the Presbyterian inhabitants of Skye to be prejudiced against his teachings. This does not appear, generally, to have been the case. George's tract was written with a view to breaking down Irish anti-English sentiment, but the passages apply equally well to anti-Catholic feelings in Scotland.<sup>67</sup> McHugh's recognition of the Skye crofters as a devoutly religious people, a fact also to be used to advantage by Michael Davitt five years later, enabled him to use arguments which had already been heard in Catholic Ireland – arguments based upon Biblical passages.<sup>68</sup>

Even though he had written his pamphlet before McHugh and Murdoch had arrived on Skye, Sheriff Nicolson, putting his early Free Church training to good use, evoked St. Paul's message to the Galatians - 'Oh foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in *Land Values*, June, 1903

<sup>66</sup> In language evoking the French Revolution, George demanded, 'Liberty – the freedom of each bounded only by the equal freedom of every other! Equality – the equal right of each to the use and enjoyment of all natural opportunities: to all the essentials of happy, healthful human life! Fraternity – that sympathy which links together those who struggle in a noble cause; that would live and let live; that would help as well as be helped; that, in seeking the good of all, finds the highest good of each!'

<sup>67</sup> He wrote, 'Let [Ireland's] rallying cry awake all those who slumber, and rouse to a common struggle all who are oppressed. Let it not breathe old hates; let it ring and echo with new hope... And the gospel of deliverance, let us not forget it; it is the gospel of love, not of hate. He whom it emancipates will know neither Jew nor Gentile, not German nor Frenchman, nor European nor American, nor difference of colour nor of race, nor animosities of class or condition. Let us set our feet on old prejudices, let us bury the old hates. There have been "Holy Alliances" of Kings, let us strive for the Holy Alliance of people'. George, *Irish Land Question*, 15

<sup>68</sup> A correspondent of the *Inverness Courier*, writing at the time of Michael Davitt's speech in Inverness, used one of McHugh's pamphlets as evidence of official 'Land League' activity in the Highlands. The pamphlet in question was made up almost entirely of Biblical quotations. *Inverness Courier*, 4 Nov. 1882

you?’ – in an attempt to stop the spread of the agitation.<sup>69</sup> Both ‘sides’ in the struggle, however, would use the Bible in an attempt to win the moral high ground. The *Irish World* in particular, carried a number of quotations from Scripture with the intention of displaying the biblical justice of the land agitation. These would also be prefaced by a statement making the gist of the quotation very clear.<sup>70</sup>

Patrick Ford had run an editorial on the justice of the Land War as seen from the Bible, whilst McHugh had been on Skye.<sup>71</sup> John Murdoch reflected on how:

One of the curiosities of Mr. Mac’s visit to Skye is the readiness with which he has been able to prove the right of the people and the no-right of the lords to the land – from the Bible. While the military, civil, and even clerical functionaries have indulged in threats and in incentives to violence, the Irish Land Leaguer has been disseminating Scripture truth among pious Presbyterian crofters.<sup>72</sup>

Murdoch was especially pleased that it should have been an Irishman, and a Catholic lay Irishman at that, who had undertaken the task of teaching ‘the light of God’s word on the subjects.’ Whilst condemning the clergy for not doing what he saw as their duty, the fact that McHugh was in their stead, thought Murdoch, would do more than anything to break down any anti-Irish bigotry amongst the Scots, and help to unite the causes in both Ireland and the Highlands. John Murdoch had long used Biblical text in order to illustrate the evils of landlordism. Whilst in existence, his *Highlander* newspaper carried various Biblical messages.<sup>73</sup> Murdoch noted in his autobiography

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<sup>69</sup> The Gaelic original read, ‘O Ghalatianacha smaideach, Co cuir druidheachd oirbh?’ For reference to Nicolson’s proposed career as a Free Church minister, see *The Times*, 18 Jan. 1893. ‘Rob Roy Jr.’ mocked the open letter of Sheriff Nicolson by stating ‘Bravo! The Skyemen are imitating the Irish.’ *Oban Times*, 13 May 1882

<sup>70</sup> *Irish World*, 15 Jul. 1882 ran one such piece: ‘Woe to the land monopolist! Woe to him who possesses himself of the holding of an evicted brother! – “Woe to you that join house to house, and lay field to field, even to the end of the place! Shall you alone dwell in the midst of the earth?” ISAIAS 5,8’

<sup>71</sup> *Irish World*, 3 Jun. 1882. This in itself delighted the envoy, who wrote ‘I read your magnificent article to this religious people. It is no exaggeration to say that it electrified them. If I had a few thousand copies of that article it would do incalculable good among the religious, bible-reading Highlanders.’ *Irish World*, 12 Aug. 1882

<sup>72</sup> *Irish World*, 19 Aug. 1882

<sup>73</sup> Such as ‘Text for sermons on Thanksgiving Day: “Wealth gotten by vanity (say, sport) shall be diminished; but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.” Prov. xiii, 11.’ Even when not quoting directly, the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, was uppermost in Murdoch’s mind. ‘Scotch landlords, factors and ministers seem to go in for the superficial rural economy of large farms and rich farmers. What was the size of the farms laid out by Joshua for the families of Israel?’ Both quotations from *Highlander* 16 Feb. 1881. For details of Murdoch’s use of the Bible, see P. Harding, ‘John

that it was the Bible which had led him to think in terms ‘far above the that of the selfish and unbelieving world around.’<sup>74</sup>

McHugh himself seemed overjoyed with the situation, as if his reception had surpassed his expectations. In Glendale at the start of July, he related how the factor, accompanied by a neighbouring ‘grabber’, had told the local crofters that they must obey the law:

One of the crofters speaking out said, ‘law is not always justice’. ‘Oh’, said the grabber, ‘we must support the law.’ The crofter struck him dumb with these words – ‘Had you lived in the time of Nebuchadnezzar you would have assisted him in punishing the children who refused to worship the golden image that he set up. That was the law, but it wasn’t justice’.<sup>75</sup>

There was a receptive audience for McHugh, therefore, when he arrived on the island. His material was concerned with land, not nationalism. This was, after all, only a very short time after the Phoenix Park murders – one of the most infamous atrocities of the Irish Land War period. Although condemned by Parnell and Davitt, the press largely blamed the Land League for normalising outrages, and in spite of the appearance of threatening notices earlier in 1882, there is no evidence to suggest that the majority of Skye crofters would have been receptive to any solution of the land issue involving harm to the person.

Initially, though, McHugh’s visit seems to have had marked success in spreading the ideas of land reform throughout the island, or at least giving a focus to those who already had an interest, awakened, perhaps, by the earlier Land League contact of 1881. Some reports from later seem to blame McHugh for starting the land agitation on Skye. It seems more reasonable to suggest that he was providing information for a people who had already begun to consider their situation.

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Murdoch, Michael Davitt and the Land Question: A Study in Comparative Irish and Scottish History’ (Unpublished M.Litt. Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1994), 89; J. Murdoch, *The Land Question Answered from the Bible* (1883); D. Meek, ‘The Land Question Answered from the Bible: The Land Issue and the development of a Highland Theory of Liberation’, *Scottish Geographical Magazine* cxxxiii (1987), 86

<sup>74</sup> Mitchell Library, Glasgow, J. Murdoch, Autobiography Vol. II, 37-46

<sup>75</sup> *Irish World*, 12 Aug. 1882

## The press assault on McHugh

Perhaps inevitably, the visit would arouse some local opposition, and from the beginning of July, the presence of McHugh seems to become resented in quarters other than the Inverness-shire police force and council chambers. By the middle of July, the *Oban Times* was moved to write that ‘from all that can be learned, the Irish doctrines of ‘no rent’ do not meet with much favour – they are too good to be true...’<sup>76</sup> The idea that there was some kind of propaganda offensive against him is given some strength by the following statement in the *Courier* in July: ‘Mr. McHugh has not been in the slightest degree affected by several groundless statements sent from several parts of the island’.<sup>77</sup> A correspondent from Bracadale had already written in the *Northern Chronicle*, bemoaning McHugh’s presence and stating that ‘the crofters ought to be able to settle their own affairs without Pat’s aid’.<sup>78</sup>

The Edward McHugh described by these correspondents does not sound like the ‘ideal propagandist’ described not only by Davitt in *Fall of Feudalism* some years later, but also by the worried correspondent in the *Northern Chronicle* when the envoy first arrived on Skye. There is also little explanation for why Fraser’s tenants should be so unenthusiastic about hearing McHugh, given the past relations between the Valtos tenants and the Land League, and the later – more serious – agitation on the estate. It seems clear, that for some reason, the opponents of the agitation were trying to have things both ways: first they portrayed McHugh as a dangerous agitator, then

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<sup>76</sup> *Oban Times*, 15 Jul. 1882. Caution must be used, however, because much of the evidence against McHugh comes from the two main Inverness newspapers – the *Courier* and the *Northern Chronicle* – and this often appears to have been written by the same man. For a warning about the influence of local correspondents filing to more than one paper, see *Celtic Magazine*, Dec. 1884. The following report appeared in identical form in both papers: ‘Mr. E. Machugh [sic], the emissary of the Irish Land League, has made several visits in the Uig district of Skye, but his progress, I may tell you, in attempting to convert Skyemen to Irish ideas, has been so slow and unpromising that he has been completely discouraged. He confined his last two or three visits merely to coming here, smelling the air, and staying at the hotel for a day or two. The people will have none of him or his ideas.’ This correspondent went on to say that McHugh would have progressed to Stenscholl, had it not been for a remarkable stand up row at the door of the Uig hotel with the widow of a Free Church minister. The widow allegedly first defeated McHugh in an argument about land reform, and then chased him down the road with an umbrella. He concluded that ‘I have no hesitation in saying that the Land League, their views, and actions, are most heartily detested in Skye. Machugh was, I believe, sent to Skye simply because no Highlander could be found to undertake the job.’ *Inverness Courier*, 8 Jul. 1882; *Northern Chronicle*, 12 Jul. 1882. Conversely, MacPhail, without giving a source, also claims that McHugh had an ally in Stenscholl, in the form of Church of Scotland minister Rev. J.M. Davidson. See I.M.M. MacPhail, *The Crofters’ War* (Stornoway, 1989), 105

<sup>77</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 15 Jul. 1882

<sup>78</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 14 Jun. 1882

as a somewhat pathetic figure. John Murdoch, writing as the Inverness correspondent of the *Irish World*, summed up the situation thus:

They tried to smile with one side of their face while they trembled on the other side; and when they dared, they frowned upon anyone who showed any sympathy for the people.<sup>79</sup>

The claim that McHugh was sent to the Highlands because there were no Highlanders to do the job may or may not be true, but it would appear that from around this time there was money available to be given to local agitators, the ‘Confidential Report’ stating that ‘local agents were employed, and liberally paid from some source which does not appear.’<sup>80</sup>

The chief sergeant from Portree, Malcolm MacDonald, travelled up to Kilmuir on July 4<sup>th</sup> to investigate McHugh’s actions. This was the very day of the supposed incident outside the Uig Inn, and yet this is not mentioned at all in the report he made to Sheriff Ivory.<sup>81</sup> The picture painted is of crofters reluctant to say anything about the visitor, or denying that he had been to any of the ‘disaffected’ districts. Again, it

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<sup>79</sup> *Irish World*, 10 Jun. 1882. Doubt over the veracity of the story of the minister’s widow also increases when reading a letter, published in the *Inverness Courier*, which denied the very existence of the widow, and mocked the representation of the mood of the islanders as given by the Uig correspondent. *Inverness Courier*, 26 Jul. 1882. The letter, from ‘One Who Knows’ ran: ‘SIR – The Uig correspondent speaks for the people of Skye, and expressed their sentiments with regard to the land league. “We the people of Skye” object, however, to be misrepresented and beg to state that the said correspondent’s “people of Skye” means just himself, plus a certain widow, plus a certain umbrella. This valorous three bear, at least, a numerical resemblance to the three tailors who constituted themselves as “we the people of England”. Whether the land league is detested on Skye or not, the Uig effusions – with respect to a gentleman from another country who is visiting our beautiful island – are at any rate very much detested in Skye. Has McHugh gone to Stenscholl be it said also, that it does not boast of Free Church minister’s widow who deems it consistent with her modesty and her character to engage in a public house door wrangle about the Irish and matters. We are all anxious to know who the widow is who is now so pertinently teaching us “by precept and example”. Who would for one moment imagine that of Erin’s bravest sons even one stout heart could be found who would not “beat a retreat” before the widow’s umbrella and the correspondent’s quill? The Uig correspondent, no doubt in the simplicity of his heart, has involved the name of more than one Free Church minister’s widow of Skye in this very Irish scene, this second Battle of the Boyne, fought and won by the Uig Inn door, by the old umbrella and the quill of the goose. He is bound in honour to say which of them it is who has distinguished herself. I am +c. One Who Knows both Uig and Stenscholl, Stenscholl 18/7/1882’

<sup>80</sup> NAS, AF67/401, *Confidential Reports*. This may be a reference to the ‘Fenian Skirmishing Fund’ accusations. For an attack on the way the land agitation in the Highlands enriched previously obscure individuals, see *Oban Telegraph*, 29 Mar. 1889. The *Telegraph* was a Conservative alternative to the *Times* in Oban.

<sup>81</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/6, MacDonald to Ivory, 6 July 1882. See below, App. C. The same correspondent who wrote about the Free Church minister’s widow mentioned that McHugh stayed on this occasion from Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July to Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July.



seems unlikely that after two months on the island, and mainly in Glendale and Kilmuir, the agents of the land league had not visited the townships in the area. In Kilmuir, the innkeeper at Staffin claimed that ‘McHugh had never been as far as he was aware at Stenscholl or any of the townships thereabout.’ Similarly, after finding nothing at Stenscholl, MacDonald returned to Uig, ‘and between these places I had been speaking to several persons, but could not find any trace of McHugh having been there.’ Nevertheless, it is perhaps significant that the ‘Crofters’ War’ up until this point had been almost totally confined to Skye: Ellishader and Valtos in Kilmuir, Braes and Glendale. All these areas were associated with McHugh or the Land League. The *Oban Times* also recorded at this time, in a piece by the paper’s Uig correspondent, that ‘Mr. McHugh has been in our midst lately. His intention was to visit the disaffected areas of the Quiraing, but urgent business called him away to Portree.’<sup>82</sup>

MacDonald’s ‘long conversation’ with Donald Ross of Idrigill and another, unspecified, man is especially instructive. Like the other people encountered by the policeman, his interlocutors, whilst admitting that they knew of the Land League’s agent and his mission, denied that McHugh had penetrated as far as Uig. Furthermore, ‘they did not want him, that they got a reduction of twenty five per-cent of their rents this year from their proprietor and they were well enough pleased.’<sup>83</sup> And yet, when he appeared before the Napier Commission at Uig less than a year later, on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1883, Ross – reading a prepared statement on behalf of the Idrigill crofters – stated that crofts were too small, and that they wanted more land at a fair rent. It was a fear of eviction, however, that prevented wider complaints.<sup>84</sup> Malcolm Nicolson, following Ross, stated that when people had complained about the rents they were told to pay up or leave their holdings.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Oban Times*, 15 Jul. 1882; This report is at longest soon after MacDonald was writing to Ivory, and probably simultaneous with the Kilmuir crofters denying knowledge of McHugh’s existence. When the Napier Commission visited Waternish (14 May 1883), delegate John McLean denied knowing anything of McHugh or his ideas. Remarkably, in spite of the heavy coverage in the press, he also claimed an ignorance of the situation in Ireland. *Napier Commission*, qq. 3176, 3177, 3178

<sup>83</sup> For the earlier settlement with Fraser’s Valtos tenants, see *Oban Times*, 25 Jun., 9 Jul., 16 Jul. 1881. For the general 25% rent reduction, see MacPhail, *Crofters’ War*, 34.

<sup>84</sup> *Napier Commission*, qq.1771, 1789. The complaint of rents being too high was, by the time Napier and his men arrived in Uig, almost universal. See *Napier Commission*, qq.1556, 1677, 1726, 1830, 1895. Donald Nicolson claimed that his rent had been £7, 10s., and that it had been doubled at once with an extra pound added. He refused to pay and was therefore evicted. *Napier Commission*, q.2364

<sup>85</sup> *Napier Commission*, q.1844

Whilst Ross's evidence before the Commission must be qualified by stating that it was a prepared statement, possibly assisted by John Murdoch or Alexander MacKenzie, and that the agitation had been growing in volume over the past year, such a fear of eviction and speaking out could well explain the reluctance of anyone in Kilmuir to confide in MacDonald. Fraser himself had written to Alexander MacDonald at the end of May 1882 to pass on a message to his tenants.

When you next see any of the tenants, you may mention, if you like, that having given them time now to see what the agitators can do for them, I do not propose now putting up with any more nonsense of this kind, and that if they wish to remain my tenants, that they must just honestly attend to their engagements like people elsewhere.<sup>86</sup>

Even though Sergeant MacDonald was in plain clothes, and quite confident that he was 'not known' in the districts of Uig, the local residents were frequent visitors to Portree, and in an island with only a handful of policemen such men had something of celebrity status. Even if one person in the locality recognised MacDonald, the word could soon spread that he was investigating the area. Furthermore, the crofters had seen what had happened in Braes, and were aware of the actions of Sheriff Ivory, and any stranger travelling around the district asking about the agitation could have aroused suspicion or even fear. Henry George found a similar situation in Ireland when he arrived there some months before McHugh went to Skye. There, he said in a letter to Patrick Ford, 'I can't well describe to you the reign of terror I found here, and the difficulty... of getting at the truth about things.'<sup>87</sup> The people, George found, were simply too afraid to talk.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> HRA, KEP/D123/2 (e), Fraser to MacDonald, 30 May 1882.

<sup>87</sup> R. Kee, *The Laurel and the Ivy: The story of Charles Stewart Parnell and Irish Nationalism* (Harmondsworth, 1993), 410; Barker, *Henry George*, 346

<sup>88</sup> A similar situation appeared to prevail in Glendale, where delegates to the Napier Commission in 1883 attempted to minimise the extent of the agitation – denying both the existence of an organised 'Land League', and of 'boycotting' in the area. (*Napier Commission*, qq. 6912, 6913, 6921, 7419). John Campbell of Hamara, with whom McHugh and Murdoch had stayed whilst in Glendale, did not deny the Irishman's presence, saying that 'he was there to enlighten the people on something, but I could not understand what he was saying'. (*Napier Commission*, q. 7219). Contrary to Davitt's later claim, Campbell stated that McHugh's inability to speak Gaelic meant that only a few gathered to hear him speak. (*Napier Commission*, q. 7220, 7221, 7230). Confusingly, however, Campbell went on to give details of what McHugh was speaking about: 'He was telling the public to plead for good justice, and to get more land, and advising them that they were not to break the law.' (*Napier Commission*, q. 7222). Donald MacDonald – 'Tormore' – told Lord Napier that he could scarcely believe the evidence of the Glendale men: 'I am extremely sorry to find that the people denied the existence of a land league, and a

John Murdoch, when he first began his attempt to politicise the issue of land in the Highlands, had travelled to the Outer Hebrides. In spite of the poor state of the crofts in South Uist, for example, he found that many of the crofters still owned portraits of the landlord, John Gordon, even though he was an absentee. In attempting to stir the crofters, he met with little response.<sup>89</sup> After some perseverance, he found a 'break in this ice of repression', and it is possible that McHugh – a similarly dogged character, may have needed to bide his time with some of the crofters in Skye.

This silence in relation to Ireland, or Irish agitators, might also be considered in the light of the presence on Skye in 1882-3 of not only McHugh, but also Murdoch and Alexander McKenzie, part of whose task was to prime the crofters in advance of the Napier Commission's arrival on the island in May 1883.<sup>90</sup> The uniformity of many of the crofters' answers before the Commission, especially evident in the many prepared statements, indicates that there was a degree of success in the agitators' preparation.<sup>91</sup> With Ireland being such a controversial topic at the time, it is likely that even enthusiasts such as John Murdoch would be sensitive to alienating public opinion which, as illustrated by the 'Braes' incident, finally seemed to be turning towards the crofters.<sup>92</sup> With the Commission offering the hope of genuine concessions, it was vital that nothing should be done to give opponents the opportunity to tar the crofters with a 'Fenian' brush. With even Glasgow-Irish supporters playing down the link between

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knowledge of the notices which were being put up... As to their being bound by a league, there is plenty of evidence to prove that they said and believed that they were under such a bond, for they repeatedly said to me that they were so, and sworn to stand by each other against all law and against all force until their demands were dealt with.' (*Napier Commission*, q. 9470)

<sup>89</sup> J. Hunter, *For the People's Cause: From the writings of John Murdoch* (Edinburgh, 1986), 150. Murdoch wrote that 'All this time the poor people in South Uist were in such a state of slavish fear that I never got a meeting – although I often tried and visited the island repeatedly. The first break in this ice of repression was effected rather curiously. On one occasion I had ranged from Barra to Carnan but could not get a dozen men to listen. Just as I was nearing the ford at Carnan to cross into Benbecula, a subscriber to *The Highlander* told me that, down at Iochdar, there was a gathering of people repairing a fold and that if I went I could address them. I took the hint, put off my shoes and stockings and hurried down through pools and over streams and leaped in among them. They could not well run away from their work and they were at my disposal.'

<sup>90</sup> See, e.g., *Napier Commission*, q. 9473

<sup>91</sup> Compare the statements when the Commission reached Uig (10 May 1883), for example: See *Napier Commission*, qq. 1171 (D. Ross), 1895 (A. McInnes), 1987 (D. McQueen)

<sup>92</sup> Murdoch wrote in the *Irish World* that an 'adroit attempt was made to make this an Irish Land League affair, and so stamp it out with the odium borrowed from the landlord press in relation to the Irish agitation'. *Irish World*, 15 Jul. 1882

the Highlands and Ireland, apart from in the pages of the *Irish World*, the Irish activity in Scotland can again be seen to be more subtle than previously suggested.

Three other points need to be made about the police report. Firstly, even if it is accepted that McHugh had not yet visited the districts investigated by MacDonald, it does not mean that he did not go there subsequently. It is a problem of the sources inasmuch as many of the reports of McHugh being in Kilmuir are rather unspecific, and it is possible that he only appeared in places like Staffin and Idrigill after MacDonald had gone back to Portree.<sup>93</sup> Secondly, even if the idea that McHugh was reviled in Kilmuir is to be believed, this does not constitute grounds for claiming that people in other parts of Skye thought in the same way.<sup>94</sup> By the time of MacDonald's investigation, the press had generally started to report the Land League envoy in an unfavourable way, but in the previous months it was widely reported that his talks had been very popular in Glendale and other parts of the island. Certainly, the subsequent months saw more serious agitation in Glendale than in Kilmuir, and there is a danger in taking the crofters of Skye to be acting as a united body at this stage. Thirdly, the effect of the fishing season must be considered. Contrary to the opinion of the Stenscholl correspondent, who believed that McHugh was only present as 'no Highlander could be found to do the job', agitators amongst the local tenantry had already given Fraser cause for concern. Arriving at Portree on board the 'Skyeman' steamer at the beginning of April, he had had a conversation with Malcolm Matheson, the miller at Tote, who, Fraser discovered, had 'very advanced notions as to the land and tenants.' He asked his factor, Alexander Macdonald, to find out if Matheson had had anything to do with the recent agitation at Glenhinnisdale.<sup>95</sup> At the time McHugh

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<sup>93</sup> If, for example, the report that McHugh had been in the area of Uig, and had intended to visit the Quiraing but was called away on urgent business to Portree, is to be dated to the start of July, this would be consistent with the envoy having been in Earlish, but not Staffin or Stenscholl. He was certainly present in Kilmuir by July 10<sup>th</sup> at the very latest (*Northern Chronicle*, 12 Jul. 1882).

<sup>94</sup> MacDonald reported that McHugh was to have spoken to a meeting in Earlish on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July, but that only one man turned up. Whether this incident was embellished to become the tale of the Free Church minister's widow is not clear, nor, alternatively, whether the 'urgent business' which called McHugh back to Portree meant that he had to cancel the full meeting after brief discussion with just one or two crofters. Another remarkable incident was said to have taken place in the house of Archibald Gillies, cattle dealer and crofter, in Earlish. McHugh had visited the croft the previous Saturday (2<sup>nd</sup> July), but according to Macdonald, 'when he [McHugh] came in [the family] went to the other end of the house and left him alone in the kitchen, and after being so left for a time, he left having at the same time handed to a little girl a few pamphlets...' Again, it might be considered that a family caught by a policeman in possession of the pamphlets would deny actually having taken them voluntarily, preferring to state that an innocent young girl had them thrust upon her.

<sup>95</sup> HRA, KEP D123/2 (e), Fraser to MacDonald, 5 Apr. 1882.



visited the region, however, many of the younger men – those who had been, and would be, ‘ringleaders’ of the local agitation, were away in various places for fishing.<sup>96</sup> Ivory had been informed that all would be quiet ‘until the men get back from the Irish fishings. What will be done then... depends on the state of Ireland.’<sup>97</sup>

The greatest factor working against McHugh, according to this MacDonald’s report, was that he was a Roman Catholic. Several people are reported to have called him a ‘trusdair’ – dirty fellow – and MacDonald, after speaking to the catechist at Earlish, stated that ‘I could see that his being a Roman Catholic was very much against him.’ This appeared to satisfy both Sheriff Ivory, and many later writers, that McHugh had been ineffective, and lot of the subsequent writing which refers to McHugh has taken this piece of evidence, a single statement from one person on the island recorded by the police – and used it rather uncritically.<sup>98</sup>

There may well have been some suspicion against Catholics on the island, but this need not necessarily have been a barrier to success for McHugh. His speech at Dunvegan, where he was described as speaking about ‘the Fenian movement’, although most likely about the Irish Land League agitation, seemed to be well received at the time. The fishermen of Skye were well used to visiting Ireland, as has been documented, so the appearance of McHugh can hardly have been a shock to them.<sup>99</sup> The very fact that Michael Davitt was received like a hero in the Highlands

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<sup>96</sup> Even though Fraser was constantly urging an increase in the police force at this time, most reports coming from Kilmuir was that it was keeping quiet, although people were still refusing to pay their rents. SRO, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/3, 24 Apr. 1882, Anderson to Ivory; 28 Apr. 1882, Spiers to Ivory; GD1/36/1/5, 1 Jun. 1882, Fraser to Ivory; 4 Jun. 1882, Spiers to Ivory; 7 Jun. 1882, Spiers to Ivory (‘The Kilmuir lot seem quiet. so perhaps it is no use sending another PC to Stenscholl. The PC at Uig is complaining that he has nothing to do.’); 25 Jun. 1882, Spiers to Ivory; GD1/36/1/7, 31 Aug. 1882, MacVicar to Ivory.

<sup>97</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/4, 21 May 1882, MacPherson to Ivory

<sup>98</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/6, 10 Jul. 1882, Spiers to Ivory – Spiers was happy to tell Ivory that ‘the people don’t believe in [McHugh]’ after reading MacDonald’s report; For secondary sources, see J. Hunter, ‘The Politics of Highland Land Reform, 1873-1895’, *Scottish Historical Review*, liii (1974), 49; MacPhail, *Crofters’ War*, 46; Harding, ‘John Murdoch, Michael Davitt and the Land Question’, 156

<sup>99</sup> Later in the year, P.L. Ross of Plockton stated that ‘...Perhaps, however, the suggestion that so many of the Skye fishermen attending Land League meetings in Kinsale may be more at the bottom of this mischief.’ Clearly it was not an incredible suggestion that Presbyterian Skye fishermen had been fraternising with Catholic Irishmen. *Oban Times*, 9 Sep. 1882. Michael Davitt himself, in a letter to the *Irish World* from Inverness in November 1882, stressed the links between the fishermen of Skye and the Kinsale fishing. He neglected to mention McHugh’s influence, even though – with Davitt not visiting Skye after his speech in Inverness as planned – the letter bore the unmistakable influence of McHugh. This is consistent with the attempt at the time to make it appear as if the Highlanders had



later, and the fact that Donald MacFarlane was elected as member for Argyll in 1885, show that the crofters were not in any way bigots, repelled by land league ideas simply because they were propagated by Catholics. Indeed, the National Land League had wanted to embrace Protestants in Ireland, and seemed at one time to be gaining some success.<sup>100</sup> Particularly in the early stages of the agitation, however, it would be surprising if there was not anti-Catholic feeling among some of the community.

McHugh by no means disappeared from the Highland scene after his return from Skye to Glasgow. He helped organise, along with John Ferguson, Davitt's 1882 Scottish tour, especially the meeting at Inverness, which he chaired. There, negative press comment continued to belittle the reformers. The following Gaelic 'discussion' between various fictitious protagonists appeared in the *Northern Chronicle* after Davitt came north.

*Faodaidh iad gun teagamh, ionnsuidh a thoir air cur an aghaidh  
lagh na Rioghachd airson uine ghearr, ach cha'n fhada gus am bi  
fios co is treise, agus feuch ciod e ni Davitt no McHugh dhoibh d'ar  
a thig sin!*

McHugh, in particular, was dismissed as insignificant:

*Cha'n eil mi gabhail iongantas idir ged is e Mac-Who (McHugh)  
thug iad mar ainm air-cha'n eil fhios domhsa co dha da'm mac e,  
ach a mhain gur bheil mi a cluinntinn gur e Eirionach a th'ann.  
Cha'n eil iomradh no eachdraidh agum air gus 'n do landig e'm  
Port-Rìgh o chionn coig no sè mhiosan<sup>101</sup>*

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started their agitation without any direct external influence. 'This going-in-a-body-to-demand-your-rights policy was taught to the crofters by their sons, who were visiting the coast of Ireland, in the fishery trade, during the Land League agitation, and had learned that the lesson of "organised demand" was the best way by which to teach landlords and factors their duties to tenantry.' *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882.

<sup>100</sup> For example, see Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 432. Davitt presided over a Land League meeting in Dublin, 30 Nov. 1880, where he was told of increasing Orange and Protestant support. Even Protestant farmers were becoming Land League members.

<sup>101</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 22 Nov. 1882: 'They can undoubtedly set about opposing the law of the Kingdom for a short while, but it won't be long until it is known who is strongest, and see what Davitt or McHugh will do for them when that happens... I am not at all surprised that he is called Mac-Who (McHugh) that they called him – I have no idea who on earth he is, except that I hear he is an Irishman. I never heard tell of him until he landed in Portree five or six months ago.' I am indebted to Dr. R. ó Maolalaigh, Department of Celtic, Edinburgh University, for this translation.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that Tory or landlord opinion in the 1880s should not only attempt to minimise the influence of the Irish land agitation in the hope of preventing a parallel movement growing up in Britain, but also that they should seek to blame external factors for the arousal of a crofting community they had long perceived as being docile. It appears, though, that the crofters were a receptive audience to Edward McHugh from the beginning, and a report taken from the *London Echo*, which appeared in the *John O' Groat Journal* in April 1882, asserted that 'the grievance and the discontent existed long before the Land League was ever heard of', helps back this up.<sup>102</sup>

And yet, in spite of what the reports were suggesting, and the way in which McHugh has been seen as a failure in subsequent historiography, the envoy himself was in a very positive frame of mind when discussing his visit to Skye.

### **Optimism in the face of alleged threats**

Despite McHugh now being part of a group, including Davitt, who were in many ways set against the Parnellites after the 'Kilmainham Treaty', his progress was still being monitored by the Irish Nationalists in the House of Commons. Joseph Biggar, apparently concerned about McHugh's safety, asked the Government if it:

Had witnessed the language of Anderson, Laird of Lochaber, at a meeting of landlords in Inverness, reported to have said 'an Irish fellow called McHugh is going around teaching and he would deal very summarily with him. He would take him down and drown him.' Provost Ross of Dingwall said that the people of Forres were prepared to dip the land league agent into the sea if he set foot on the island.<sup>103</sup>

Whilst this displays that Biggar's research was not always the most thorough (confusing Harris with Forres, for example, and also seeming to misunderstand – perhaps wilfully – that this was an after dinner routine by 'Anderson of Lochdu' at the Inverness Caledonian Hotel), it shows how the Land League, and Irish Nationalist MPs, were always keen to make capital from alleged heavy-handedness on the part of

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<sup>102</sup> *John O' Groat Journal*, 27 Apr. 1882

<sup>103</sup> *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., cclxxii, Col. 1960, 27 Jul. 1882. The *Northern Chronicle* dismissed Biggar's words, stating that 'the remarks so grotesquely referred to, were made at the Caledonian Hotel "ordinary" on the Friday of the wool market.' *Northern Chronicle* 2 Aug. 1882

the authorities. It was Biggar, after all, who repeatedly had asked if the police sent to deal with the 'Battle of the Braes' had been carrying revolvers.<sup>104</sup> In spite of J.B. Balfour's somewhat ambivalent reassurance to Biggar that McHugh was in no danger as long as he himself did not violate the law, this apparently jocular comment was played up with all the indignation John Murdoch could muster when he related the tale to his Irish-American audience.<sup>105</sup>

So from one apparently harmless, if ill-judged, speech, the land reformers were able to use the amenable parts of the press to their advantage, and the picture painted was of an heroic McHugh defying death to bring his message to the grateful crofters. This impression certainly had a long life, with the *Freeman's Journal* remembering in 1915 of how:

The older generation will recall, the [crofter] agitation was marked by many exciting episodes, and Mr. McHugh on more than one occasion ran considerable personal risks in defiance of the forces which the landlords brought to their aid.<sup>106</sup>

Spiers' early frustrations about being unable to tackle McHugh because he 'kept within the law' remained true for the duration of the stay, however. The most inciteful thing he seems to have done was to support the assertion that the law was not always synonymous with justice. Sergeant Malcolm MacDonald's report to Ivory also admitted that 'I could not find that McHugh advised [ Roderick McNeil, crofter at Earlish] to attempt to deforce the law further than to decline paying but the first rents £2.'<sup>107</sup>

In spite of later being referred to as 'an almost violent democrat, insistent at all costs upon the rights and advancement of men', there is no hint of his inciting violence

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<sup>104</sup> *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., cclxviii, Col. 1245, 24 Apr. 1882; 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., cclxviii, Col. 1565, 27 Apr. 1882; 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., cclxix, Col. 94, 4 May 1882. It is possible that Biggar's comments were transcribed wrongly in *Hansard*.

<sup>105</sup> *Irish World*, 19 Aug. 1882. Explaining that the publicity of this case in Skye would persuade the British public that the violence they read about daily in Ireland was mainly instigated by the authorities, Murdoch them moved on to tell of how a 'Volunteer Officer' in Portree 'expressed his regret that Mr. McHugh had not been dipped into the sea', and that 'the chief magistrate of the town of Dingwall, who, like the last mentioned volunteer officer is a land grabber, indulged at a public dinner in the same sort of murderous expressions... another magistrate and petty landlord said he would drown McHugh.'

<sup>106</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Apr. 1915

<sup>107</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/6, Macdonald to Ivory, 6 Jul. 1882

among the crofters in any of his speeches, preferring to rely on 'his great cogency and eloquence' to persuade his audience of the truth of his message.<sup>108</sup> Certainly, the claim of the Bracadale resident that he was 'paid to teach Fenianism' can be dismissed.<sup>109</sup> Whilst there is a record of him advocating non-payment of high rents during his visits to Kilmuir, this was no more than had already been happening in parts of the island already.

Certainly, the evidence of his success in speaking about other causes to which McHugh adhered during the rest of his life lend credence to John Murdoch's claim that:

Among the peasantry of Skye Mr. McHugh has been received in the most kind and hospitable manner, and he carries with him the best wishes of all the peasantry that have seen him.<sup>110</sup>

McHugh himself seems to have been delighted with the progress that had been made. Having been on the island for some two and a half months, he wrote from the Portree Hotel on July 12<sup>th</sup> that:

Landlords and lawyers are rushing from pillar to post for relief. The people who for years have been trampled in the dust are now standing 'shoulder to shoulder' looking defiance into the face of their hereditary oppressors... The movement is advancing by leaps and bounds all over the north and west. I cannot speak personally of the south, but I am told that the good work goes bravely on, and the newspapers are incessant in their abuse.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 15 Apr. 1915

<sup>109</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 14 Jun. 1882

<sup>110</sup> *Irish World*, 19 Aug. 1882

<sup>111</sup> In the same communication to Patrick Ford, continuing to talk up his progress for American consumption, McHugh recounted a meeting with a certain Aberdeenshire farmer, who had come to Skye to see for himself the condition of the crofters. This meeting had particularly enthused the Land League envoy, as an article from the *Irish World* on land reform had left the farmer 'quivering with excitement', so much so that he took out a three month subscription 'Furthermore', continued McHugh, 'a copy of George's pamphlet reached him in Aberdeen from Skye. He says since he read it he has kept it "going about doing good like the twelve apostles." The *Executive* of the Aberdeen Alliance have already reached the stage of "The Land for the People". The rank and file are *scarcely* so advanced.' The presence of a fairly radical Liberal newspaper, the *Aberdeen Free Press*, in the city no doubt helped the reformers' cause in Aberdeen and north-east Scotland, but again it is possible to see McHugh as having had an influence. *Irish World*, 12 Aug. 1882; TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9535, Sat. 28 Oct. 1882

While McHugh had been on Skye, not only had Davitt been released from prison, he, too, had begun a vigorous campaign in the cause of land nationalisation, and would have been well aware of his friend's activity in the north. McHugh's enthusiasm for how well the cause was advancing also seems somewhat uncharacteristic, suggesting that he believed the message of Henry George and the other propagandists had been accepted to a greater degree than he had believed possible when he set out for Skye.<sup>112</sup>

The true success of McHugh's visit to Skye could only be measured later, in the context of further visits to the Highlands by other land reformers such as Michael Davitt, Henry George himself, and James Shaw Maxwell, and by the fact that within a few months of his arriving on Skye the agitation had spread throughout almost the whole island, and was especially strong in Glendale.<sup>113</sup>

In 1884, a leading article in the *Northern Chronicle* bracketed McHugh not only with Davitt and George, as might be expected, but also with Karl Marx and the 'thoroughgoing Nihilists'.

The poor crofters of the Western Isles have been taught to expect impossible gifts from the Government, and some of them have become very different from their former patient selves. They had agitators of the Irish type with them, to whom at first they were not very willing to listen. But when they found that bodies like the Highland Land Law Reform Association of London, and other similar bodies were teaching them similar lessons with MacHugh, although in very different words, they naturally began to think that they could take by violence some sort of heaven in their own overcrowded lands.<sup>114</sup>

Eighteen months after McHugh's presence on Skye, therefore, even the Tory press was beginning to admit that he had had a long term significance. Nevertheless, the leader-writer still contradicted what his own newspaper had reported in May 1882

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<sup>112</sup> Indeed, it was recorded later that 'if he were asked how he got on at the close of some campaign, he would smile and say: "oh, not so bad", and more than likely commence how he had to meet and overcome some organised and inane opposition. The one inference to be drawn from his explanation was that he could very well have been working for advantage in some other quarry. A visit to the area affected would tell another tale. The mission had been an overwhelming success; for days and weeks the place had been ringing with conversations and discussions on the land question, on the subject of how wealth was produced and how distributed.' *Land Values*, May 1915

<sup>113</sup> See, e.g., *Oban Times*, 18 Nov. 1882

<sup>114</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 23 Jan. 1884



about the immediate effectiveness of the envoy's words on those 'poor crofters', and also failed to recognise that McHugh's language had not been couched in violent terms, certainly no more 'violent' than Henry George, the HLLRA, or any other reformer or reform organisation. The hope still persisted, it seems, that the LLGB, though having passed out of existence by this time, could be tarred with the brush of Fenianism.

A demonstration of the universality of McHugh's message was given soon after he had returned to Glasgow. On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1882, he addressed an 'enthusiastic demonstration' of – admittedly mainly Irish – working men in Broxburn Town Hall, in West Lothian. Although the chairman of the meeting, a Mr. Masterson of Edinburgh, referred in his introductory remarks to the 'struggle' going on in Ireland, McHugh's lecture was again a classic exposition of his beliefs, and little changed for this audience of urban workers from his addresses to the rural population of Skye. In reference to his contention that the land was the God-given right of the people, McHugh harked back to recent experience:

A landlord in Skye once told him that it was true that the land belonged to the people, but they must pay the rent to the landlord... He (the speaker) said that if the land belongs to the people, the profit resulting from its use must be applied to the purposes of its owners, the whole people. To say that the land belongs to the people, and then turn round and say that the landlord must get the rent is the most absurd proposition in the English language.<sup>115</sup>

And this doctrine was presented by McHugh as the 'doctrine of the league – to have the rent or tax on land paid into the purse of the whole people.' Having explained the benefits of the doctrine for the workers of Broxburn, and called for those present to support the agitation whole-heartedly, McHugh again showed his delight at the progress of the land issue in the country he felt was his responsibility:

Allow me to express my opinion that the land question is understood by the land leaguers of Scotland than it is even in Ireland, and that the conviction is fast taking hold of the people here that the time is coming when we shall have an agitation in Scotland that will sweep over its whole face. That is the tendency of thought today.

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<sup>115</sup> *Irish World*, 30 Sep. 1882

## Conclusion

T.W. Moody referred to John Ferguson and Richard McGhee as ‘the most consistent supporters of Davitt’s land and labour policy in Britain.’<sup>116</sup> McHugh certainly deserves to stand alongside his friends in this respect. Whilst not as visible in terms of major set-piece events - McHugh was often to be seen on the platform at Irish and Labour meetings in and around Glasgow, perhaps giving a vote of thanks to the speaker – he was an indefatigable agitator on behalf of the land nationalisation theories of Henry George and, subsequently, Michael Davitt.

Those who have described McHugh’s visit of 1882 as a failure or as a waste of time, have tended to look at it either in isolation, or in an incorrect context. McHugh was not in Skye to convert the crofters to Roman Catholicism, nor indeed to persuade them of the justice of Irish Home Rule. He was not ‘paid to teach Fenianism.’ He was there, simply, to promote radical reform of the land laws. He was also part of a wider movement, and he paved the way for Michael Davitt, Henry George and others to speak to receptive audiences later on. George, in particular, was received much more enthusiastically in Scotland than he was in Ireland. Critics who have portrayed McHugh as a failure have not gone on to explain convincingly why they have done so. Change would not occur overnight, and would not be of a violent nature, in spite of the fears of many contemporaries. A start had to be made, however, and McHugh, along with John Murdoch, was there to make it. Yet while Murdoch has been almost universally feted for his contribution to the Highland ‘people’s cause’, his companion has scarcely been acknowledged in recent times.

The presence of McHugh on Skye intensified debate on the land question both inside and outside the Highlands and Islands. Furthermore, Skye was an area where the inequitable distribution of the land and its results was clearly visible, thus making it, like Ireland, an appropriate place to preach the ideas of *Progress and Poverty*. With most Irishmen now concentrating on nationalism and Parnellism, the Highlands

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<sup>116</sup> T.W. Moody, ‘Michael Davitt and the British Labour Movement, 1882-1906’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ser. iii (1953), 62. Moody does, however, later give a brief mention to McHugh in the context of his Trade Union activities.

enabled Georgites to get a foothold in Scotland, whilst striving to gain respect in the cities.<sup>117</sup>

McHugh failed in that respect that, whilst he was clearly attempting to base a solution to the land question on universal truths, the crofters still concentrated more on the specifics of Highland history, and their restoration of perceived lost rights.<sup>118</sup> When putting their case to the Napier Commission, furthermore, there was not a single request amongst the Skye crofters for land nationalisation, with almost all of the delegates requesting an amended version of the Irish '3 F's', including an extra demand for increased holdings.<sup>119</sup> Again it must be considered, however, that the crofters knew that this was an excellent opportunity to gain concessions, and to present their grievances to a Britain wide audience, and many of their statements seem to have been, at the very least, assisted by John Murdoch or Alexander MacKenzie.

Whilst MacKenzie was certainly on the moderate wing of the reform movement in the Highlands, deprecating close involvement with Ireland and also land nationalisation, John Murdoch also surely realised that the best way to gain some degree of land reform in 1883 was to present moderate demands, seemingly based on the unjust removal of ancient rights. Although Murdoch believed, like McHugh, that a much more radical overhaul of the land laws was required not just in the Highlands, but throughout the British Isles, the Napier Commission was probably the wrong forum for airing such advanced views. The agitation was too young, and, indeed, public fear of 'communism', or 'nihilism' were, as will be seen, almost as strong as fear of 'Fenianism'.

Michael Davitt would shortly afterwards visit Scotland to present the similar views as McHugh, but to wider audiences. The best receptions he received were in Inverness and Aberdeen, both of which places had been influenced by McHugh's activity in Skye. As will be seen in the following chapter, it was the excellent reception Davitt

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<sup>117</sup> A contemporary comment from Henry George claimed that 'two-thirds of the population of Scotland now live in towns. It is not until these begin to realise their own direct interest in the settlement of the land question that the movement will reach the strength of which it is capable'. *Irish World*, 20 May 1882

<sup>118</sup> For examples, see *Napier Commission*, qq. 888, 1064, 1198, 1297, 1411, 1556, 1824, 1989, 2052, 2143

<sup>119</sup> Taking only the sitting at Uig, for example, very many examples of this can be seen. *Napier Commission*, qq. 1461, 1566, 1771, 1895, 1987

received in Scotland for his new ideas that kept his spirits up in the face of apathy from his native land. In 1884 and 1885, Henry George himself would tour the Highlands, and received a better reception in the region than anywhere else in his British Isles tour. Therefore, whilst the crofters did not, eventually, embrace the Single Tax, or even land purchase, to any great degree, the larger picture is somewhat different.<sup>120</sup>

This action on the part of George's followers did not treat the Highlands as a separate entity, and regarded the whole of Britain and Ireland as requiring nationalisation of the land. Soon after McHugh had been agitating on Skye, however, Angus Sutherland commenced a similar programme of 'education' in his native county, Sutherlandshire. It is interesting to note that, although outsiders such as McHugh and Davitt did not alter their essential message for Highland audiences, and indeed the examples of the rapacity of Highland landlordism which were used at such meetings were also given to audiences throughout Britain, Angus Sutherland carried an essentially similar message. As a native Highlander, and one who had been closely involved in the politicisation of urban Gaels, Sutherland had his finger on the pulse of Highland opinion perhaps more than McHugh or Davitt. He felt that his ambition, to organise and politicise the crofters of Sutherlandshire, could best be fulfilled by carrying an extremely radical – Georgite – message. If the benefit of hindsight allows us to see that the Single Tax movement was never as strong in the Highlands as in other parts of Scotland, especially the Central Belt, it certainly seems that Angus Sutherland was quite prepared to tackle the hegemony of the ducal Sutherland family on a Single Tax platform. The following chapter will discuss in more detail the messages brought to the Highlands by Michael Davitt, Angus Sutherland and Henry George between 1882 and 1884, and what they were hoping to achieve through their respective missions. The importance of McHugh's presence on Skye in 1882, and his presentation of Georgite ideas, can only be properly evaluated in the light of this subsequent activity.

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<sup>120</sup> One possible example of a demand in front of the Napier Commission for a peasant proprietary came from John Gillies, who stated at Uig not only that he wanted to be treated like the Irish, but that he wanted the 'land to themselves', rather than on a lease. *Napier Commission*, qq. 1461-2

## CHAPTER FOUR: LAND AGITATION IN SCOTLAND – THE CONTRASTING CASES OF MICHAEL DAVITT, HENRY GEORGE AND ANGUS SUTHERLAND

*Cuideachan Ghlaschu 's Dhun Eideann,  
Cuideachan Eirinn 's Lunnainn leinn;  
Dùthaich is baile is chèile,  
Muinntir tìr chèin – 's bidh a'bhuid orra.*<sup>1</sup>

'MacL.', 1884

The preceding chapter detailed the activity of Edward McHugh on Skye in 1882, a visit which, as has been noted, paved the way for several other tours by Georgite land reformers in the region. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the activity which followed on from McHugh's visit, beginning with the tour of Michael Davitt to Scotland in 1882, and the attention that he paid to the Scottish agitation in subsequent years. It will discuss the reasons Davitt had for concentrating on Scotland, and the Scottish Highlands in 1882, and will again set into context the activity of the former Irish Land Leaguers in Glasgow, such as John Ferguson. It will become clear not only that such activity was not following an Irish nationalist agenda, but that there was an increasing, and mutual, antipathy between the 'Parnellite' Irish nationalists, and the radicals, some of whom appear to have placed their faith more in advanced Liberals such as Joseph Chamberlain, than Parnell. Such tension resulted in frequent, and often unconvincing, assertions of unity within the Irish movement, especially from Davitt.

Alongside John Ferguson, Davitt hoped to break down prejudice against Irishmen in Scotland, for only then, through a united action amongst the working classes of the towns and cities, could true social reform become a reality.<sup>2</sup> The reasons why Davitt continued to look more to Scotland than Ireland for this reform will be examined in detail throughout this chapter. Throughout this chapter, it will be noted that reformers

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from 'Moladh Henry Seòras' ('In Praise of Henry George'), by 'MacL.' This stanza translates as 'The societies of Glasgow and Edinburgh/ the societies of Ireland and London support us/ town and country stand together/ along with the people of foreign lands – and results will follow.' *Oban Times*, 13 Dec. 1884; D. Meek, *Tuath Is Tighearna: Tenants and Landlords* (Edinburgh 1995), 128. See below, 170, for a discussion of the importance of this poem.

<sup>2</sup> Davitt had also shown frustration at the former Land League's lack of concern for winning the hearts and minds of the British people. He claimed that if the Land League had only realised the power of public opinion, they would have established a press office in London, and organised more promotional meetings. T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), 518



– Irish or otherwise – in the Highlands did not yet feel free to associate the land movement there with that in Ireland. Some radical newspaper correspondents continued the work of linking these two ‘oppressed Celtic peoples’, but in general the reformers themselves wanted to stress the distinct nature of the Scottish agitation.

Arguably the biggest boost for the Single Tax movement in Scotland during the 1880s, was the arrival of Henry George himself. As part of promotional tours of Britain and Ireland, George made several speeches throughout the Highlands, notably on Skye, in 1884 and 1885. Although George is not one of the principal characters in this thesis, his influence on McHugh, Davitt and Sutherland was such that it is necessary to consider briefly what he was trying to achieve by visiting the Highlands, what sort of reception he was given, and what legacy, if any, he left.

The final part of this chapter will examine the activity of Angus Sutherland, who, in 1882, engaged in a similar campaign in Sutherlandshire as Edward McHugh had in Skye. He set about trying to inform the crofters and workers of the region on the land issue, and – unlike Davitt and McHugh, who were ‘outsiders’ in the Highlands with many interests in other areas – Sutherland was able to concentrate his attention on one area for a long period of time. Unlike McHugh, and vitally for the land reform campaign in Sutherlandshire in the second part of the 1880s, Sutherland appears to have begun a much more concerted effort to organise the crofters of his native county. Furthermore, whereas the Skye crofters were prepared by John Murdoch and Alexander MacKenzie in advance of the Napier Commission’s visit to the island, Sutherland not only undertook a similar task, but also spoke before the commission himself, giving historians some insight into his mindset relating to landlordism.

### **Michael Davitt and Land Nationalisation**

Davitt in 1882 ‘quickly recognised that both Ireland and Irish America were stony ground for his land nationalisation gospel, but for the next few years he continued to preach it in England and Scotland, where he helped to promote the cause of radical reform of the land laws.’<sup>3</sup> All the leading Radicals – not least Davitt and George – seemed to realise that Scotland was at this stage, to quote George, ‘riper on the whole

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<sup>3</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 539

than England', and certainly Ireland, for land and social reform.<sup>4</sup> The actions of the Glasgow-based Irishmen: John Ferguson, Richard McGhee and Edward McHugh, helped in no small measure to bring about such a state of affairs. Speaking in an interview in 1882, Davitt stressed the importance of Ferguson to the growth of a land movement in Scotland. Even at that stage, the Ulsterman was considered a veteran reformer.<sup>5</sup>

Davitt had been brought news of the 1881 Irish Land Act by Archbishop Croke of Dublin whilst in Portland prison, on the 8<sup>th</sup> September. He recorded in his prison journal that the act would only flood Ireland with litigation and leave the land question where it was.<sup>6</sup> Although he was later to admit that he and other leaders of the land agitation had underestimated the importance of the Land Act, and that it passed 'a sentence of death by slow processes against Irish Landlordism' the immediate impact of the act was to make him reassess his philosophy on peasant proprietorship.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst the 'New Departure' had witnessed an effective fusion of Fenian Republicanism, parliamentary action and agrarian agitation, there arose signs of tensions in the alliance after the passing of the 1881 Land Act. For the purposes of this paper, the most important dissent was that between Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell. The Act granted the '3 F's' of fixity of tenure, free sale, and fair rents, which Irish smallholders had long seen as their natural right.<sup>8</sup> A mechanism was set up for determining a fair rent, based upon a system of land courts which would arbitrate between landlords and tenants, fixing an appropriate rate. The tenant was granted fixity of tenure, so long as the rent was paid, and the right to sell the land was fully granted, in a clarification of the 1870 Act.

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<sup>4</sup> *Oban Times*, 29 Mar. 1884

<sup>5</sup> 'While speaking of Scotland', said Davitt, 'I must not forget to mention one of the oldest Irish land reformers now living. John Ferguson of Glasgow, has for years kept the land issue before the Scottish people. Another fact, which is significant, is, that in the Land League of Great Britain there are many English and Scotch members, and their support of the principles involved is as hearty and sincere as that of any Irishman living. The Highlanders of the Western Islands and North of Scotland are now stirring for themselves.' D.B. Cashman, *The Life of Michael Davitt, founder of the National Land League, to which is added The Secret History of the Land League, by Michael Davitt* (London, 1882), 227. This quotation is taken from the appendix, an interview with Davitt from the *New York World*.

<sup>6</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 448

<sup>7</sup> M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland: or, the Story of the Land League Revolution* (London & New York, 1904), 317

<sup>8</sup> P. Bull, *Land and Nationalism – A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin, 1996), 58-59.

The Land Court had been flooded with applications from its inception, and by the time Parnell, John Dillon, and James O’Kelly were freed from captivity in Kilmainham, there had been 75,000 applications. Only 7% had been heard but 90% of these had seen a reduction in rent.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of May 1882, under the so-called ‘Kilmainham Treaty’, Gladstone promised to free the suspects and also extend the benefits of the 1881 Act in return for Parnell’s pledge to abandon the Land War and support for the Liberals over the Home Rule issue. For Parnell, the Land War was over. The radicals in the Irish nationalist movement, however, wanted the total abolition of landlordism, and Davitt emerged as a leader of this wing. For both Davitt and Parnell, the Kilmainham Treaty began new periods in their careers. For Davitt, as Moody notes, ‘it ensured not only his release from Portland but also his return to Irish politics in circumstances in which he was certain to be opposed to Parnell and the majority of nationalists...’<sup>10</sup>

Given these circumstances, Davitt’s concentration on pan-British working class politics, although he also fought for land nationalisation in Ireland, was a natural progression. It is sometimes overlooked that whilst Davitt was from an agrarian background in Mayo, and his eviction in early life shaped his thinking on the land, he had also spent formative years in the heart of industrial Lancashire, where he was exposed to the harsh conditions faced by workers in factories. Therefore, his priorities were different from those of many nationalists.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Davitt’s biographer plays down the split with Parnell, but does accept the practicality of turning with the land nationalisation doctrine to Britain, a place where Henry George and his writings were gaining acceptance among radicals and reformers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> R. Kee, *The Laurel and the Ivy: The Story of Charles Stewart Parnell and Irish Nationalism* (Harmondsworth, 1993), 444; O’Brien, O’Kelly, Dillon and Parnell had been arrested under coercive measures over the ‘No-Rent’ manifesto, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1881.

<sup>10</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 527

<sup>11</sup> Even as early as 1878, Davitt had stressed that Irish nationalism should be able to accommodate different shades of opinion: ‘With Thomas Francis Meagher I am of the opinion that “from the divisions of Irish society, the chief obstacles to Irish freedom arise”.’ *Flag of Ireland*, 8 Jun. 1878. Quoted in T.W. Moody, ‘The New Departure in Irish Politics, 1878-9’, in H.A. Cronne, T.W. Moody D.B. Quinn (eds.), *Essays in British and Irish History* (London, 1949)

<sup>12</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 539; ‘The “Treaty”’, wrote Moody, ‘ran counter to Davitt’s thinking on the land question... this rejection of the “Treaty” was, however, mitigated by Davitt’s reluctance to cause a breach with Parnell and by Parnell’s tact and consideration in handling Davitt. Davitt went on to give Parnell and immeasurable advantage when, at Liverpool on 6<sup>th</sup> June, he revealed in full detail that the abolition of landlordism meant ownership of the land by the state, not by the occupiers...The utter unacceptability of this doctrine both in Ireland and in Irish-America... ensured the failure of Davitt’s attempts to revive the Land War. Ireland and Irish-America were stony ground

His programme set out at the Rotunda in Dublin on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1880, under the chairmanship of John Ferguson, had strongly advocated peasant proprietorship, but now he had become convinced that the demise of landlordism could only be brought about by the total abolition of private ownership of the land.<sup>13</sup>

Although Davitt was not at liberty in April 1880, his land theories were heading in a similar direction as those of Ferguson. Davitt's spell in Portland prison was very important for the development of his ideology. When previously incarcerated in Dartmoor, Davitt educated himself with books from the prison library. This time, he was allowed to supplement these with books from outside, the only prohibitions being newspapers and current political works. 'He was already a well-read man when he found himself in Portland, and he used his opportunities there to deepen and extend his command of general literature, of social sciences, and of history.'<sup>14</sup> In particular, the thinking and writing of Henry George were to have a major new influence on his philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, one of the first things Davitt did after his release from Portland was to ask Parnell whether Land League funds could be used to produce a cheap edition of *Progress and Poverty* for the British and Irish markets.<sup>16</sup> Shortly afterwards, to Parnell's chagrin, Davitt chaired Henry George's lecture in Manchester, where he stated that he would continue the land war even though the Irish Parliamentary Party might be content with Peasant Proprietary.<sup>17</sup>

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for his land nationalisation gospel, though for the next few years he continued to preach it in England and Scotland, where he helped promote the cause of radical reform of the land laws'. See also *The Times*, 7 Jun. 1882 for Davitt's Liverpool speech.

<sup>13</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 374-5

<sup>14</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 504

<sup>15</sup> See A. O'Day, 'Revising the Diaspora', in D.G. Boyce & A. O'Day (eds.), *The Making of Modern Irish History*. O'Day describes T.W. Moody's review of Brown's *Irish American Nationalism* thus: 'Moody is especially interested in Brown's evidence that Michael Davitt's ideas about Irish Land were not formed while in prison, as previously believed, but forged on the anvil of Irish-American radicalism during his trip in 1878. Strangely, though, the doyen of Trinity historians does not comment on the potential implications of Brown's insight for nationalism in Ireland.' The earliest full length biography of Davitt was also keen to suggest that he had not simply taken George's ideas wholesale. Rather, it claimed that 'the influence of Henry George on Davitt was of the same character as that held by Lalor – collaborative not stimulative.' Sheehy-Skeffington further held that Davitt was already advocating land nationalisation on his 1878 American tour. See F. Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt: Revolutionary, Agitator and Labour Leader* (London, 1908), 75-76.

<sup>16</sup> T.N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (Philadelphia & New York, 1966), 125

<sup>17</sup> Speech in Manchester, 21 May 1882. See *The Times*, 22 May 1882

Davitt's espousal of land nationalisation seemed like something of a novelty to his contemporaries, but the kernel of the theory may have been implanted in Davitt's mind many years earlier. As a young boy he attended an address of the veteran Chartist, Ernest Jones, whilst the Davitt family were settled in Haslingden.<sup>18</sup> Amongst other radical proposals, the Chartist convention of 1851 proposed that 'the land is the inalienable inheritance of all mankind; monopoly is therefore repugnant to the laws of God and nature. The nationalisation of the land is the only true basis of a national prosperity'.<sup>19</sup> Davitt argued that it was impossible for a title to land to be vested in an individual, just as water or air could not be owned, and any landlord must, ultimately, have gained his land by illegal confiscation.<sup>20</sup>

Davitt's theories, moreover, certainly deviated from George's at times. Indeed, one of George's biographers has suggested that, whilst the American was delighted that Davitt had refused to act with the Parnellites, his theory of land nationalisation owed rather more to A.R. Wallace than George.<sup>21</sup> Unlike George, Davitt suggested that when the state confiscated the land, compensation ought to be given to the landlords. George denied the necessity of reimbursing the landed classes, who had for so many generations held their possessions, in his eyes, fraudulently. A further difference arose over what form the proposed single tax should assume. Davitt wanted the tax to be based on the total cost of running a devolved Irish state. George, on the other hand, wanted a single tax based on the value of rents – the 'unearned increment'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 21; E.A. Cameron, *The Life and Times of Charles Fraser Mackintosh, Crofter MP* (Aberdeen, 2000), 47; James Hunter also mentions this point as further evidence of the bond of sympathy between Davitt and John Murdoch, who was also inspired by some of the Chartists' thinking and had lived in Manchester for a spell in the 1840s. J. Hunter, *For the People's Cause: From the writings of John Murdoch* (Edinburgh, 1986), 19

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in J. Saville, 'Henry George and the British Labor Movement', *Science and Society* xxiv (1960), 323

<sup>20</sup> D.B. Cashman, *The Life of Michael Davitt, founder of the National Land League, to which is added, The secret history of the Land League, by Michael Davitt* London, 1882), 243-245

<sup>21</sup> C.A. Barker, *Henry George* (New York, 1955), 367; Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 522, also allows for this possibility. For the *Oban Times*' view of Wallace and the practicality of his ideas in the Highlands, see *Oban Times*, 13 Oct. 1883.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, 126; See Appendix B for a precise definition of George's theory. Davitt outlined his policy on compensation, for example, at Inverness in 1882. Here, he said that 'for this purpose a commission should be appointed to examine into titles, and to separate from the prairie value of the land all the increment value added thereto both by the labour and capital of the cultivators and the industrial pursuits and necessities of the community. In the matter of compensation, as in all mundane transactions, let justice be done though the heavens may fall.'



For the tenant farmers of Ireland, however, ‘the land for the people’ had a much narrower definition – it meant that they would become owner-occupiers of their holdings, and indeed that Land War eventually helped secure this wish. It is this, more than anything else, which convinced Davitt to look first to Scotland, and the Highlands especially, as a test ground for his plans.

It was at this time also that Davitt produced large amounts of jottings and journals, some of which took published form in *Leaves from a Prison Diary*.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, Davitt realised the need to shape the opinion of ordinary British people by producing pamphlets, lecture tours and the like, to combat the landlord dominated press. His views on land nationalisation also began to become concrete, as is seen in the statement that:

How simple it would have been to have declared the land of Ireland to be national property with the state as the only landlord; to pension off, out of the revenues of the land, the ten thousand whose interests... constitute the grand evil that afflicts the people...; to give security from wrong and disturbance to the tillers of the soil by the removal of every other power that stands between the protection of the state; and finally, where landlords should be compensated and the treasury reimbursed for its expenses in the process of settlement, to abolish rent, fix a reasonable tax upon the land, and allow the revenue from this tax to be employed in developing the general resources of the country and in defraying the cost of the evil administration.<sup>24</sup>

Moody indicates that by this point, Davitt had ‘outgrown the romantic nationalism of his youth’, and it is clear that he was concerned more with social justice than political independence for Ireland, and this must be remembered when looking at his speeches in the Scottish towns in 1882.<sup>25</sup> Two of Davitt’s colleagues, Matthew Harris and James Daly, had condemned the idea of land nationalisation in no uncertain terms in June 1882. Both were well acquainted with the opinions of Mayo smallholders, and

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<sup>23</sup> Much of these jottings are observations on prison and prisoners, but Davitt also writes a good amount on Anglo-Irish relations. Whilst he mentions the English unions with Wales and Scotland, he claims that Ireland was a different case entirely in the way it was governed, and indeed he seems to place the Anglo-Irish question in the context of other European countries, equating the Fenians for example with the Illuminati of Bavaria, Tugenbund of Prussia, and Carbonari of Naples. TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9639, ff. 83, 84; Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 501. R. Pearson, *Longman Companion to European Nationalism, 1789–1920* (Harlow, 1994), 281

<sup>24</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9639 f.253v.

<sup>25</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 519

Lee states that 'the man in the field effectively rejected land nationalisation.'<sup>26</sup> Even if his constituency had altered after 1882, however, there can have been little doubt in his mind that he could still attract adherents and find willing allies. The writing of Wallace and George had stimulated interest in the whole land issue ensuring, in H.M. Hyndman's words, that 'recently, the subject has been more generally debated than ever'.<sup>27</sup>

By the time he arrived in Scotland, therefore, the world was already aware of Davitt's revised philosophy on the issue of the land.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in exactly the same way as John Ferguson, Davitt accepted that Parnell and 'many wise men in and out of the league' thought of peasant proprietary as a final settlement of the land question, but believed that these men were wrong. Identifying three classes of people in Ireland, namely landlords, tenants and labourers, Davitt admitted that owner occupiers might create an end to predatory landlordism, and greatly improve the lot of the smallholders, but added that 'I must confess myself unable to see where the advantage to the other class, the labourers, comes in.'<sup>29</sup>

Several themes can be discerned in Davitt's speeches to Irish audiences on the subject of land nationalisation. He presented landlordism as a system of private ownership of land imposed on Ireland by English conquest and confiscation, and supplanting a Gaelic system under which the land belonged to the 'clan', with each individual having the right to share the use of it. He also tended to unite the 'Land for the People' doctrine with nationalist mythology. Landlords were presented as a ruthless class of usurpers, enslaving natives and being the root of poverty and social ruin. The crisis years of 1879-80 were seen as the inevitable result of three decades of landlordism.

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<sup>26</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 24 June, 1 Jul. 1882; J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society* (Dublin 1973), 88

<sup>27</sup> H.M. Hyndman (ed.), *The Nationalisation of the Land in 1775 and 1882. Being a lecture delivered at Newcastle On Tyne by Thomas Spence, 1775. Reprinted and edited, with notes and introduction, by H.M. Hyndman* (London, 1882), Introduction.

<sup>28</sup> Speech of Davitt at Liverpool, 6 June 1882. See Cashman, *Life of Michael Davitt*, 177

<sup>29</sup> Cashman, *Life of Michael Davitt*, 242. Again, this quotation is taken from Davitt's 1882 interview in the *New York World*.

It has been argued, however, that on the subject of nationalisation, Davitt's assertions can be seen to contain several exaggerations and inconsistencies.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, in spite of some theories linking Davitt to this idea of 'Celtic nationalism', there was fierce criticism from some of his contemporaries, such as John O'Leary, that his new ideal was anti-nationalist, rather it was internationalist and socialist.<sup>31</sup>

Following Davitt's announcement that he would carry on the land struggle on the basis of land nationalisation, he set off on a three month tour of the United States. Although he still received the strong support of the *Irish World*, he found the trip somewhat disheartening. He was forced to spend more time stressing his loyalty to Parnell, and stating that land nationalisation was a personal policy, not one he would attempt to force upon the Irish Parliamentary Party, than giving details of his scheme.<sup>32</sup> Davitt's public support for Parnell was, however, matched by an ever-increasing disillusionment, if not yet antipathy, for Irish politics.<sup>33</sup> This mood was not helped by Parnell's rejection of Davitt's proposed 'National Land and Industrial Union of Ireland'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Moody claims that he was guilty of sweeping generalisations on subjects like rack-renting, eviction, and agrarian crime, apparently oblivious to local variations and the fact that not all landlords were guilty of oppressing their tenants. Davitt also chose to ignore that conditions for tenant farmers in Ireland improved greatly between the end of the great famine and 1879. J. S. Donnelly, for example, argues that the Irish Land War erupted because of the 'rising expectations' of the rural community which led them to defend against 'mutilation or erosion.' Even though Vaughan has recently pointed to flaws in the 'rising expectations' theory, mainly because prosperity did not rise by a great deal, he does allow that it may have been a contributory factor in the land wars. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 524; W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford 1994), 209-211; J.S. Donnelly Jr., *Land and People of Nineteenth Century Cork* (London, 1975), 249-50. See below, however, 165, for Davitt's explicit assertion that the institution of landlordism was wrong *per se*, irrespective of whether there might be 'good' or 'bad' landlords. This tends to undermine some of Moody's points.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 127. O'Leary claimed that 'I and others have long since held that Mr. Davitt was not a nationalist at all in any sense intelligible to us; but only some sort of an internationalist and socialist, in some sense, not even intelligible to himself.'

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 129

<sup>33</sup> Davitt referred in his diary to Parnell having 'little backbone'. TCD Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9353, 3 Aug. 1882

<sup>34</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 540; Eventually, the two men reached an agreement whereby Parnell agreed to compromise a little with Davitt's views. In the so-called 'Avondale Treaty', a meeting at Parnell's home on 13 Sep. 1882, Davitt agreed to support the new body when it was proposed, and was also able to reserve the right to advocate land nationalisation after it was set up. He recorded later that he believed the new body would be 'sufficiently elastic' to allow for all shades of opinion. See Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 542; Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 371. The invitations to the conference, which was held in the Antient Concert Rooms, Dublin, on 17 Oct. 1882, called for the 'uniting together of the various movements and separate interests that are now appealing to the country for separate sanction and support'.

Davitt's idea of state ownership of the land seemed more suited to Scottish ears than those of the Irish. After all, one of the most clear points of contrast between the two communities during the 'Land Wars' was that the crofters in the Highlands did not usually want to become owners of their holdings. The Irish smallholders had a cherished desire to be owner-occupiers, and Davitt's scheme would require them to abandon this aspiration.<sup>35</sup>

The support for Parnell shown by 'the man in the field' hindered Davitt in his quest for general social change in Ireland, and the cult of Parnell became increasingly annoying to him. In replacing the Land League with the National League, after the October 17<sup>th</sup> conference, Davitt complained of the eclipse of a semi-revolutionary movement by a purely parliamentary one. Although *Fall of Feudalism* was written twenty-two years later, and the bitterness of the O'Shea scandal may have coloured Davitt's judgement against Parnell still further, his summary of the events of the post-Kilmainham months support the notes he made in his diary:

[The National League] was, in a sense, the overthrow of a movement and the enthronement of a man; the replacing of nationalism by Parnellism; the investing of the fortunes and guidance of the agitation, both for self-government and land reform, in a leaders' nominal dictatorship.<sup>36</sup>

With Ireland reorganising itself into National League branches, therefore, Davitt took his new social gospel to Britain, and after a brief visit to London, where he spoke at Clerkenwell – scene of one of his terms of imprisonment – he headed for Glasgow.<sup>37</sup> The *Oban Times* recorded that 'during the following three months Mr. Davitt will devote himself specifically to the organisation of the Irish population in Great Britain.'<sup>38</sup> This is a little misleading, however. Davitt did spend the majority of 1882, after the Dublin Conference, in Britain, but it had little to do with organisation of the

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<sup>35</sup> Davitt reminisced about the tale of an old Mayo man who, upon hearing a speech advocating a root and branch destruction of landlordism, asked 'Arrah, to who do we pay the rint, thin, Sir?' This, although merely anecdotal evidence, cannot suggest a deep devotion to the principle of land ownership among Irish smallholders. Davitt himself sardonically remarked that 'manifestly education in this instance had progressed a little too rapidly.' Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 164

<sup>36</sup> Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 377-8

<sup>37</sup> *The Times*, 23 Oct. 1882, 25 Oct. 1882

<sup>38</sup> *Oban Times*, 21 Oct. 1882

recently formed Irish National League. In John Ferguson, Richard McGhee and Edward McHugh, Davitt knew that he could find some refuge from the Parnellites, and discuss future plans with like minded Irish reformers.

Amongst the Scots Davitt found a willing audience. Even though it has been claimed that the likes of Davitt and George were treated with suspicion in the Highlands because they went beyond demanding 'security of tenure, fair rent and additional land', this was not immediately apparent in 1882.<sup>39</sup> As much as the nascent Highland land movement may have benefited from the visit to Scotland – especially Inverness though not yet Skye or the other 'disaffected' areas – of a man of Davitt's standing, Davitt and the left wing of the disbanded Irish Land League knew that, if they could prove enthusiasm for land nationalisation existed, they could be the main beneficiaries of the tour. The 'sincere hope' Davitt expressed that there would be no immediate legislation for Scotland underlines that he wanted a radical and sustained agitation to replace the one in Ireland. That agitation had been cut short by both the 1881 Land Act, and the political calculations of Parnell, and Davitt stated that it would be 'disastrous' for the movement in Scotland, 'inasmuch as some paltry measure would only be passed; and a people inexperienced in practical land reform might (when advised to do so), be ready to accept any – the least – instalment of what is their full right, and what can only be won through an attitude of non-compromising and persevering determination.'<sup>40</sup>

### **Davitt's speeches in Scotland, 1882**

Michael Davitt's first speech on this visit to Scotland was at the Glasgow City Hall on Wednesday October 25<sup>th</sup>, and was followed up by an address at the Harbour Trust building in Greenock the next night.<sup>41</sup> As a backdrop to this visit, there was a Britain

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<sup>39</sup> J.D. Wood, 'Land Reform and Populism in the Atlantic Community, 1879-1890: Towards a Comparative Approach' (Unpublished M.Litt. Thesis, Edinburgh University, 1981), 81

<sup>40</sup> *Irish World*, 9 Dec. 1882

<sup>41</sup> Davitt's itinerary for his 1882 Scotland tour was somewhat tortuous, travelling from Glasgow to Aberdeen, for example, before returning to Edinburgh and then heading for Inverness. His full tour ran as follows: Wed. Oct. 25, Glasgow (speech); Thu. Oct. 26, Greenock (speech); Fri. Oct 27, Lenzie (resting); Sat. Oct 28, Aberdeen (Speech); Sun. Oct 29, Glasgow (Spurious meeting of the 'Michael Davitt' INL); Mon. Oct. 30, Edinburgh (speech); Tue. Oct 31, Lenzie (resting); Wed. Nov. 1, Dundee (speech); Thu. Nov. 2, Perth (Catching up with correspondence); Fri. Nov. 3, Perth (Resting); Sat. Nov. 4, Inverness (speech); Sun. Nov. 5, Inverness (meeting local land league representatives); Mon. Nov. 6, travelling from Inverness to Glasgow and Lenzie; Tue Nov. 7, Lenzie; Wed. Nov. 8, Coatbridge (speech); Thu. Nov. 9, Greenock to Dublin.



wide agitation and strike among coal miners, as well as the ongoing troubles in Skye. For example, five or six men had descended on the house of a crofter in Kilmuir who had missed a 'Land League' meeting, and Graham Spiers was 'more convinced now than ever' that a military force was needed to back up the police on the island. On 24<sup>th</sup> October, the messenger at arms had been deforced at Balmeanach, in Braes, when attempting to serve notices of interdict.<sup>42</sup>

Although the audiences for Davitt's initial speeches were predominantly made up of exiled Irishmen, especially in Glasgow and Greenock, Davitt did note that there were a 'large number of Scotchmen present' at the Glasgow City Hall.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, there was at this stage a need for Davitt to appeal to Irish, rather than necessarily Scottish, sensibilities in these speeches.

Land nationalisation was central to all of the speeches given by Davitt at this time. In Inverness and Aberdeen, where his audiences were not predominantly made up of Irishmen, he felt less inclination to stress his continued loyalty to Parnell. He was not afraid, however, in any of his addresses, to criticise Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party for their recent friendliness with the Government, and the tour in fact ended on something of a low note when he attacked Parnell in the speech at Coatbridge.<sup>44</sup> Davitt's disillusionment with the situation in Ireland after Parnell had effectively called off the Land War, served to heighten his enthusiasm for the increasing possibilities in Scotland.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/9; MacVicar to Ivory, 10 Oct. 1882; Ivory to Balfour, 18 Oct. 1882; Spiers to Ivory, 24 Oct. 1882; Report of MacDonald, 24. Oct. 1882 The *Glasgow Weekly News* recorded the promotional activities of the Glasgow Irish, and the attempt to encourage Scots, whose only knowledge of Davitt was from the press, to come and judge him for themselves. TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9599, ff.29-29v. (Cuttings from *Glasgow Weekly News*)

<sup>43</sup> Diary, TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9353, Wed. 25 Oct. 1882

<sup>44</sup> Diary, TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9395, Mon. 8 Nov. 1882, Davitt referred to his 'infernal bad speech' and seemed somewhat depressed about going back to Ireland and Irish politics. Davitt's time in Glasgow had also been marred by a contretemps with the then committee of the National League branch which bore his name. Promising to come and chat with a few members of the branch, Davitt arrived at the Albion Hall to find an 'immense gathering' waiting for him. Furious, he recorded that it 'seemed the following day that I had been tricked by the committee – that a charge of admission had been made and that board bills been issued announcing that I was to deliver an address on "Castle Government". Mean, paltry subterfuge to get some money to pay debts of the branch, no regard for my honour at all, making it appear as if I lent myself to such a dodge... dirty work by dirty minded people'. Diary, TCD Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9353, Sun. 29 Oct. 1882. Presumably the 'Davitt' branch of the Irish National League contained different personnel from the Land League branch which had carried the same name.

<sup>45</sup> Diary, TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9395, Thu. 2 Nov 1882. He warned himself, 'put not your faith in Irish Parliamentary politics'. Davitt remained critical of the Parliamentary Party, especially over the

Writing enthusiastically about his Scottish trip to the *Irish World*, Davitt described 'the active mind of the Scotch people', which had spent months, and years, considering the land question from various angles.<sup>46</sup> Because the land question had not yet assumed the crisis proportions which had been seen in Ireland, it allowed for greater reflection in Scotland, a process also assisted by the nature of the people. Scotland was, like Ireland, a 'landlord ridden country', and was, according to Davitt,

now ready for a Land movement of the most advanced and radical kind. Peasant proprietary finds no acceptance here; neither is the question of compensation to landlords exercising the consciences of the people overmuch. They are a logical, hard-headed people, who reason out their position first, and then resolve upon working out the legitimate conclusions, *coûte que coûte*. The native impulsiveness of the Celt is kept strictly under control by the intermixture of Saxon coolness and calculation, from which union springs a people possessed of qualities that enable them to give a good account of themselves, either where physical courage is required or in the higher moral field of intellectual effort.<sup>47</sup>

Davitt identified the Battle of the Braes as being a 'stimulus', and 'an invaluable aid', to the agitation in the Highlands, but claimed that it was only a contributory factor, one which had captured public attention and sympathy, rather than the cause of the troubles. He showed excitement at the possibilities presenting themselves in Scotland, noting the 'extreme' language of some of the Scotsmen with whom he had shared a platform, and also bringing the attention of Irish Americans the fact that agrarian violence of an Irish nature seemed to be making an appearance in the Hebrides and Caithness. He further condemned the Duke of Sutherland, and, again reminiscent of some of Ferguson's speeches and writings, argued that continuing depopulation of the

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policy of planting Parnell loyalists in safe constituencies at by-elections. This he condemned as 'obnoxious to popular feeling throughout the country'. Parnell had remarked to O'Brien after Davitt's Liverpool speech that 'if I were Davitt I would never define. The moment he becomes intelligible he is lost', and Lyons states that 'Parnell continued to score points with almost contemptuous ease'. See Lyons, *Parnell*, 233. Davitt was bound not to reply publicly to Parnell's thinly veiled taunts – firstly, by a feeling of duty and honour, and secondly by a pragmatic realisation that to go against Parnell openly would mean alienating the Irish tenant farmers still further.

<sup>46</sup> Davitt and Ferguson, as well as McHugh, saw the *Irish World* as one of the most important sources of support for their land nationalisation plans.

<sup>47</sup> *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882

Highland would have severe consequences for the whole of Britain in the event of a war.<sup>48</sup>

Davitt also showed that he realised the importance and zeal of the Irish in Glasgow by praising their advanced knowledge on the land issue. In this way he linked his newer thinking with the old principles of 'the land for the people' and indeed, much of these speeches are taken up by responses to criticisms, especially that the 'internationalist' doctrine undermined both Irish nationalism and the bid for Home Rule. In addition, he produced a great many statistics to give support to what was, after all, a policy he had embraced relatively recently and would require 'selling' to much of his audience.

At Glasgow, Davitt declared 'irreconcilable war on landlordism in Ireland, England and Scotland'.<sup>49</sup> His solution was undoubtedly what might be called a 'working class' rather than a 'nationalist' solution to the land question. Yet this socialistic and internationalist doctrine was also a source of pride for some Irishmen, as was shown the next night at Greenock when John Ferguson expressed his delight that the Irish nation was at the van of the world's progress in the great land movement.<sup>50</sup> Henry George would have approved of this apparent subordination of narrow nationalism for the benefit of the bigger picture.

The progress which had been made in Aberdeen, reported in the summer by McHugh, seems to have continued. The *Aberdeen Free Press* reported the advanced statements made by Davitt in the town, claiming that landlords produced nothing but poverty, and broke God's commandment 'Thou shalt not steal'. Land nationalisation, on the other hand, would have meant that:

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<sup>48</sup> Davitt was delighted at the uncompromising language used by Scotsmen, such as David Macrae, at his meetings. He also informed his American readers that troops were about to be sent from Fort George to quell the 'sturdy crofters'. 'A general belief prevails', he wrote, 'that blood will be shed if such a plan is carried out.' *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882, 9 Dec. 1882

<sup>49</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 26 Oct. 1882; *Freeman's Journal*, 28 Oct. 1882. Parnell's *United Ireland* newspaper greeted Davitt's progress in Scotland enthusiastically, but stressed that there were more issues at stake than simply that of land. *United Ireland*, 4 Nov. 1882

<sup>50</sup> Ferguson was chairman for the Glasgow speech, and spoke at length in Greenock. *Glasgow Herald*, 27 Oct. 1882. Davitt also stressed the universality of the problem. For example in Inverness he told listeners that 'there is not a spot of God's Footstool in Big Britain but there you will find the footprint of that enemy of God and man, the desolating, murdering, land thief.' *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882.

Instead of the tillers of the soil having to pay a rack-rent to a landlord, whether his land produces such rent year by year or not, the land would be required to meet so much of a public taxation as would be a just and fair tithing upon the national property and which would remove farmers, labourers, artisans and the whole industrial classes that the burden of taxation which now falls both heavily and unjustly upon those least able to spare it from their earnings.<sup>51</sup>

The Aberdeen meeting seems to have given Davitt the greatest personal pleasure: not only did he believe that it was his ‘best speech ever’, he claimed to be delighted with the way that the most advanced social doctrines were the ones that were the best received, and was happy to make the rye comment that ‘the landlord party must be delighted on reading such a speech in Scotland, and in particular seeing how it was cheered.’<sup>52</sup> Observing that violent anti-Landlord rhetoric had been used in a speech by fishermen in Caithness, Davitt professed that he was not surprised:

To recognise, among my Aberdeen audience on Saturday last, one of the detectives who ‘invited’ me from Dublin to Portland twenty months ago. The English Government would not wish to see a similar movement to the Irish agitation taking hold of the Celtic population of Scotland; yet such a movement is inevitable unless Mr. Gladstone comes forward at once with some of his quick legislative remedies, and arrests, by means of temporary concessions, what will only be satisfied by and by with the complete overthrow of the landlord system.<sup>53</sup>

At this stage, therefore, Davitt’s interest in Scotland arose more from a general desire to ameliorate the condition of all workers in the British Isles through united action, than through Celtic mutual co-operation in the drive for Home Rule or a desire to assist in any specific region. Realising that any similar quest in Ireland would, at this stage, be doomed to failure, Davitt became one of the many Irishmen who were central to the birth of the British Labour movement.

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<sup>51</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9361 (Cuttings from *Aberdeen Free Press*)

<sup>52</sup> Diary, TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9535, Sat. 28 Oct. 1882

<sup>53</sup> *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882. The *Oban Times* called Davitt’s Aberdeen meeting ‘large and turbulent’, which indeed it was, although the disturbance was apparently a protest by students against the rector of Aberdeen University. It also noted that ‘several objections’ were raised against Davitt’s nationalisation scheme, although allowed that he dealt with them. The Aberdeen meeting also passed a resolution in favour of land taxes replacing rental to a landlord. *Oban Times*, 4 Nov. 1882; *Glasgow Herald*, 30 Oct. 1882.

The agitation in the crofting districts was nonetheless referred to by Davitt in the Glasgow lecture, but the prominence of the Highlanders in the national news made this almost inevitable:

He had a word or two to say about Scotland, and he had read in the papers just that day that things were looking very lively in Skye. In fact it looked very much there – if they would pardon a very bad pun – as if landlordism was soon going Skye high. While he was glad to see the intelligent spirit of determination animating the crofters, he was most anxious that nothing should be done by land reformers, by farmers, or by labourers, that they would give the landlord class a legal pretext to come down on the movement.<sup>54</sup>

Having learned the lesson after agrarian violence had led to the suppression of the agitation in Ireland, Davitt knew it was in his best interests of the crofters to stay within ‘the lines of even a stringent constitution.’ He claimed at the Greenock meeting that he did not come to Scotland to interfere, but because he was ‘anxious to speak to the Scottish people’. Nevertheless, he was very careful not to cause any over-reaction, and cancelled planned visits to Caithness and Skye when those districts appeared too volatile.<sup>55</sup> He believed his principles would, if applied to Scotland, ‘benefit the tillers of the soil and the labourers as much as they would benefit those of Ireland.’ He attacked the establishment for not joining in face to face debate, but preferring to attempt to blacken the names of the agitators in a compliant, landlord dominated, press. He was joined on the platform at Greenock by ‘Gentlemen representing the tillers of the soil in the Western Highlands and Islands’, but always stressed the importance of staying within the law, so that ‘every civilised nation in the world’ would give support. Importantly, in reply to his vote of thanks at Greenock, Davitt

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<sup>54</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 27 Oct. 1882. In Dundee he ‘appealed to the Irishmen here not to be backward in giving support to the Scotch when they started the movement in this country.’ TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9361; *Dundee Advertiser*, 2 Nov. 1882

<sup>55</sup> This did not prevent him from talking up the aggressive language of some crofters for American consumption: ‘From the language indulged in by some of the speakers at a public meeting held in Wick last Friday night, the agitation there is not going to be a “milk and water affair”. The mover of one of the resolutions urged upon his audience the necessity of legal conduct, but reminded those whom it concerned “that there was as much pluck in Wick and Thurso, if properly applied, as would rid them of their oppressors!” He cautioned them to be prudent, as by “such a policy a two fold end would be secured, namely, the preservation of the lives of their oppressors from an untimely end, and their own prevention of being crushed to death beneath the iron heel of the tyrant.” This, too, from the “loyal” Highlands.’ *Irish World*, 9 Dec. 1882. A ‘Special Correspondent’ of the same newspaper, three weeks later, ‘I find, on coming over here [Britain], that the “Land for the People” has advanced a very important stage within the last few weeks’, *Irish World*, 30 Dec. 1882



stated that in relation to his proposed visit to Skye, the Irish Land League had no official connection there, but any assistance he could possibly give he would be:

Only too glad to extend to the Celts of the Islands or to the people of Scotland in their struggle against monopoly and oppression... he did not know that it would be within his province to go and make any speeches to the people in the Highlands or the farmers of those western islands. He did not intend to do that; he simply intended to go there and see the condition of the people, to inquire into their grievances, and obtain facts and figures which would enable him... to advocate the case of the tenant farmers in Scotland long with that of the tenant farmers in his own country.<sup>56</sup>

Davitt was certainly being economical with the truth in this case, as no-one would have been able to deny that McHugh had spent several months on the island on behalf of the LLGB. Strictly speaking, however, Davitt was correct. There was, after all, no Irish Land League by this point to have a connection with Skye. Furthermore, even its successor, the Irish National League, had no official policy on the crofting agitation. Rather, as had been the case for some time, it was interested individuals amongst the Glasgow Irish and Highland communities who monitored and nurtured the agitation.

Davitt and his supporters may still not have been confident of a unanimously supportive reception in Skye, although the reaction of the Inverness audience and the promptings of the urban Gaels must have done much to assuage such concerns. There seems no reason to doubt that the main reason why Davitt refrained from venturing into Skye at this stage was a fear of igniting what was being portrayed as a powder-keg situation on the island. This cautious approach mirrored both John Ferguson's over the 'No Rent Manifesto' in 1881, and that of Angus Sutherland and the Glasgow Highlanders during the development of the crofting agitation.

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<sup>56</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 27 Oct. 1882; A correspondent of the *Inverness Courier* – 'Resident' – questioned Davitt's assertion that there was no official connection between Skye and the Irish Land League. He claimed that he was in possession of Land League literature which had been distributed by Edward McHugh, 280 Holm Street, Glasgow. He described McHugh as 'a paid agent, who spent several months in the disturbed districts recently, sowing, by his own confession, the seed which is now bearing such bitter fruit.' *Inverness Courier*, 4 Nov. 1882. The chairman of the Greenock meeting was Neil Brown, who said that 'the crofters and tenant farmers of Scotland in the secret of their hearts wished a God-speed to Michael Davitt and his fellow labourers in the sacred cause.' In 1885, Brown hoped for a 'Crofters' Party' which could act like the Parnellites, keeping the Tories and Liberals at their mercy. *Glasgow Observer*, 30 May 1885

Davitt's judgement was sound, however. Even without his intervention exciting the situation, tension was rising on Skye. Glendale crofters attacked a shepherd at Waterstein, and a notice threatening a local landlord was put up, signed by 'our faithful landleaguer'.<sup>57</sup> In Braes, tenants reacted to reports of an impending military expedition by resolving 'to fight as long as there was a man alive among them.'<sup>58</sup> Perhaps most worrying for the authorities was the claim by Broadford's Church of Scotland minister, Rev. MacKinnon, that a good deal of mutual support existed on the island, unwittingly echoing Davitt's notion of a land movement already being in existence.<sup>59</sup>

The panic prevailing heightened still further with a death threat against Lord MacDonald and Fraser of Kilmuir. Although it was almost certainly a hoax, the language of the notice, evoking 'St. Patrick and the Blessed Virgin', only served to reinforce the fears of the authorities that Captain Moonlight – the generic nickname given to Irish agrarian terrorists – had crossed the North Channel to the Highlands, and that the worst excesses of the Irish Land League would soon be reproduced in Scotland.<sup>60</sup>

### **Davitt's visit to Inverness**

There was a predictable reaction from the generality of the Highland press when it was announced that Michael Davitt was to speak in its nominal capital – Inverness.<sup>61</sup> The authorities would be understandably disquieted by the advent of a charismatic and bitter opponent of landlordism, who also had links with the Fenians, in their midst at a time when it appeared events in the Highlands had already taken a serious turn. Dean of Guild, Alexander McKenzie, speaking at the meeting, remarked that

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<sup>57</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/10, MacVicar to Ivory, 9 Nov. 1882; MacLennan to Ivory, 13 Nov. 1882. The shepherd was attacked by Milovaig residents, who shouted 'surround the bugger at once', knocked him to the ground and kicked him in the back and sides before driving him away.

<sup>58</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/10, MacArthur to Ivory, 18 Nov. 1882

<sup>59</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/10, MacKinnon to Ivory, 23 Nov. 1882. MacKinnon wrote that 'the Glendale men are ready at a moment's notice to come to the aid of the Braes against the police.'

<sup>60</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/10/53 (24 Nov. 1882). See App. D for details of this notice.

<sup>61</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 4 Nov. 1882; *Northern Chronicle*, 8 Nov. 1882; TCD Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9599, ff. 29-29v. (cuttings from the *Weekly Press*)

... the audience had reason to congratulate themselves on the manner in which they had received a man who had been so calumniated by the English and Scottish press.<sup>62</sup>

Davitt himself, upon taking the platform, stated that he would not have been surprised that instead of the loud cheering which greeted him, there would have been hissing, 'because all the reports that appeared in the landlord dominated press of the three countries would be credited by those before him, he would be put down as an incendiary, as a revolutionist, as one of those atrocious characters that make war against mankind and society.' Davitt's own diary records the 'surprisingly warm reception afforded me notwithstanding efforts of the two local papers to work up popular feeling against an "ex felon", "fenian" and a "land-leaguer"'.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, Davitt had already been made highly suspicious of the Scottish press, believing that they did not report that many Scots speakers at his meetings agreed with his theories on land nationalisation, and bemoaning the fact that 'The Scotch press is a purely conservative power.'<sup>64</sup> He later allowed, however, that he had generally been treated with 'remarkable fairness'.<sup>65</sup>

The Portree correspondent of the *Oban Times* was certainly concerned, and stated categorically that the crofters did not care for Home Rule for the Irish and 'did not want to have their cause mixed up in anything revolutionary.'<sup>66</sup> For the speech at the Music Hall, the concerned authorities would hardly have had their minds put at rest by the other men present beside Davitt on the platform. John Ferguson had to send his apologies, but present were Edward McHugh, reappearing in the Highlands after a period back in Glasgow, and John Whyte, the librarian of the Free Library in Inverness.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 7 Nov. 1882

<sup>63</sup> Diary, CD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9535, Sat. 4 Nov. 1882

<sup>64</sup> Diary, TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9535, Thu. 26 Oct. 1882; In one of his letters to the *Irish World*, he reiterated the fact that, 'to the dismay of Scottish Landlordism, and the astonishment of John Ferguson, I was accorded a most flattering reception.' *Irish World*, 9 Dec. 1882

<sup>65</sup> *Irish World*, 9 Dec. 1882

<sup>66</sup> *Oban Times*, 4 Nov. 1882

<sup>67</sup> The *Irish World* heralded McHugh as the man 'who had done much to bring forward the land question in Scotland', *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882. Whyte was the brother of Henry Whyte - 'Fionn'. John Whyte had become known as a Land League supporter in his own right, however, as the Lord Advocate, Balfour, had written to Sheriff Ivory in September in order to ascertain 'what manner of man "John Whyte, Librarian", of the public library, Inverness, is. The reason for this I shall tell you when we meet. I should also feel obliged if you could, without difficulty, learn and inform me as to the

Whether or not Whyte or McHugh had any direct impact on Davitt's speech – he apparently penned it whilst relaxing in Perth the day before – this was a very different lecture from that which he had given in previous days. He realised that he was 'probably the first Irishman who had ever addressed an exclusively Scotch meeting in the place', and because he was speaking to a very different constituency, the nature of the speech was altered accordingly. The very title, 'Land Nationalisation and Highland Depopulation' showed an awareness to tailor the lecture for a crofting audience, and the speech included several appeals to Highland or Scottish national sentiment and links with Ireland. .

In answering the question as to why Landlords should be abolished, Davitt made five points:- (1) Because they claimed the land for themselves when it actually belonged to the people. (2) The claim that they administered the land for the people was clearly false. They depopulated the land and misappropriated it for purposes other than the production of food for the masses. (3) Landlords claimed the incremental value of the land, but this was actually owing to the labour of the tenants. (4) The establishment of huge deer parks and the like placed great restrictions on the productive capacity of the land. Fifthly, he claimed that:

The good of the community at large demanded that a system which was founded on national spoliation; that had enforced its rights with a hand of iron, and had neglected its duties with a hand of brass; that claimed the wealth that it did nothing towards creating, and stood in the way of the spoil of Scotland producing all the goods necessary to feed its population, should follow all the other feudal institutions that had before militated against the rights and happiness of the people of the nation, and which a progressive people had sent to the limbo of exploded institutions.

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character, number and influence of the Highland Land League association at Inverness.' Land League papers bearing Whyte's stamp and name had come into the Lord Advocate's possession. Subsequent to Davitt's visit, John Whyte was put before the Free Libraries Committee, with the Provost having complained that 'It appears to me that a subject like this on which there is so much controversy is not one in which a paid official should be taking part.' In spite of a bullish response, in asking 'what other political questions currently agitating the public mind I am expected to shun besides that of the land', Whyte was warned as to his future conduct by the Procurator Fiscal, James Anderson. The involvement of Whyte with the agitation appears to have created waves of concern at high levels in Inverness. NAS, GD1/36, Ivory Papers. GD1/36/1/8, Lord Advocate to Ivory, 13 Sep. 1882; Other Irish and Highland newspapers carried reports of Whyte's reprimand. See, (e.g.) *United Ireland*, 25 Nov. 1882; *Oban Times*, 18 Nov. 1882; *Inverness Courier*, 16 Nov. 1882; *Irish World*, 23 Dec. 1882. The *Irish World* presented the incident as a blow for the free thinking Highland radicals.

In the course of the speech, Davitt quoted extensively from the bible, as well as from a variety of philosophers and historians such as Williams, Froude, Mill and Bishop Nulty.<sup>68</sup> All of these were reported as having been used by McHugh on Skye, and therefore there seems to have been continuity in efforts to educate the crofters in the theory of the land agitation.

Whilst these principles did have a Universal application, they would have been music to the ears of supporters of land reform present, involved as they were in a nascent agitation against Highland landlords. To remove deer parks and redistribute the land among the tenants could hardly fail to raise a cheer when the crofters' main complaint was lack of available land.<sup>69</sup>

The Inverness audience seems to have been delighted to have been addressed by one of Ireland's leading political figures, and the question of Catholicism, which was alleged to have dogged McHugh, was certainly not an issue on this occasion. Rev. David Macrae, of Dundee, albeit in a letter of apology, expressed a hope that 'the people of Inverness would speak out on the land issue with no uncertain sound, and that Mr. Davitt would unite the Scotch and Irish people in one on this great movement of land reform. The time had come for vindicating the people's rights on the land.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The report of the meeting in the *Irish World* detailed the sources Davitt used. One authority used by McHugh on Skye but notable by its absence in Davitt's Inverness speech was G.B. Clark's *Plea for the Nationalisation of the Land*. It seems likely that by quoting only from respected figures in society, such as Priests and Oxford historians, Davitt was seeking to play down any idea of land nationalisation being a 'revolutionary' doctrine. *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882

<sup>69</sup> See, (e.g.) *Napier Commission*, q.1566 (P. MacDonald, Uig); q.2399 (N. Stewart, Stenscholl); q.4057 (A. McInnes, Dunvegan); q.6867 (A. Ross, Glendale).

<sup>70</sup> *Oban Times*, 9 Feb. 1884; David Macrae was a Presbyterian minister in Dundee, and a prominent figure in the land and Home Rule movements in Scotland. Known as an engaging speaker – he was in demand not only for political speeches but also simply as an entertainer. (e.g. *Oban Times*, 24 Jun. 1882, 5 Sep. 1885, 22 May 1886). It is not a surprise, therefore, that he should be invited to share the platform with Michael Davitt in Inverness. Macrae was also to the fore, for example, when Henry George visited Scotland in 1884. Macrae followed George by telling a crowd of over 2,000 in Dundee to 'give earnest consideration to the reform of the iniquitous land system, now subsidised by law.' Macrae is another Radical who appears time and time again during the land agitation in the Highlands. At the outbreak of serious agitation in the Highlands, and a month before Davitt's speech in Manchester which prepared the way for his statement on land nationalisation, David Macrae had already given a definition of 'The Land for the People'. Before his Dundee congregation he stated that 'the land belonged to the people', referring to the clan system and the Old Testament to back up his claim. (*Oban Times*, 29 Apr. 1882). The week after, Macrae was to be found alongside Angus Sutherland and John Murdoch in Glasgow, hoping to rouse the Highlanders of the city into affirmative action on the land issue. (*Scotsman*, 6 May 1882; *Oban Times*, 13 May 1882). 'The question', he asked



When closing his lecture in Inverness, Davitt expressed delight and said that having spoken in front of 500 or 600 audiences throughout the world, he had never felt so proud as he had done on this occasion. When stating that he hoped he would not again be sent back to prison, a wag from the audience shouted ‘Stay in Inverness, then...’

Davitt attempted to stoke up the agitation in several ways during the Inverness lecture, whilst stressing the need for peaceful methods at all times. Firstly, he acknowledged the existence of a Scottish land movement, stating that:

Whether it be acceptable to the landocracy of Scotland or not, there is beyond doubt a Scotch land movement in existence. It might not be organised. There might be no connection between the crofters of Skye and those of Caithness; but there was in the popular mind of Scotland a revolt against the idea that the land of this country could continue to

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the audience, ‘which these troubles were forcing to an issue was this: To whom did the land in this country belong? In what sense did it really belong to those who were its nominal owners? Who gave these landlords the right to take the soil and degrade those who had been upon it and those who had occupied and tilled it for generations?’ Although speaking in rather general terms, about emigration, the decline of the Highland regiments and ‘tenant right’, rather than land nationalisation, Macrae was, even at this stage, like Ferguson and Davitt considering the bigger picture: ‘It would be vain dealing with the mere local symptoms of the disease. If the thing was to be really cured they must go down and deal with the disease itself, which lay in the land system of the country.’ He helped to keep up the Highland agitation, addressing Highlanders in Paisley and Greenock, for example, and thereafter, Macrae became a loyal supporter of the Georgite Scottish Land Restoration League, and of George himself. (*Oban Times*, 20 Oct., 29 Dec. 1883). Henry George himself described his visit to Dundee in glowing terms, stating that ‘I myself occupied a pulpit for the first time in my life, at the request of Reverend David Macrae preached upon the land question to one of the most intelligent audiences I have ever seen.’ (*Dundee Advertiser*, 4 Feb. 1884; *Oban Times*, 29 Mar. 1884). Accordingly, he was praised both by the Radical / Georgite Liverpool correspondent of the *Oban Times* as one of the ‘giants’ of the land movement, and by H.M. Hyndman as a ‘true reformer’. (*Oban Times*, 9 Aug. 1884, *Justice!*, 9 Feb. 1884). Michael Davitt himself was to become an ardent admirer of the Dundee minister, and in 1889, in a letter declining an invitation to speak in Dumfries, he regretted the fact that he would be denied ‘the pleasure of renewing the acquaintance with the reformers of Dumfries and enjoying the eloquence of the father of the Scottish Home Rule movement, Rev. David Macrae.’ (TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9375, f.998, Davitt to MacGowan, 7 Jan. 1889). Although he was unable to attend the large meeting at Portree in 1885, Macrae again sent a telegram of sympathy to be read out by Charles Fraser Mackintosh. (*Oban Times*, 12 Sep. 1885). Whilst still based in Dundee, Macrae remained prominent amongst Glasgow Radicals, and was firmly involved in the mélange of working class and nationalist agitation which had the attention of John Ferguson and his allies. Like Ferguson, Davitt and Sutherland, this meant that Macrae also supported not only land reform, but also Home Rule for Scotland and Ireland, as well as opposing Tory coercion in Ireland after 1887. In the latter regard, he was especially vociferous over the imprisonment of John Dillon in 1888. (*Glasgow Observer*, 18 Aug. 1888). As a firm ally of George, Macrae’s rhetorical skills were put to great use by the Single Tax movement, of which he was a natural leader. (*Bridgeton Advertiser and Single Tax Review*, 1 Mar., 6 Dec. 1890; *Single Tax*, Dec. 1895). For Macrae’s death, see *Land Values*, Jul. 1907, which noted that although in his later years he had become more associated with Scottish nationalism, he had remained an ardent supporter of the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values.

be administered on behalf of a privileged class to the detriment of the Scottish nation, and this rebellion of sentiment was the inevitable herald of a moral onslaught of public opinion upon the institution of landlordism in this country.

The very use of the word 'nation' can be seen as a calculated appeal to nationalist sentiment, but the fact that Davitt linked the movements in Caithness and Skye was an attempt on his part to ensure that these movements, which would eventually be harnessed by Glasgow and London based agitators, would be linked both in the minds of the general British public and the crofters themselves upon reading the newspaper reports of the speech.

Several aspects of the speech appeal directly to the Highlands, and the sense of injustice that had been inflicted upon it in the past. This was foremost in the minds of many Highlanders at the time, owing to the likes of John Murdoch in his recently defunct *Highlander* newspaper, and Alexander MacKenzie, who had been serialising the history of the Clearances in the *Celtic Magazine*, and publishing the complete work as a single volume in 1883.<sup>71</sup> MacKenzie was quick to praise Davitt, and whilst stating that he did not agree with the practicality of nationalising the land, he lauded Davitt's references to Highland depopulation, reminding the audience of the Clearances.

Both of the main Inverness newspapers, the *Courier* and the *Northern Chronicle*, ran editorials which spoke out against Davitt, and the criticism in the latter was the most stinging and most personal.<sup>72</sup> After listing further examples of Davitt's allegedly

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<sup>71</sup> 'Here in the Highlands', stated Davitt, 'the necessity for a change in the laws was imperative (hear, hear). One of your own countrymen has eloquently exclaimed – "While abroad over the earth, Highlanders were the first in assault and the last in retreat, their lonely homes in far away glens were being dragged down, the wail of women and the cry of children went out upon the same breeze that bore too upon its wings the scent of heather, the freshness of gauze blossom, and the myriad sweets that made the lonely life of the Scotland's peasantry blessed with health and happiness..." To convert the Highland glens and vast wastes, untenanted by human beings; to drive forth to distant and inhospitable shores men whose forefathers held their own among those hills despite Roman legion, Saxon archer, or Norman chivalry, (cheers) – Men whose sons died freely for England's honour through their wide dominions her bravery had won for her – such was the work of cruel laws framed in a cruel mockery of name by the Commons of England.'

<sup>72</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 8 Nov. 1882; It claimed that 'Mr. Davitt's popularity with certain classes arises from the fact that he is a ticket-of-leave treason felonist, who was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment during the former administration of Mr. Gladstone. He is not worse than other patriots who live on Irish agitation, and who, if they had any remorseful consciences, would have spent the remaining days of their lives in a prison cell, lamenting the crimes which they had directly or indirectly

violent past, the *Chronicle* dismissed the land nationalisation movement as 'profoundly anti-Christian', and warned readers that Davitt, allied with English Trades Unionists, were 'trying to plunge this country into a vortex of all-swallowing socialism...' To underline how the *Chronicle* saw the land agitators, it is necessary only to look at how they opened the report of Davitt's speech:

Mr. Davitt, on the invitation of the Land Leaguers of Inverness, delivered an address in the music hall of this town on Saturday to a large audience of a 'thoroughly democratic' – that is to say of a recklessly revolutionary and destructive character.

A somewhat more balanced, although still firmly anti-Davitt, piece appeared in the *Inverness Courier*. Rather than denouncing the speaker as a dangerous former prisoner, it described Davitt as courageous for suffering imprisonment with firmness and dignity. Furthermore, in the place of a bloodthirsty agrarian terrorist the readers were told that:

He disapproves of physical force; he expresses abhorrence of the atrocities that have blackened that agitation in Ireland; he is full of sympathy for the toiling masses; he burns with indignation against what seems to him to be social abuse and oppression... A magnetic man like Mr. Davitt gives a certain amount of dignity and popularity even to extravagant and impracticable doctrines. Under the influence of his fervent speech, the audience on Saturday night applauded him to the echo; but when they came afterwards to reflect they must have perceived that they had listened all through to eloquent generalities, without either convincing logic or definite design.<sup>73</sup>

The *Courier* was, therefore, responding to Davitt's claims that the landlords, and their friends in the press, were simply conducting a smear campaign, and were not interested in intellectual debate on the subject of land nationalisation. The *Courier* had decided that the best way of countering Davitt lay not in denying his charisma, indeed this was stressed, but showing how nothing sensible actually lay behind that charisma. The article denied the existence of predatory landlordism, claiming that rents had only risen during the last three decades because of a general rise in prosperity. The practicality of the state acting as a landlord was also questioned, and the theory that

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sponsored... Under the management of Mr. Davitt, the land league took hold of the mind of the Irish agricultural population; and the natural result was a fine crop of outrages...

<sup>73</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 7 Nov. 1882

the state would benefit was dismissed as a 'baseless vision'. In summary, and in keeping with the tone of the article, it was stated that although changes in the land laws were necessary and, indeed, desirable, Davitt's scheme was wildly impracticable, and would lead to the destruction of society.

In spite of this reaction, Davitt himself expressed delight with his visit to the Highland capital. As in Aberdeen, he believed that it was his most socially advanced doctrines that were most appreciated, and he also enjoyed both being able to understand Gaelic and to be understood in speaking Irish. Although his observation that 'Highland ladies are much better looking than those of Glasgow and the South' is only of peripheral importance, it does back up his assertion that, for him at least, 'Highlanders are very much better specimens of people than the Lowland Scotch.'<sup>74</sup> The Irish Press, similarly, were reinvigorated in their coverage of the Scottish land question after Davitt had returned from Inverness.<sup>75</sup>

Following the meeting in Inverness, recorded the friendly *Irish World*, the platform was 'besieged' with enthusiastic Highlanders who went up to shake hands with Davitt and congratulate him on his address.'<sup>76</sup> On the Sunday, Davitt spent a social evening with a 'number of educated Highlanders'. He was delighted to find that they were learned in the works of George, Kay, Arnold and others, and believed that they were 'just the class of men to start a land movement on the right basis.'<sup>77</sup> In respect of this, he left Inverness promising to 'keep the ball rolling in the Highlands.' It was with a great deal of enthusiasm for the Scottish agitation that Davitt left Greenock for Dublin the following Thursday:

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November 1882: Finish of campaign. Believe I have done good work. Certainly I have broken down a good deal of Scottish prejudice against the Irish Land movement and carried the banner of 'The Land for the People' into the Highlands! Will it remain there?<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9535, Sat. 4 Nov. 1882

<sup>75</sup> The *Oban Times*, for example, noted that 'the land agitation in Skye is receiving coverage from the Irish press. The Dublin *Freeman's Journal* in a an article on the Inverness meeting refers to a grievance of the Scottish crofters, and makes the admission that, while not considering the Irish Land Act a panacea, and while not considering the position of the Irish tenants as entirely paradisaical, they have for the last year or so been less helpless and exposed than the Scottish crofters.' *Oban Times*, 25 Nov. 1882; *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882.

<sup>76</sup> *Irish World*, 2 Dec. 1882

<sup>77</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9535, Sun. 5 Nov. 1882

<sup>78</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9535, Thu. 9 Nov. 1882

Davitt, therefore, initially intended to bring his new ideas regarding the land nationalisation programme to Irish audiences in the Central Belt, but also took the opportunity to stoke up the land agitation in the Highlands. The final speech of the tour was the ill-fated one at Coatbridge, and Davitt upon his return to Ireland seemed somewhat depressed about the Irish Land Question. 'Arrived in this dead country once again', he wrote. 'Oh that I could really rouse it into full throbbing life once more... But I fear it is a man-worshipping, begging nation after all. Still, nil desperandum.' Another part of the 'good work' was furthering the process of allying radical Scots with radical Irishmen, as a basis for a Britain and Ireland-wide workers' movement.<sup>79</sup> Even though he was not carrying a nationalist message, Davitt, along with Ferguson, knew that they nevertheless had to counter the fear which was felt towards radical land reformers because of their associations with the Irish Land War. There was still work to be done, as can be seen by examination of the pages of the *Oban Times* from the period after Davitt's tour.

### **Attitudes to Ireland and the Highlands in the *Oban Times*, 1882-1883**

Just as the *Inverness Courier* and the *Northern Chronicle*, with differing tones, had sought to remind the crofters not to follow the 'impractical' or 'revolutionary' land reformers after Davitt's visit in 1882, so the *Oban Times* continued to preach a conservative editorial line in relation to Ireland. Throughout the year, however, correspondence on the letters page of the *Oban Times* became increasingly radical, with men such as James Somerville of Ardrishaig making frequent contributions.<sup>80</sup> In December, 'Indignant Skyeman' penned a letter assuring readers that it was 'not the minority of Skye' who were disaffected, but a majority.<sup>81</sup> John Murdoch – unable any

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<sup>79</sup> He wrote that '...the purely Scotch audiences to which I have spoken in favour of Land becoming national property evinced no hostility or aversion to such doctrines... apart from personal considerations, is doubly encouraging - it shows that our exiled kindred in Scotland are no longer looked upon as hated intruders... A strong and very bitter feeling has existed, until very recently, between the Irish in Scotland and the people of that country, partly from political, but, I believe, chiefly from religious antagonism. This mutual, but stupid, hostility has frequently assumed the same deplorable character as the party and religious riots of Ulster, and has often resulted in collisions between opposing mobs in the streets of Glasgow and other Scotch cities... The rational explanation of this agreeable change of feeling is, I think, to be found in the acceptance, by an educated and observant people like the Scotch, of the truths enunciated by the Land League, and the recognition of what its leaders have accomplished on behalf of their own people, and what they demand, on the other hand, in the interests of Scotland and Great Britain as well.' *Irish World*, 9 Dec. 1882

<sup>80</sup> *Oban Times*, 3 Jun., 24 Jun., 5 Aug. 1882

<sup>81</sup> *Oban Times*, 9 Dec. 1882



longer to use his own newspaper as a vehicle for his opinions – also featured, stressing the importance of agitation and the traditional links between Ireland and the Scots. ‘It is worth remembering’, he wrote, ‘that in Scotland as well as in Ireland, no successful battle has been fought since the Celts of Erin and Albin fought together as at Bannockburn and Clontarf.’<sup>82</sup>

The first few months of 1883 saw continued agitation on the pages of the *Oban Times* from Liverpool and Glasgow, and the fact that ‘Fionn’ commented from time to time on events in Liverpool suggests that there was a concerted effort on the parts of these men to infuse urgency into the crofters as well as break down residual prejudice against Ireland and the Irish land reformers who had been taking an interest in the Highlands.

The reference to Bannockburn made by Murdoch was ridiculed in print a few weeks later by Reginald Macleod, scion of Dunvegan and Tory candidate for Inverness-shire in the 1885 election, who stated firmly that the Scots ‘won without Irish help at Bannockburn, and will do so again’.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, in spite of the labours of ‘Fionn’ and his Liverpool colleague, the editorial line of the *Oban Times* in relation to Ireland by 1883 still more closely mirrored Whig, rather than radical, opinion.

Although John Murdoch had also written condemning the *Scotsman* for attempting to turn the popular mind of Scotland against the crofters by linking their cause with Irish Home Rule, the *Oban Times* was itself just as wary of crofters becoming influenced by Irish methods.<sup>84</sup> Although committed to the establishment of a Royal Commission to look into the situation of the crofters, this was seen as a way of dampening down the Highland agitation, and dire warnings continued about getting involved with Irish ‘revolutionaries’, and about the state of Ireland in general. An editorial in September 1882 had complained that ‘Ireland is not improving’, in spite of Parnell’s calling off the Land War, and went on to claim – in just the sort of generalisation that ‘Fionn’, John Murdoch and many others were trying to combat – that the majority of Irishmen were lazy.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Oban Times*, 20 Jan. 1883

<sup>83</sup> *Oban Times*, 17 Feb. 1883

<sup>84</sup> ‘John Murdoch and the Anti-Irish’, *Oban Times*, 6 Jan. 1883

<sup>85</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Sep. 1882

Michael Davitt was especially vilified in the *Oban Times* during late 1882, with crofters warned against listening to his ‘revolutionary’ schemes, and accused of using ‘inflammatory language’ at a meeting in Navan, where he told the audience to feed their families before paying rents.<sup>86</sup> With trouble in both the Irish countryside and the towns – ‘the bhoys are out in Dublin’, ran one piece – the *Oban Times* continued well into 1883 to rail against the opinions of some of its most influential correspondents, and would only change very slowly.<sup>87</sup>

The eventual establishment of a Royal Commission was not greeted with the enthusiasm which the loud demands for its formation might have suggested. Nevertheless, as the Napier Commission progressed, crofters grew in confidence to speak out against the landlords they accused of oppression. For the first time, furthermore, during 1883 the *Oban Times* clearly became a journal for, and influenced by, the people instead of one which would try and impose its opinions and decry any attempt at rebellion. The editorship of Duncan Cameron was starting to make itself felt – it would appear that he took over in 1882 rather than, as has been assumed, 1881 – and he now stated, for example, that:

If there are any weak kneed timid mortals who are still doubtful, let them cast their eyes to Glendale, where a cloud is observable not much bigger than a man’s hand, but which we are convinced will yet spread over the land.<sup>88</sup>

The weeks following 31<sup>st</sup> March 1883 carried exhaustive reports of the dealings of the Napier Commission and its progress throughout the Highland and Islands, at times even taking the form of a special supplement. As usual, the regional correspondents

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<sup>86</sup> *Oban Times*, 4 Nov., 2 Dec. 1882

<sup>87</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Dec. 1882

<sup>88</sup> *Oban Times*, 27 Jan. 1883. For Cameron’s take-over of the paper, see *Oban Times*, 8 Jul. 1961 – this centenary edition of the paper stated that the ‘premature death of Mr. Miller in 1881’ saw the ‘newspaper acquired by Mr. Duncan Cameron of the firm McNiven and Cameron... and his eldest son, Duncan Cameron Jr., assumed the editorship.’ This has been accepted by Hunter, who, it must be noted, also had access to the paper’s archives. Hunter, ‘Politics of Highland Land Reform’, 51. However, no mention is made of Miller’s death in the *Oban Times*’ review of 1881, in spite of there being obituary notices for other prominent Oban residents who died that year (*Oban Times*, 31 Dec. 1881). The owner of the paper was given as ‘James W. Miller, John St., Oban’, until 14 Nov. 1882, when it changed to ‘Duncan Cameron, The Esplanade, Oban.’ In the absence of internal evidence from the newspaper, therefore, this might suggest a change in ownership slightly later than has been thought previously, and partly explains the continuing conservative editorial line throughout most of 1882.

spoke for radical opinion, claiming that the commission was too landlord dominated to be useful.<sup>89</sup> 'Fionn' was also well to the fore, also showing concern about the composition of the commission and echoing Michael Davitt's words to the Irish people in 1879, and Angus Sutherland's in Sutherlandshire in 1882, by writing 'Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!'.<sup>90</sup> This was followed up by a bilingual appeal to the crofters to ensure they used the commission, and support for the work of Alexander MacKenzie and John Murdoch, who visited the townships in order to ensure that 'the crofters would give expressions to their own opinions'.<sup>91</sup>

Whilst the Napier Commission was followed closely throughout 1883, the editorial line was understandably non-committal save for a piece in October which anticipated the report, but was reluctant to comment on any matters other than emigration and congestion.<sup>92</sup> Editorial antagonism towards Ireland remained strong, however, and commented at one point that 'we are heartily sick of the Irish question in general and the land issue in particular.'<sup>93</sup> The Parnellites were still referred to sneeringly as 'The Rebel Party'.<sup>94</sup>

Not for the first time, then, there appeared to be inconsistency in the pages of the *Oban Times* – not only in the duality of opinion between editor and correspondents, but also within the editorial pieces themselves. September 1883 saw a piece supporting the Ross of Mull crofters in their stand for land law reform, whilst still not giving any support to the Irish cause.<sup>95</sup> This is partly explicable by the fact that the Irish had already won a measure of land reform, enacted in 1881, and with Duncan Cameron demanding a similar measure for the Highlands and Islands, he might have thought that the Irish should have been satisfied with their position. There was a deeper strain of anti-Irish sentiment in the paper, however, and the contrasting receptions given to Michael Davitt and Henry George who, after all, carried very

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<sup>89</sup> *Oban Times*, 31 Mar. 1883

<sup>90</sup> *Oban Times*, 28 Apr. 1883

<sup>91</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 May 1883; *Napier Commission*, q. 44503; Angus Sutherland did a similar job in Sutherlandshire, see below, 176

<sup>92</sup> *Oban Times*, 6 Oct. 1883

<sup>93</sup> *Oban Times*, 23 Jun. 1883

<sup>94</sup> *Oban Times*, 4 Aug. 1883

<sup>95</sup> *Oban Times*, 8 Sep. 1883

similar messages, seem to back this up.<sup>96</sup> Something of a welcome, albeit a guarded one, was given to Henry George.<sup>97</sup> This suggests that while the *Oban Times* did support land reform, Michael Davitt – although very close to George in philosophy – was still tainted with Fenianism and was considered too dangerous a person to be associated with at the time.

### **Davitt and Scotland, 1882-1884**

The Highlands seemed to give Davitt an opportunity to learn from previous mistakes, and his enthusiasm for Scotland contrasted starkly with his pessimism for his native land. Davitt's involvement with Scotland before 1882 had been almost entirely confined to addressing the expatriate Irishmen who had settled in Scotland in such numbers. The trip to Inverness, however, had been a watershed, in that he had deliberately carried the 'Land for the People' message to the Highland people. In this way he continued the work begun by Edward McHugh and John Ferguson, and – perhaps more importantly – prefigured the visits of Henry George in 1884 and 1885. Davitt's high profile support for such an extreme doctrine as land nationalisation began a more detailed debate on what land reform measures were needed for the Highlands.

Having finished his tour of Scotland, *United Ireland* stated that Davitt had been 'in areas where no Irish agitator had penetrated before.'<sup>98</sup> Edward McHugh had, as has been seen, penetrated much farther into the Highlands than Davitt had managed on this occasion. Nevertheless, for such a celebrity of the land agitation as Davitt to come and address crofters' representatives was a major boost to the Highland land reformers, and Davitt himself seemed to have gained much strength from it. Soon

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<sup>96</sup> Upon Davitt's visit to Glasgow in early 1884, the paper was moved to comment that '[Davitt] has generally been looked upon as the practical and intensely earnest member of the Irish National Party, but epithets "ruffian landlord" and "double headed political monster" when referring to the Queen's government in Ireland will not raise him in the estimation of honest, though mistaken, land reformers on this side of the channel.' *Oban Times*, 12 Jan. 1884. Whilst it is possibly not surprising that Michael Davitt was referred to in unflattering terms, in spite of the apparent mildness of his statements and support for similar action in the Ross of Mull, to call the Highland land reformers 'mistaken' surely put the paper at odds once more with many of its readers.

<sup>97</sup> See below, 168

<sup>98</sup> *United Ireland*, 18 Nov. 1882

after, the *Irish World* was to announce Davitt's retirement from the National League, an action it strongly supported.<sup>99</sup>

It seems clear that for Davitt, speaking in Scotland was a matter of spreading a workers' agitation rather than trying to create a political second front for Irish nationalism in the Highlands. John Murdoch's support from the Irish-American community, especially the controversy surrounding the Fenian 'Skirmishing Fund' which came into the public domain in late 1881 – has somewhat obscured the issue.<sup>100</sup> It is convenient to see Davitt, the ex-Fenian, coming north to join the earlier Land League emissary in poisoning the crofters' minds against the evils of London government. This may, indeed, have been what the Land League had intended in the first place, and may – eventually – have been a by-product of Irish involvement in the Highlands. Both McHugh and Davitt, however, were committed to improving the position of the working man over nationalist aspirations. In fact it can be argued that because the Highland land issue was free from the nationalist connotations of the Irish agitation, Davitt enjoyed greater freedom to express himself in Scotland. His frustration with Ireland is all too apparent from his diary entries in 1882.

Whilst McHugh was important in spreading the land issue around Skye, Davitt's well publicised visit can be seen as a defining moment in the land issue in the Highlands. In the next few years the region was alive with land reformers and reform movements. Edward McHugh had shown that Irishmen could at least get a hearing, but with the demise of the *Highlander* all the press in the Highlands warned against becoming mixed up with the revolutionary Irishmen. Davitt's speech in Inverness continued the process of countering these conservative messages, and paved the way for Henry George and others in the following years.

The Highlanders and Islanders, as yet, lacked the collective confidence they would show in later years. In spite of the sporadic rent-strikes in some areas, the crofters perhaps needed a visit from a major figure like Davitt to persuade them that they

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<sup>99</sup> *Irish World*, 16 Dec. 1882. The editorial stated that: 'In retiring from the executive of the National League, Mr. Davitt, we believe, has done a very wise thing. Henceforth he can freely preach the 'No Rent' doctrine, which is the only one that can rescue Ireland from landlordism. Henceforth he will not be handicapped by having to drag along an organisation whose programme is a dead weight on the activity of the Irish cause'.

<sup>100</sup> See, e.g., *Celtic Magazine*, Oct. 1881



would be taken seriously. It is with justification that Davitt could tell himself he had 'done good work there.'

Michael Davitt's desire to keep the banner of the 'Land for the People' flying in the Highlands was realised in the years after 1882, but it was not until April 1887 that he returned in person to the Scottish Highlands. The land issue in all parts of Britain and Ireland was never far from his mind, however, and in a letter he wrote in March 1883 for publication in the press in Melbourne, Montreal, and New Orleans, he described the growth of the 'Scotch Land League', referring to it as an offspring of the Irish movement, and with the Welsh also stirring he described the fight against landlordism as being confined to the 'Celtic race.'<sup>101</sup>

It was the suitability of the area for his theories, rather than sentimentality, which stimulated Davitt's interest in the Highlands. This had also been recognised by Henry George who, after originally taking Ireland as his laboratory, transferred much of his interest to Scotland in 1884 and 1885. Scotland not only had the correct conditions to give graphic illustrations of the theories of *Progress and Poverty*, both in the countryside and the towns, it also seemed to contain a people less distracted by other political issues. Speaking in London in October 1883, Davitt condemned monopolies, private ownership of land, and emigration. Evoking John Stuart Mill, Ruskin, and Alfred Russel Wallace, he also referred to Professor J.S. Blackie, and the evidence he had recently given before the Napier Commission. All the Clearances in Scottish history, he said, had been done in accordance with English law:

Which give all power to the strong and no protection to the weak members of society. It was not only the honest crofters who had to retreat before the omnipotent Nimrods of these sporting preserves. Their purple Bens and green, winding Glens, that were once as free to the foot of the pedestrian as the breeze which blows over them, were now fenced round with iron rails, and guarded by jealous gamekeepers. Not a botanist can pick up a fern, nor a geologist split a rock, nor an artist sketch a cascade, nor a rhymer spin a verse, nor a traveller in search of health whiff the mountain breezes for fear, the sacred fear, of disturbing the deer, and curtailing the sport of some able young gentleman.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> TCD Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9586, Notes of letters to newspapers, 1883-4, f.10, Mar. 14 1883: *Melbourne Advocate, Montreal Post, New Orleans Times-Democrat*.

<sup>102</sup> M. Davitt, *Stand aloof from injustice: Speech at the meeting in favour of Land Nationalisation, held at St. James's Hall, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1883* (London, 1883). It is unclear whether Davitt was aware of

Although George's tours around the Highlands have received more attention, Wallace's plans for land nationalisation were also known in the area, and were indeed mocked by the *Oban Times* at the same time as Davitt was extolling his virtues in London.<sup>103</sup> Wallace's work was, according to Skeabost proprietor Lachlan MacDonald, widely available on Skye.<sup>104</sup> The visit of Henry George to Scotland in 1884 also kept the issue of land and social reform on the agenda. The *Oban Times*, in an editorial, criticised Davitt for using violent language at a meeting in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, but it was also at this time that Davitt returned to Scotland to address crowds of Irishmen in Glasgow.<sup>105</sup> These speeches were generally on the question of Irish landlordism, rather than Highland problems; internal ructions within the Irish nationalist movement prevented Davitt accompanying Henry George around Scotland.<sup>106</sup> An exasperated Davitt reflected privately – in his diary – at the end of 1883 that the Irish Parliamentary Party were 'idiots' for not only ignoring the English (and, by extension, Scottish) land and labour movement, 'but actually to obstruct me in my efforts to help it along'.<sup>107</sup> Concern seemed to be growing on the part of Charles Stewart Parnell that Davitt's working class politics were interfering with Irish

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differences in Scots and English law, or whether this reference to the English legal system is a result of a positive view of Scotland and the Scots. This was a predominantly English audience, so any use of 'English law' to inspire latent nationalism in a Scottish audience could only have come through reading the speech in newspapers, or in pamphlet form. Compare this with Angus Sutherland's reference to 'English laws' at John Dillon's 1888 Inverness speech. See below, 300. Davitt attacked the 'absurd reasoning' of those who criticised the work of George and Wallace as being acceptable in theory but impractical in application: 'It may be asserted again that private property in land is a necessity in the economy of society and that its theoretic injustice is compensated for in its economic advantages. If so, where are they to be seen? Want keeps pace with wealth, poverty with progress, the discontent of the many with the affluence of the few. Are they to be seen in millions of paupers, in land going back to a state of Nature, crowded cities and depopulated acres, Highland and Irish clearances and crowded emigrant ships?' He gave a similar speech in Nottingham on the 'Irish Social Problem'. *Irish World*, 12 Jan. 1884

<sup>103</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Oct. 1883

<sup>104</sup> *Oban Times*, 15 Dec. 1883

<sup>105</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Jan. 1884

<sup>106</sup> *Oban Times*, 19 Jan. 1884 claimed that 'the Land Nationalisation Society intends to start operations in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Henry George and Michael Davitt are to be the missionaries who will convert the crofters to the new faith... whatever immediate success they have they will almost certainly intensify and deepen the agrarian movement which exists among the crofters, and that is probably the real object of their campaign.'

<sup>107</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9536, 31 Dec. 1883; T.W. Moody, 'Michael Davitt and the British Labour Movement, 1882-1906', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ser. iii (1953), 62

nationalist aspirations, and used his newspaper to question the merits of the Davitt / George lecture tour.<sup>108</sup>

At a meeting in Drogheda in 1884, Parnell condemned both Davitt's plans for land nationalisation and his courting of the British working classes in almost mocking terms.<sup>109</sup> Davitt's fears that the 'man worshipping' Irish would blindly follow Parnell seemed confirmed when, in stark contrast to his Scottish lectures in 1884, George's Dublin address was unenthusiastically received.<sup>110</sup> Representatives of the Irish Parliamentary Party boycotted the meeting, and in spite of Davitt's presence on the platform:

The only feeling which seemed to pervade the crowd was curiosity, and the lecturer did not appear to excite any new interest. At the close he asked if anyone had any objections to offer or questions to ask, but there was no response...<sup>111</sup>

So Davitt stayed away while two of his closest allies were keeping the crofting agitation alive. John Murdoch was organising Highlanders in Glasgow and Edinburgh and Henry George carried the theory of land nationalisation to Skye, where – according to John McPherson of Glendale – 'his words fell like a shower of nectar on

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<sup>108</sup> The *Oban Times* reported that 'Mr. Davitt was exceedingly angry with the *United Ireland* for letting the cat out of the bag with regard to Henry George... Mr Parnell and his lieutenants are afraid to attack Mr. Davitt as yet, so they attack him through Mr. George, with whom he shared the responsibility of shared views and efforts.' *Oban Times*, 19 Jan. 1884; *United Ireland*, 12 Jan 1884. G.B. Clark had also intended to 'join Mr. Henry George and Mr. Michael Davitt in their crusade in the Highlands', but was prevented from doing so by the London HLLRA, who wanted 'more constitutional methods than those adopted', *Highland News*, 7 Jan. 1884. Tensions also surfaced within Glasgow, with internal divisions in the Home Government Branch of the National League, between Ferguson and his supporters, and those who wished to remain loyal to Parnell. *The Exile*, 30 Aug. 1884. Ferguson, indeed, resigned, albeit temporarily, shortly afterwards. *The Exile*, 20 Sep. 1884. By 1886, John Ferguson was not even recognised by Irish leaders Tim Healy and John Redmond when they came to Glasgow. *Glasgow Observer*, 6 Mar. 1886. This state of affairs led to 'A Looker On', a correspondent in the SDF's newspaper, *Justice!*, to call for Parnell's replacement by Davitt as Irish leader. See *Justice!*, 3 May 1884

<sup>109</sup> F.S.L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977), 258; Parnell said that 'we are told of some great wave of English democracy which is now to come over here to Ireland and assist the Irish democracy. Well, I do not believe in the English democracy. The poor Irish democracy will have, I fear, to rely upon themselves in the future, and they have had to do so until this moment.' *Glasgow Observer*, 15 Sep. 1888 also quotes Parnell's Drogheda speech, juxtaposing his views with those of Davitt.

<sup>110</sup> A. Birnie, *Single Tax George* (London, 1939), 109

<sup>111</sup> *The Times*, 10 Feb. 1884. This failure to rouse the Irish from their support for Peasant Proprietary continued to frustrate the Single Tax movement. In 1903 an article written about George's 1881 visit was entitled 'What Might Have Been'. *Land Values*, Jun. 1903

his auditors.’<sup>112</sup> Davitt showed that he still took a direct interest in the Scottish Highlands and Islands by penning a letter on ‘The Progress of Land Nationalisation’ appearing in the *Oban Times* in July.<sup>113</sup>

This was a wide reaching policy document, even though it was sent to a person known as ‘Scottish Land Restorer’ acknowledging receipt of a copy of a pamphlet called ‘The Blight of Landlordism.’ Davitt had become seen as a father figure to the nascent Scottish land restoration movement, and several of the issues raised in the statement have importance for the Scottish agitation. He was excited about how far the land issue had come in such a short time, and of the bringing together of all working class interests, irrespective of nationality. This theory had long been advocated by Henry George, and it is in the context of George’s visit to Britain that Davitt wrote.

The other notable feature of Davitt’s speeches to Irishmen in Scotland in the 1880s was the importance he placed on winning the hearts to the Scottish people to cause of land reform, and, latterly, Irish Home Rule. This is in keeping with other speeches he made on social matters throughout Britain at this time, but it was Scotland, and Glasgow in particular, which he considered to be the platform from which he and his colleagues could popularise Henry George’s theories throughout the rest of Britain and Ireland.

The co-operation between urban Highlanders and Irish, so notable in the years leading up to 1882, showed no sign of weakening. J. MacKenzie MacLeod. ‘Lochbroom’, of the Liverpool Highland Association, attended Davitt’s speech on ‘Castle Rule and Country Ruin’ in that city in 1883.<sup>114</sup> During the same week, ‘Lochbroom’ gave a speech in Liverpool entitled ‘the Land for the People’, and the anonymous Liverpool correspondent of the *Oban Times* expressed a wish that ‘if but the Irish and Scottish people could be brought to look upon one another with closer friendship, English and Scottish misrule would soon be a thing of the past.’<sup>115</sup> The same Liverpool correspondent would continue to promote the cause not only of Irish-Highland co-

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<sup>112</sup> *Oban Times*, 9 Feb. 1884; 23 Feb. 1884. John Murdoch’s Edinburgh speech, alongside J.S. Blackie, argued that the Irish and Scottish land questions were ‘perfectly parallel’.

<sup>113</sup> *Oban Times*, 5 Jul. 1884

<sup>114</sup> *Irish World*, 29 Dec. 1883

<sup>115</sup> *Oban Times*, 22 Dec. 1883

operation, but also of Georgite land nationalisation in Scotland, though his *Oban Times* column.

Davitt continued to lecture in British towns and cities at this time, generally on Irish social problems.<sup>116</sup> At a meeting held by Davitt's fellow Land League veteran, Thomas Sexton, in late 1883, the links between Highlanders and Irishmen in radical circles in the city were on full display. Some observers, however, became exasperated at an apparent campaign to prevent these links becoming common knowledge.<sup>117</sup>

The implication is that, whilst some parts of society, and the press – notably the *Scotsman* – had no hesitation in blaming the influence of Irish agitators for the outbreak of unrest in the Highlands, they had resolved to control this co-operation by depriving it of the oxygen of publicity. When Davitt spoke at the City Hall in February 1884, presided over by John Ferguson, Highlanders took prominent positions on the platform, including John Murdoch who, as usual, sported 'the Highland costume'.<sup>118</sup> The main point of this meeting was to stress loyalty to Parnell as the Irish leader, but it also claimed that 'the real leaders of men were siding with them'.

At a further speech, given in the Albion Hall to the Glasgow Young Ireland Society – of which Davitt had been elected President – Davitt impressed upon an audience of

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<sup>116</sup> One speech in Newcastle on 'The Irish Social Problem and its Solution' created a tremendous disturbance, during which Davitt was compelled to hold his revolver in self-defence; *The Times*, 13 Feb. 1884; *United Ireland*, 16 Feb. 1884

<sup>117</sup> Writing in J. Shaw Maxwell's short-lived radical newspaper, *The Voice of the People*, 'Highlander' complained that 'the conduct of the Glasgow press is notorious for its petty prejudice regarding public meetings. If an Irish lecture on the Land Question takes place, the daily and evening newspapers are busy (showing secret skill) in cooking it to suit the public palate. This week Mr. Sexton, MP, lectured in the City Hall, and on the platform and among the meeting were many Scotchmen – many of them prominent men. To my own knowledge I saw five Scotchmen on the platform who I knew by name, and three of four of them addressed the meeting. But no mention is made by the papers of such men of spirit and courage as Mr. Murdoch, Mr. Sutherland and the Rev. Mr. Webster. The first and last named are omitted by all the papers. The *Evening Times* curiously says there was one Scotchman only, and one Highlander. The only reason that I am left to suggest for such trickery and petty spite is this – they are afraid lest Scotchmen and Englishmen might be easily influenced to follow the good example of such men; and further, to prevent the masses showing, or having any sympathy with, Irish grievances.' *Voice of the People*, 10 Nov. 1883. 'Highlander' was John Murdoch's long standing *nom-de-plume*.

<sup>118</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 5 Feb. 1884; *Irish World*, 15 Mar. 1884; A brief report is also included in *Oban Times*, 9 Feb. 1884. Rev. Alexander Webster was a Unitarian minister who was later involved in spreading socialism around north west Scotland. See W.H. Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics: From Radicalism to Labour* (Edinburgh, 2000), 113



2,000 people the need to influence Scottish public opinion on the Irish land movement. 'In carrying out that work' he said, 'he would impose upon the members the necessity of exercising great care and judgement in all their efforts to inform the public mind of Scotland on the Irish national cause...' Although some of the speech was taken up, inevitably, with the evils of 'Castle Government' and the heroic deeds of Young Ireland leaders such as Thomas Davis and John Mitchel, Davitt took the opportunity in what he called 'the greatest city in Great Britain' to reaffirm his views on land:

Another error to be avoided was the condemning of individuals for the crimes and consequences of the system. He always held that landlords, as individuals, were not morally or politically responsible for the crimes of Irish landlordism. He had occasionally to draw distinctions between the actions of certain landlords of a bad type and those of landlords who were not quite so bad. But at the same time he invariably endeavoured to educate people into the view that bad laws were responsible for the bad actions of individuals who held possession of their property.<sup>119</sup>

Although not compatible with the views of Parnell and the majority of the Irish parliamentary party, Davitt's analysis was well received in a city which would, in the next month, spawn the Scottish Land Restoration League. With Henry George on Skye at this time, Davitt's words were of clear interest to crofters, and further explains why Davitt saw Scotland as such a vital part of his long term plan to convert Britain and Ireland to land nationalisation. His private contempt for Parnellism remained undiminished, confiding in Henry George that 'Irish people are too prone to man worship to lead a movement of ideas'.<sup>120</sup> It is clear, however, that Davitt had sound pragmatic reasons for at least paying lip service to Parnell. Responding to a concerned John Ferguson in 1884, Davitt argued that any attempt to speak out against the 'retrograde speeches' of the Parliamentary Party would be crushed at once as an attack on the leader himself.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Feb. 1884; *Oban Times*, 16 Feb. 1884; This totally contradicts what Moody said about Davitt not distinguishing between different types of landlord. See above, 137

<sup>120</sup> Letter from Michael Davitt to Henry George, 19 Mar 1884. Quoted in J.R. Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left: The Impact of American Ideas on the Scottish Labour Movement from the American Civil War to the end of World War One' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1998), 98

<sup>121</sup> Davitt suggested that it would be wise 'in my opinion to allow the country to make up of itself to the knowledge that men who have been masquerading as land leaguers are now insidiously apologising for landlordism... There is great strength in a well-regulated silence, particularly when ideas are ripening in the popular mind... Do nothing to create division, let it come through a defection from principle over

In an article in *To-day*, Davitt claimed that ‘the [1881] Land Act is neither a final nor a temporary settlement of the Irish agrarian war. It is a mere parley between contending forces, in which the bayonets of the Government are alone the preservers of peace.’<sup>122</sup> In arguing that ‘peasant proprietary will not destroy, it will only extend the absolute ownership of the land’, Davitt was not speaking for the majority of the Irish tenants, even though the *Irish World* backed him in America. Likely to be far more receptive to his ideas were Scots, amongst whom the main focus of debate at this time was not on Home Rule, but on what form of land reform would suit them best.

The *Oban Times*, so recently critical of Davitt’s inflammatory rhetorical style, praised his article for its moderation and common sense.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, with the report of the Napier Commission finally appearing – to almost universal condemnation amongst Highland activists – the *Oban Times* had supported the doctrines espoused by Henry George and J. Shaw Maxwell in their recent visits to the Highlands and Islands. An editorial even echoed Davitt’s own words in suggesting that, just as peasant proprietary was condemned as utopian in 1880, prior to the Irish Land Act, land nationalisation, in 1884, was ‘no longer a baseless dream’.<sup>124</sup>

Other parts of the Highland press, inevitably, remained sceptical, if not downright hostile, to Davitt and other supporters of George. The Tory *Northern Chronicle*, as well as reporting how Lady MacDonald had visited Braes with food and blankets for the needy, spoke of Henry George as a communist.<sup>125</sup> It also proudly reported that the

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the other side... to preach ideas and not men, or wait for the victory of the franchise. On these lines, the future is ours, that is, it will be won by a platform of truth and justice.’ TCD Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9375/992f. Davitt to Ferguson, 25 Jun. 1884

<sup>122</sup> M. Davitt, ‘The Irish Social Problem’, *To-day*, New Series, iv (Apr. 1884), 241-255

<sup>123</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Apr. 1884

<sup>124</sup> *Oban Times*, 17 May 1884. Whilst an ‘unquestionable authority’ had claimed that the Chief Secretary for Ireland, George Otto Trevelyan, and the cabinet had spoken privately about the possibility of buying out Irish landlords, nothing came of these alleged proposals. Furthermore, discussions about the Highlands had a much less radical hue, with ministers and landlords debating over whether even the ‘3 F’s’ were necessary for the region. It appeared that any legislation might be delayed by considerations over what constituted the crofting regions, and fears that any measures would have to cover the whole of Scotland, or possible England. See Public Record Office, CAB37/14/166-171, Confidential Letters Relating to the Question of the Skye Crofters, 1884-5: Lochiel to Harcourt, 20 Dec. 1884; Lord Advocate to Harcourt, 18 Jan. 1885; Harcourt to Gladstone, 17 Jan. 1885

<sup>125</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 16 Jan. 1884

American was 'heartily hissed' at his Inverness meeting.<sup>126</sup> It was even more scathing about the SLRL, and was at a loss to explain the sudden gullibility of the crofters in following such organisations.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, the *Inverness Courier* put the activities of the land reformers in perspective by reporting in detail about the Russian Nihilists and revolutionary movements, and the Socialist agitation in Austria.<sup>128</sup>

Aware that land nationalisation was a much more live issue in Scotland than Ireland, Davitt made repeated references to the crofting agitation throughout 1884 and 1885. At a meeting of the English Land Restoration League in London, he admitted that, although Ireland had been in the vanguard of the land reform movement, there were, at that time, more possibilities for radical reform in Scotland. He gave begrudging praise to the 1881 Land Act, stressing the agitation that led to it, before giving a wide summary of the situation – as he saw it – in Scotland.<sup>129</sup>

As has been noted above, Henry George's ideas on land reform had been disseminated throughout Skye by Edward McHugh from an early stage of the agitation. George had stated in a despatch to the *Irish World* – for which he reported during his first visit to Ireland – that the Irish Land League had caused great

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<sup>126</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 27 Feb. 1884

<sup>127</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 19 Mar. 1884; A correspondent wrote: 'Dear Sir – The Land League nuisance crops up in almost every imaginable "hole and corner". The Highlander is supposed to be of highly respectable antecedents, but of late he seems to be doing all he can to prove himself unworthy of the stirring traditions and memories of the past. Ready he is to follow any Fenian quack, even over the rocks of revolutionary ruin, provided he hears the cry of "more land" and seems to see its reflection in the depths into which he is about to plunge.' Another article in the same edition wrote that 'the disciples of Henry George in Glasgow have formed themselves into the "Glasgow Central Branch No. 1" of a Scottish Land Restoration League. Their leaders declare their distinctive cry to be "Down with Landlordism", which is just sufficiently odious in the sight of Scottish people. Mr. John Murdoch is one of the crew.' For another reference to the good works which MacDonald had apparently embarked on, including having her children learn Gaelic, see N. MacLeod, *The Former Days* (London, 1945), 132

<sup>128</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 5 Feb., 16 Feb., 23 Feb., 28 Feb. 1884; See also *Christian Socialist*, Aug. 1885, which quoted *Blackwood's Magazine's* assertion that the crofting agitation was 'simply and solely the work of a few crafty revolutionists in England, Ireland and America.'

<sup>129</sup> *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1884. 'He felt certain that unless the Government dealt with the crofters on lines as radical and just as the so-called settlement in Ireland, things would before long be done in Scotland which he should regret, but which would be justified. In England the people were being aroused from their lethargy on the subject of land nationalisation, and he held that if the land and the mines and the minerals were nationalised, the working classes of this country would have better homes, better wages, and more leisure, and poverty would all but vanish. To being about this, he did not advocate force, but moral, constitutional, and peaceful means. If the reform were not speedily effected, it was impossible to say what means the people would resort to once aroused.' Davitt also condemned William Harcourt for his actions in the Highlands, and read a letter of support for the crofters from the Belfast Land Restoration League. *The Exile*, 22 Nov. 1884

embarrassment to the British government by sending their envoy to Skye, and that the crofters had stood up en masse against the oppressive landlords. He was able to describe to Irish American readers the proliferation of deer forests, and criticised the 'rapaciousness' of Lord MacDonald.<sup>130</sup>

### **Henry George, Land Restoration Leagues and Land Nationalisers in the Highlands**

Davitt's Inverness speech of November 1882 had been the first time Georgite land theory had been presented before a mass audience in the Highlands, but it was a further fifteen months before George was to address the crofters. In spite of his views against nationalism, he had been demonised as a land leaguer and Fenian sympathiser by most of the Tory press in Britain. In condemning Britain as 'the most damnable government that exists today outside Russia', and writing articles for the *Irish World*, it is no surprise that he became identified with lawlessness as far as the British establishment was concerned.<sup>131</sup>

There was a mixed response for the 'Prophet of San Francisco' when he arrived in the Highlands. The *Northern Ensign* carried a letter which accused George of 'trampling on the moral law of God', after he held a reception at Euston Station on the Sabbath. It went on to accuse him of supporting 'assassination, murder and boycotting' as an ally of Davitt.<sup>132</sup> Henry George's arrival in Scotland was greeted by the *Oban Times* with a welcome which could best be described as guarded, and at worst downright cynical:

Some one has stated that either Mr. Henry George is a consummate hypocrite or a noble enthusiast of deep religious conviction. Our opinion is that he is the latter; but we must guard ourselves against

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<sup>130</sup> *Irish World*, 27 Apr. 1882. George's tour to Scotland has already received some academic attention. Most recently, see Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left', 77-118; Barker, *Henry George*, 378-416; E.P. Lawrence, *Henry George in the British Isles* (Michigan, 1955), 35, 42-3, 45, 58. Frame's work, in particular, questions both the impact George had on the Highlands population, and George's own desire to establish any land movement in the region.

<sup>131</sup> George undertook a strenuous tour in 1884 and 1885 throughout Britain, taking in areas which has been targeted by the Land Reform Union as susceptible to his arguments. With George and Davitt at odds with Parnell, and Ireland embroiled in the Home Rule issue, it seemed prudent to concentrate attention on England and Scotland. He made fifty speeches in Scotland, twenty three in England and just a couple in Ireland. For details of his tour, see Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left', 88-102

<sup>132</sup> Lawrence, *Henry George in the British Isles*, 35

being identified with his conclusions, with which we have no sympathy.<sup>133</sup>

The piece claimed that there should be no objection to the landlord class per se, as long as those landlords fulfil obligations to their tenants. In spite of this vague ideal, George was condemned because his theories were ‘all in the air. Good enough for gushy philanthropists but highly impractical in this work-a-day world.’ Conversely, an *Oban Times* correspondent signing himself as ‘Ratepayer’ from Portree, praised George’s speech to the people of that town in February 1884 as ‘brilliant and telling.’ The letter also hinted at the widespread knowledge of George’s ideas by claiming that it didn’t matter that the paper had not carried a full report on the speech because ‘...his book, *Progress and Poverty*, costs only sixpence and is everywhere read.’<sup>134</sup>

In summing up his visit to Scotland at the end of March 1884, George claimed that he found Scotland ‘riper on the whole than England’ for land reform. As will be seen, a major consequence of his 1884 visit was the formation of the Georgite SLRL, and this body, he warned, ‘meant business’.<sup>135</sup> Referring to the Highlands, George claimed that it was, in fact, the men of the cities to whom he looked to instigate a Single Tax movement and that the towns ‘must carry the standard of advancement’.<sup>136</sup> The First National Radical Conference, which was held in February 1884, not only called for a Highland Land Bill, but also remarked that ‘if only the citizens of Dundee, Paisley, Glasgow and other towns in Scotland will only join the crofters in their agitation, it will not be long before the cry of Land Nationalisation will be heard all over North Britain’.<sup>137</sup>

The poem ‘Moladh Henry Seòras’ appeared later in the year in the pages of the *Oban Times*, but Meek identifies it as having been composed some time around February or

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<sup>133</sup> *Oban Times* 23 Feb. 1884

<sup>134</sup> *Oban Times*, 1 Mar. 1884 *Oban Times*, 5 Apr. 1884.

<sup>135</sup> *Oban Times*, 29 Mar. 1884. Even this paled into insignificance compared with the blandishments heaped upon George by some in the Highlands. The Ross of Mull correspondent of the *Oban Times* claimed poetically that ‘the gentle sighing of the breeze through the branches of the non-budding trees has a smooth running articulation of “Henry” running through it...’ *Oban Times*, 5 Apr. 1884

<sup>136</sup> H. George, *Scotland and Scotsmen* (Melbourne, 1932), 18

<sup>137</sup> *Justice!*, 2 Feb. 1884



March.<sup>138</sup> The final stanza in particular of this poem is interesting, as it could show that the crofters felt themselves part of a much wider struggle of workers throughout the world, ‘dùthaich is baile le chèile’ showing that it is not only a land struggle, but a vindication of the rights of the working classes.<sup>139</sup> Even if the poem cannot be said to represent the opinions of all crofters, it is surely still worth mentioning that there were people prepared to write such pieces as a means of influencing the Highland population. The optimistic tone of the poem is also in keeping with the increasing confidence of the Highlanders and Islanders, and its date of publication anticipated the imminent return of George to the North in January 1885.

In its full length of eight stanzas, however ‘Moladh Henry Seòras’ does not deal with any specifics of George’s theory, other than the black and white of the landlord dominating the people, who were all born equal. In this respect, the poem is an example of how the crofters possibly allowed themselves to be accused of supporting anyone calling himself a land reformer, regardless of the detailed arguments involved.

This had already been observed by a correspondent in Dundee who wrote that it was no surprise to see Henry George cheered to the rafters wherever he went, because ‘...it is pleasant to many persons to hear anything at all like plausible reasons for a proposal that they, as citizens of the country, should be endowed with the property of other persons...’<sup>140</sup>

However, even though there was great enthusiasm at the time for George and his message, the long term effect on the crofters who listened to him is debatable. Similarly, when James Shaw Maxwell visited Skye on behalf of the SLRL, he carried with him the manifesto of that organisation, proposing a land nationalisation scheme.<sup>141</sup> In visiting Skye, Shaw Maxwell covered a lot of ground, addressing

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<sup>138</sup> Meek, *Tuath Is Tighearna*, 129; *Oban Times*, 13 Dec. 1884. The opening stanza translates as ‘We will praise Henry George/ we will sing a song about him, and give him honour/ we will, and we ought to/ we will praise him gladly, in manly fashion.’

<sup>139</sup> Meek translates this as ‘town and country stand together’. The full stanza infers that support for the crofters already came from London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Ireland, ‘along with people of foreign lands’.

<sup>140</sup> *Dundee Courier and Argus*, 4 Feb. 1884; Lawrence, *Henry George in the British Isles*, 67

<sup>141</sup> *Oban Times*, 19 May 1884. Along with Shaw Maxwell, the leading lights of the Scottish Land Restoration League included William Forsythe (President) and J. Bruce Glasier, as well as well-known agitators like McGhee and John Murdoch, who was the league’s secretary. Murdoch and Shaw Maxwell were also active at this time in the Scottish Farmer’s Alliance. Shaw Maxwell’s newspaper,

meetings of crofters in Dunvegan, Waternish, Glendale, Valtos, Uig, Portree and Braes. Success was seen in Braes, where a branch of the league was founded, and Glendale, where a resolution was passed calling on the HLLRA of London to unite with the SLRL in its efforts. Shaw Maxwell also pressed the force of moral justice.<sup>142</sup>

Land nationalisation was a live issue, therefore, at the time when the Royal Commission published its recommendations.<sup>143</sup> If the 1881 Irish Land Act can be seen as too little, too late, to satisfy the growing demands of the Irish tenants, perhaps the same can be said of the Napier Report. In a climate of increasing awareness of nationalisation of the land, and indeed the *Oban Times* reported in May that 'it would appear that the nationalisation of the land in Ireland is no longer a baseless dream', the crofting community reacted negatively to the 1884 report, even if they did not generally favour the extreme views of Davitt, George and the SLRL.

Liverpool continued to be an important centre for radicalism. The theme of unity between Irish and Highlanders was stressed, and this was vital in a city which – like Glasgow – contained a sizeable proportion of residents angered by the Irish influx, and a large number of Orange lodges.<sup>144</sup> The point was continually reinforced by the *Oban Times*' letters from Liverpool, which praised the Dublin *Freeman's Journal* for its coverage of Highland affairs, urged Highland people to follow the Irish example regarding reform of the land laws, and even singled out individual Irishmen – local worthies or nationalist MPs – for particular praise.<sup>145</sup> It is also clear that the correspondent had the ear of some prominent men in the city, describing his conversations with Irish MPs and even claiming, after the 1885 election, that Charles

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*The Voice of the People*, also carried several reports on the state of the crofters during its short life. *The Voice of the People*, 13 Oct., 20 Oct., 27 Oct., 3 Nov., 10 Nov., 17 Nov., 24 Nov. 1883

<sup>142</sup> *Oban Times*, 3 May 1884; see also Cameron, 'Poverty, Protest and Politics', 22-23

<sup>143</sup> The English Land Restoration League also sent an envoy to Skye. *Scotsman*, 22 Nov. 1884

<sup>144</sup> T. Gallagher, 'A Tale of Two Cities: Communal Strife in Glasgow and Liverpool before 1914', in R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London, 1985), 107

<sup>145</sup> *Oban Times*, 23 Feb., 3 May 1884, 11 Jul. 1885. In *Oban Times*, 15 Mar. 1884, the correspondent claimed that it was 'only a spurious religious feeling in the hands of interested parties that endeavoured to keep the Irish and Scottish Kelt asunder.' The following week, he told the people of Oban to give a warm welcome to Albert Crilly, the secretary of the Financial Reform Association, adding rather gratuitously that 'being an Irishman, he has all the charms of his race', *Oban Times*, 22 Mar. 1884. In January 1886, he highlighted MP for S. Longford, Lawrence Connolly, describing him in glowing terms, *Oban Times*, 30 Jan. 1886. Connolly had been born in Dublin in 1837, but had been a manager of a family firm of fruit merchants in Liverpool since he was a young man. L.W. Brady, *T.P. O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish* (London, 1983), 37.

Stewart Parnell himself had told him he had been delighted to have assisted the crofters.<sup>146</sup> The fact that, if anything, Parnell's pact with the Tories had hindered the land reform candidates in the cities was an irony – probably wilfully – ignored by the correspondent.

As in Glasgow, the links between left-wing Irish nationalists and Socialist / Georgite land reformers were, at least initially, close, with many people undoubtedly fitting into both roles. Alongside a firm support for the Irish people, the Liverpool correspondent stridently advocated land nationalisation – a measure which never found favour in the editorial columns of the *Oban Times*.<sup>147</sup> This closeness between the issues of Ireland and land were not lost on opponents. A consistent critic of the 'Liverpool letter' was 'JAF', who condemned Henry George as being no better than a highwayman and, referring to the Liverpool correspondent, said

If he is not an Irish land leaguer, he is a very good imitation. With him all landlords are murderers, blood suckers, craven-hearted oppressors &c. This is the usual froth that we are accustomed to hear from the deceivers of the Irish people.<sup>148</sup>

This is another example of how public perceptions did not seem to recognise the differences between Irish Nationalists and Land Nationalisers. In the same issue, a native Liverpoolian, 'Englishman', also wrote to complain about the correspondent's 'hero worship' for Henry George. It is interesting to note, though, that 'Englishman' added that his writing should 'speak well for the wide and extensive circulation of your paper, which is easily obtained in this city.'

From the beginning of the Highland land agitation, the Liverpool correspondent had been firmly opposed to any superficial reform of the land laws, condemning in particular the Napier Commission both in its composition and in its conclusions.<sup>149</sup> As further elaborated by Ronald MacDougall at the Portree Conference, the suggestions

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<sup>146</sup> *Oban Times*, 5 Dec. 1885. Parnell said, in spite of all evidence tending to contradict him, that he kept a close interest in the Highland question – the 'Stewart' part of his name linking him emotionally to Scotland.

<sup>147</sup> The editor, Duncan Cameron, favoured peasant proprietary and the '3 F's'

<sup>148</sup> *Oban Times*, 19 Apr. 1884

<sup>149</sup> *Oban Times*, 31 Mar., 26 May 1883, 10 May 1884

of Lord Napier and his fellow commissioners were anathema to the more advanced radicals, especially the recommendations relating to emigration and enlistment.

Whilst the strength of conviction on the part of the land nationalists disconcerted some – the Liverpool correspondent engaged in lengthy and detailed debate with ‘JAF’ and ‘Advance’ on the issue – all the leading Liverpool Highlanders advocated the measure and, inevitably, forged close links with the Glasgow members of the SLRL.<sup>150</sup> The debate had been provoked in the first place by the Liverpool correspondent’s unbounded admiration for Henry George, and this gave him further cause for national differences between the Irish and Scottish people to be forgotten.<sup>151</sup>

He reported on how mixed groups of Liverpool-based Irish and Highlanders met with Henry George at the Wellington Hotel upon the American’s visit to the city, and also that ‘several members of the Liverpool branch of the Scottish Land Restoration League’ were present at the Irish National Halls in Birkenhead.<sup>152</sup> At the latter meeting an address was given by A. MacDonald on the objects of the League, prompting the correspondent to reflect upon how:

The Irish and Highlanders are fraternising again as in the times of Montrose... no wonder their enemies are in dread fear of them coming together again.

As well as Irish co-operation, the Liverpool Highlanders consistently emphasised the need to secure the support of the English democracy, mirroring Michael Davitt’s beliefs relating to Irish Home Rule.<sup>153</sup> The need to push the docile Scottish MPs into action was also of great importance.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> For the debate with ‘JAF’ and ‘Advance’, see *Oban Times*, 8 Mar., 22 Mar., 29 Mar., 5 Apr., 19 Apr. 1884. The relationship with the SLRL and its members remained close, with the Liverpool correspondent in 1886 writing that ‘the names of Mr. Shaw Maxwell and Mr. John Murdoch are held here in great estimation... A few more heroes of that kind would encourage the weak-kneed amongst us.’ *Oban Times*, 26 Apr. 1886

<sup>151</sup> *Oban Times*, 9 Feb. 1884

<sup>152</sup> *Oban Times*, 19 Apr., 10 May 1884. It is notable that, in spite of the existence of an English Land Restoration League, the Liverpool Highlanders still adhered to the Scottish body.

<sup>153</sup> *Oban Times*, 14 May, 24 Dec. 1881, 19 Sep. 1885 (R. MacDougall’s speech at Oban). See also *Oban Times*, 27 Mar. 1886 for Liverpool support for the Welsh Tithe agitation.

<sup>154</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Sep. 1885

The Georgite principles espoused by the Liverpool Highlanders were carried north into the crofting districts in the run up to the 1885, and 1886, general elections. 'Lochbroom' supported John Murdoch's ill-fated campaign in Partick on behalf of the SLRL, and at least one of the Liverpool committee was present at each of the large crofter meetings in Dingwall (September 1884), Portree (September 1885), Oban (September 1885) and Bonar Bridge (September 1886).<sup>155</sup>

The message delivered by the Liverpool delegates at Portree was an uncompromising one, reminiscent in tone of Michael Davitt or the Irish Land League.<sup>156</sup> The cheers which greeted Councillor MacDougall at Portree displayed, according to the *Oban Times*' reporter, 'the popularity among the crofters of the Liverpool Society of Highlanders'. At Oban, Lamont denied that the redistribution of land equated to robbery of landlords. Bonar Bridge saw MacDougall – mindful of his grandfathers' occupation in the Easdale slate quarries – expand the land question to include not only the crofters, but also the issue of royalties on mines and quarries.

These opinions were, naturally, defended in the Liverpool columns of the *Oban Times*. Indeed, when the Crofters' Bill finally appeared in 1886, the correspondent employed similar phraseology as Michael Davitt had over the 1885 Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, calling it a 'landlord privileges bill'.<sup>157</sup> Related to the Irish and land issues, there is also a hint that, in spite of his support for a milder measure of peasant proprietary, the Liverpool Highland Society was involved in placing Donald MacFarlane as the parliamentary candidate for Argyll in 1885. While still MP for Carlow, MacFarlane visited Liverpool and discussed the Argyll option there.<sup>158</sup> The

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<sup>155</sup> For Murdoch, see *Oban Times*, 31 Oct. 1885; See *Celtic Magazine*, Oct. 1884 for Dingwall; *Oban Times*, 5 Sep. 1885 and 12 Sep. 1885 for Portree; *Oban Times*, 19 Sep. 1885 for Oban; *John O'Groat Journal*, 29 Sep. 1886 for Bonar Bridge.

<sup>156</sup> A letter from A. MacDonald, read by 'Lochbroom', stated that 'there is one point I never lose sight of for a moment, namely, how easy it is for those of us who are not under the power of landlords at home to boast of what we can do., and recommend strong measures to the crofters. I never recommend any course of action without asking my own heart the question, whether I would pursue that course if I had a croft and a wife and family depending upon me. Speaking for myself personally, I can swear most solemnly that, if I had a croft, wife and children, I would protect them with my life against the bloodhounds of eviction, and, if I had no other alternative, I would rather kill them all with my own hand rather than see my daughters turned out to be prostitutes and my sons to become thieves – all of which horrors have overtaken the victims of eviction, to my own certain knowledge, in more than one instance.' Compare this with John Ferguson's quotation in 1881, above, 35

<sup>157</sup> *Oban Times*, 17 Apr. 1886; *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Aug. 1885; C. King, *Michael Davitt* (Dublin, 2000), 48. Davitt called this act – otherwise known as the Ashbourne Act – a 'landlord relief bill'.

<sup>158</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Jan. 1883, 19 Apr. 1884



family ties which Lamont and MacDougall had in the area, along with the fact that, alone of the 1885 batch of returned 'Crofter MPs', MacFarlane was praised in the Liverpool columns, lends a degree of credibility to this theory and links Liverpool with another vital part of the Highland agitation.<sup>159</sup>

The attention which George's visit to the Highlands received allowed the SLRL to step up its activities. In a series of letters to the Wick-based *Northern Ensign*, the League's Vice-President, J.M. Cherrie, stressed that not only the crofters were harmed by the land laws:

The Highland crofters, the Irish peasants, the millions of dwellers in one-roomed houses in the large cities, the rack-rented shop keepers and manufacturers... will at once be directed to the only course by which they can escape from the oppression which overpowers them...<sup>160</sup>

What Cherrie also hoped to demonstrate was that the Peasant Proprietary plans of the HLLRA were a half-baked solution, and that only by rallying behind the SLRL proposals could the crofters enjoy a permanent amelioration of their condition.<sup>161</sup>

The gradual acceptance of land nationalisation by more mainstream figures is exemplified in Charles Wicksteed's *The Land for the People*, which, in 1885, showed the widespread acceptance of Georgite ideas, denounced, like Davitt, the Irish Land Act of 1881 as 'makeshift', and stressed the importance to the towns of agrarian reform.<sup>162</sup> Wicksteed was President of Kettering Liberal Association, and although he had a firm policy on land reform, he thought that 'the method of regaining the land was of little importance compared with the political education of the people as to their right to it.'<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Mar. 1886 1 May 1886; The Liverpool Highlanders had also been prominent in celebrating the resignation of the Duke of Argyll from Gladstone's cabinet over the Irish Land Act of 1881. *Oban Times*, 14 May 1881

<sup>160</sup> J.M. Cherrie, *The Restoration of the Land to the State Plainly Demonstrated* (London, 1884), 3; *Northern Ensign*, 22 Nov., 27 Dec. 1883, 24 Jan., 21 Feb., 27 Mar., 29 May 1884. For Cherrie's death at his residence in Tollcross, Glasgow, see *Single Tax*, Feb. 1900

<sup>161</sup> J.M. Cherrie, *On the Economic conditions of Land Occupancy, and the Depopulation of the Highlands of Scotland* (London, 1884); *Glasgow Herald*, 9 Feb. 1883; *Northern Ensign*, 28 Jun. 1883

<sup>162</sup> C. Wicksteed, *The Land for the People: How to obtain it and how to manage it* (London, 1885)

<sup>163</sup> *Christian Socialist*, Dec. 1886

The work of George, Shaw Maxwell and the SLRL undoubtedly helped to keep the crofting question before the wider public, and shifted the focus from whether there should be land reform, to what form the reforms should take. However, it is also true that whilst the Skye crofters seemed to appreciate the Land Nationalisation message during these visits, they eventually returned to Parliament a man, Charles Fraser Mackintosh, who embodied the moderate demands of the HLLRA. Furthermore, the only 'opponent' for the crofting vote in the Inverness-shire constituency had been Duncan Cameron, editor of the *Oban Times*, whose 'radicalism' only extended as far as guaranteeing the '3 F's' for the tenants.<sup>164</sup>

**'Engaging Dunrobin Castle stem and stern at close quarters'. Angus Sutherland, the Napier Commission and local agitation, 1882-1884**

In relation to the concept of the urban agitators 'having influence in the districts which they represent', Angus Sutherland was quick to practise what he had been preaching. Notable by his absence at a Glasgow Sutherland Association meeting on 'Evictions', in August 1882, Angus Sutherland was in fact in the village of his birth. He was attempting to bring the agitation directly to his native county, and was attacking the root cause which, by his own admission, had led him to be an agitator – the House of Sutherland.<sup>165</sup> As was usual by this stage, Sutherland found a reliable ally in the regional correspondence of the *Oban Times*, with 'Fionn' writing that Sutherland's address to the natives of Helmsdale 'will do much to encourage the people, and show "the powers that be" that they are being watched by those who are not afraid to expose wrong, even when perpetrated by a Duke or his minions'.<sup>166</sup>

It is likely that, before travelling north, Sutherland canvassed the opinions of a group of Sutherland crofters, based in Marrel, with whom he had been in contact since 1881. On the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1882 a deputation from the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association, including Angus Sutherland, visited Helmsdale, having first placed placards around the area inviting the inhabitants of Helmsdale, Marrel, West Helmsdale, Gartimore

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<sup>164</sup> For the election promises of Fraser Mackintosh, see Cameron, *Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh*, 147-153; *Oban Times*, 26 Sep. 1885; *Scottish Highlander*, 17 Jul. 1885; For Cameron, see *Oban Times*, 6 Dec. 1884; MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 155. Eventually, of course, Duncan Cameron stood down in order to prevent any split of the crofting vote.

<sup>165</sup> *Oban Times*, 26 Aug. 1882; *Northern Chronicle*, 23 Aug. 1882

<sup>166</sup> *Oban Times*, 26 Aug. 1882. The Glasgow correspondent followed this story up by reporting excitedly of the subsequent consternation at Dunrobin Castle, seat of the Sutherland family. *Oban Times*, 2 Sep. 1882

and Portgower to assemble 'and to pass resolutions on matters of general public importance, and particularly with respect to the deprivation of the people of the above named districts of the privilege of summer grazing for their cattle and the keeping of sheep on the moorland common.'<sup>167</sup>

Sutherland spoke to the assembled crofters on 'Evictions in Sutherland' and in particular on the recent evictions at Muie and Rogart, where common grazing had allegedly been taken away from the people of the village, as well as a more general treatment of the land question.<sup>168</sup> 'Fionn' continued to give exposure to events in Helmsdale, and was, like Sutherland, keen to stress that the crofters could have great political power as long as they acted together and had the courage of their convictions.<sup>169</sup> The meetings of Helmsdale crofters also had repercussions for the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association, although ones which Sutherland had almost certainly calculated beforehand. Given the attack under which his family was now starting to come, the Master of Blantyre felt that his position as President of the Association was now untenable.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> A.T. McCall, 'One Community's Stand Against the House of Sutherland', *West Highland Free Press*, 5 Jun. 1998

<sup>168</sup> For brief details of the Muie troubles, see E. Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances: Agrarian Transformation and the Evictions, 1746-1886* (London, 1982), 489. Fionn told readers in the *Oban Times* that Sutherland, being 'thoroughly conversant with the manner in which things are managed in the county', did not spare the Duke nor his 'underlings'. As an ally of Sutherland in attempting to politicise not only Gaels in Glasgow, but all readers of his *Oban Times* column, 'Fionn' exultantly concluded his piece by stating that 'Mr. Sutherland's address will do much to encourage the people, and show "the powers that be" that they are being watched by those who are not afraid to expose wrong, even when perpetrated by a Duke or his minions.' *Oban Times*, 26 Aug. 1882

<sup>169</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Sep. 1882

<sup>170</sup> 'Fionn' again put his own spin on the resignation, writing that a special meeting of the Glasgow Sutherland Association 'is to be held this evening, when a letter from the Master of Blantyre will be submitted resigning his position as President of the Association. Being a nephew of the Duke of Sutherland he views with alarm the action of the Association, in sending a deputation to the county to call the attention of the people to the high handed and unjust policy of the Duke and his underlings.' *Oban Times*, 9 Sep. 1882. A correspondent of the main Tory newspaper in the north of Scotland, the *Northern Chronicle*, expressed concern and regret that the Master of Blantyre had been, effectively, forced from his position: 'Mr. Angus Sutherland, Vice President of the Society... spoke in a rather silly and inexcusable way regarding the Master of Blantyre and the resignation of the office in question. That the Master of Blantyre, who has ever been a warm and generous supporter of all movements for the good of those around him, should have renounced his connection with the Association, leads those that know him and his kindly and thoughtful ways to suspect that the above Association has in some way or another departed, as the Master of Blantyre says in his letter of the 23<sup>rd</sup> ult. to the newspapers already mentioned, from the first and creditable objects it proposed as its principles when he was led to join it'. *Northern Chronicle*, 8 Nov. 1882. 'One Who Knows' also stressed the previously loyal nature of the Highlanders, the value of their military service in the past, and that the 'reputation of those simple-minded and hard-working crofters, as a peace-loving, law-abiding people, will be seriously compromised' if they continue to listen to agitators. In this way the letter is typical of many in

This is a clear indication of how far the politicisation of the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association, led by Sutherland, had come, and a further example of an unwillingness to compromise with those who did not agree with his policies. The writer of the letter, 'One Who Knows', from Rogart, agreed that an Inquiry should be launched into the condition of the Highland crofters, but added that he did not want to enter into that particular debate. His assertion that the Association would lose influence, however, presaged what opponents of Angus Sutherland would say in 1885, as he faced Blantyre's cousin, the Marquis of Stafford, for the Sutherlandshire constituency in that year's general election. A patrician figure could have much more influence in improving the crofters' condition than a firebrand agitator.

No matter how benevolent the Master of Blantyre had been, however, there was no room for him in Sutherland's plans. Any increase in democracy and self-reliance amongst the Highlanders had to come from the people themselves. For too long they had been misled into following the vested interests of the landowners and, as a representative of this class, Angus Sutherland could not accept him as a fit person to be the figurehead of an organisation he hoped would be at the vanguard of a new Highland radicalism.

Even prior to this attack on the Duke of Sutherland, Angus Sutherland had been a consistent critic of certain individual landlords. Like Michael Davitt and Henry George, however, he preferred to attack the system of landlordism in general, in order to expose what he saw as inherent shortcomings in the system. This allowed for the fact that certain individuals, such as the Skye landlord Lachlan MacDonald, might have had good relations with their tenants, but still insisted that the whole position of the landlord depended on 'fraud and confiscation'. It was only human nature that

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Highland circles who sympathised with the condition of the crofting population, but would not countenance the idea of the region falling into civil disobedience and violence as Ireland had done. A complaint that the unnecessary reference to the Highland Clearances inflamed the situation was followed by a glowing tribute to the Master of Blantyre. 'He is, in the best sense of the word, a true friend of the people, as we in Rogart and many others well know. His name is a household word in the parish, and by all classes of the people he is fondly esteemed as a genuine benefactor. His sympathy with the crofters is intelligent and thoughtful, and in the best sense, patriotic, but no-one that knows him and his sensible, kindly, and clear headed views on the land question and other problems, would believe that he would identify himself with any effort on behalf of the crofter that discard the sacred requirements of equity and social order'.

people should make laws which serve their best interests, and therefore it was not surprising that, in a land where landlords held such political power, the land laws should be made, in Sutherland's opinion, entirely to suit them. He argued that there was not a single example in that 'landlord governed country' of a law being passed which had any other basis than personal selfishness, and that no allowance was ever made for common sense and the good of the greater number if those who framed the laws could help it.<sup>171</sup>

Upon returning to Glasgow, Sutherland continued his increasingly vociferous agitation at various meetings in the city, attending, for example, a meeting of *An Comunn Gaidhealach Ghlaschu* with John Murdoch.<sup>172</sup> He also maintained – and, indeed, after the deposition of the Master of Blantyre, strengthened – his prominent position in the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association.<sup>173</sup> Frequently, he voiced the opinion that great reforms can only be enacted from humble beginnings, and that, whilst the agitation might appear to be a small one at that point in time, it would be just the start of a much larger agitation. At a meeting in Paisley, for example, he stated his belief that there were 'forces social, political, and moral, the germs of which lie dormant and hidden until the occasion arises which calls them into active life.' He continued:

We are expressly told not to despise the day of small things. From very small beginnings great events have frequently shaped themselves. From the slow growth and painful development of human knowledge and human opinion, it would appear that such is the nature of things. From the acorn to the oak; from the germ of rebellion to the achievement of liberty; from the first inception to the final consummation; the order of progress is invariably from the less to the greater. But inasmuch as the possibility of the oak lies hidden in the acorn, and of liberty in rebellion, and of final consummation in primary inception, so the great future exists in the present small beginning... There are three things to be taken into consideration in determining fitness for this task: first, ability; second, opportunity; and third, the use made of both...<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> *Highlander*, 22 Dec. 1880, 23 Feb. 1881

<sup>172</sup> *Oban Times*, 20 Sep. 1882

<sup>173</sup> *Oban Times*, 21 Oct. 1882

<sup>174</sup> *Oban Times*, 11 Nov., 18 Nov. 1882



The implication was clear. Highlanders had both the ability, and the opportunity to force reforms in the system of landholding, and to change landlord – tenant relations permanently. All that needed to be done was to grasp that chance. The same message was carried into Edinburgh at the end of 1882, with an address to the HLLRA in Edinburgh. Sutherland claimed that he had ‘heard it frequently asserted that the east wind had so frozen up the sympathies of the Highlanders of Edinburgh that they were quite apathetic to the fate of their countrymen’. Again, an example of Sutherland hoping to goad his audience into self examination and, in the longer term, action. Although he personally did not accept those claims, he clearly expected the Edinburgh Highlanders to come out and prove themselves in the aftermath of the meeting.<sup>175</sup>

By the turn of the year, therefore, Sutherland was able to identify real progress in all areas of the Highland land agitation. The most obvious manifestation of the agitation was, of course, the Battle of the Braes and subsequent unrest in other parts of Skye. Whilst, however, this concentrated the attention of the government, police, and press on that island, more work was going on behind the scenes by the Glasgow agitators. Angus Sutherland had not only been active in Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire, he had travelled north to bait the Duke of Sutherland on his own territory, and had tried to encourage the Edinburgh Highlanders to join wholeheartedly in the agitation.

Even in the newspapers, which had hitherto, with the exception of the *Highlander* and, gradually and thanks to its radical correspondents, such as ‘Fionn’, the *Oban Times*, been hostile to the idea of a movement aiming at improving the condition of the crofters, Sutherland identified progress. Referring back to his policy of goading the Highlanders into action, he blamed them themselves for not having won over the press – ‘like other institutions, it is subject to modifying influences’.<sup>176</sup> Whilst many figures – not only in government, but also the likes of Sheriff Nicolson of Kirkcubright – attempted to play up the agitation as a result of Irish mischief, Sutherland knew that public opinion was coming to support the crofters.

By December 1882, with Skye and Caithness in such a volatile state that Michael Davitt called off plans to visit the areas for fear of inciting violence, the appointment

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<sup>175</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Dec. 1882

<sup>176</sup> *Oban Times*, 11 Nov., 18 Nov. 1882

of a Royal Commission was becoming widely accepted as one means of dampening down the agitation. Sutherland admitted to a meeting in Edinburgh that a Commission was imminent, but also stated that he had no faith whatsoever in its ability to solve the problems of the Highlands.<sup>177</sup>

Armed with this confidence, and claiming that the issue of land tenure could be shirked no longer, he also began to hint at a possible future programme. Whilst it has often appeared that the 'Crofters' Party' of 1885-1892 sprang almost out of nothing with Roderick MacDonald's candidature in the Ross-shire by-election in 1884, it is clear that Angus Sutherland, as well as J.G. Mackay, Henry Whyte and others, saw political organisation coming at a much earlier stage. In suggesting a combination of parliamentary and 'extra-parliamentary' agitation in 1882, Sutherland almost proposed a 'New Departure' for Highland politics.<sup>178</sup>

Indeed, although it has not received a great deal of attention, probably the most 'radical' of the crofting counties would come to be Sutherlandshire. Whilst Davitt, McHugh and their colleagues carried on a determined agitation in Scotland and the rest of Britain, Angus Sutherland had returned increasingly to his roots. Although failing in his bid to be elected in 1885, Sutherland spent many months in his native county in order to promote radical land reform. His connections both with the Irish Land League and, later, the SLRL, meant that Georgite radicalism was able to take root in Sutherlandshire more than elsewhere in the Highlands. This was not a quick process, nor was it one which embraced everyone in the county, but by 1892 the influence of Sutherland's agitation was obvious. Sutherlandshire seems to indicate that, whilst it was possible for external agitators such as Davitt and McHugh, George or Shaw Maxwell, to influence crofter opinion up to a point it required local radicals to spend time building on their work once the outsiders had moved on.

His work 'in the field' limited his public appearances in the Lowland towns in 1883-84, but those meetings he did address often emphasised the change which had swept through the Highlands. In March of 1883, he spoke of how:

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<sup>177</sup> When the Royal Commission's appointment was all but secured, the *Oban Times* thanked the ongoing agitation for bringing it about. *Oban Times*, 27 Jan. 1883

<sup>178</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Dec. 1882

Formerly, the Highland people suffered in silence, and allowed themselves to be oppressed without offering any protests, but now they gave expression to their thoughts and were not afraid to take action to defend their rights. There was never a time in which it was more important that the Highlander in the 'Tir nam Beann' should feel that they had the hearty support of their brethren in the cities and towns of the lowlands, where they are independent of laird of factor.<sup>179</sup>

His speech, relating to the 'Tir nam Beann, nam Gleann 's nan gaisgeach' [sic], was repeated several times that year, the 'gaisgeach' – heroes – whose example all Highlanders should follow being the imprisoned Skye crofters. Indeed, in a rare moment of disloyalty to Sutherlandshire, showing all the skill of a future MP, Sutherland confided in one audience that 'if he had to begin life again, and had his nativity in his own choosing, he would prefer to be a Skyeman.'<sup>180</sup>

Having apparently ensured the support of the FCS in his political aims, Sutherland spent much of 1883 out of the Glasgow limelight. Far from being idle, he spent all his holiday time from Glasgow Academy in Sutherlandshire, briefing the crofters, organising and – vitally – collecting information he would use when he stood before the Napier Commission in Helmsdale. Sutherland's activity was noted in J.G. Mackay's report to the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association.<sup>181</sup>

In spite of Sutherland telling Charles Fraser Mackintosh, at the sitting of the Commission, that he had taken but a 'subordinate' position in the agitation, he had obviously expended a great deal of time and energy organising the Sutherlandshire delegates, in the same way as Alexander Mackenzie and John Murdoch had done in other districts.<sup>182</sup> The preparation culminated with Sutherland's presentation on behalf of the people of Loth and Kildonan, before Lord Napier and the other commissioners, at Helmsdale on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1883.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *Oban Times*, 24 Mar. 1883

<sup>180</sup> *Oban Times*, 6 Oct. 1883. The meeting, a presentation to C.M. Ramsay, Secretary of the Glasgow Skye Association, had taken place on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> September.

<sup>181</sup> *Oban Times*, 5 Jan. 1884. This kind of activity was controversial and led to some critics suggesting that the evidence could not be trusted.

<sup>182</sup> *Napier Commission*, q. 38345; qq. 9470, 9473, 41058, 41106, 44463

<sup>183</sup> *Napier Commission*, q. 38217ff. For brief newspaper accounts of the day's proceedings, see *Highland News*, 15 Oct. 1883; *Northern Chronicle*, 10 Oct. 1883. For a more detailed treatment, see *John O'Groat Journal*, 11 Oct. 1883

From the statement given some facts emerge about Sutherland himself – he said that he generally spent two months of every year back in Helmsdale, and that his father still had a croft in the village.<sup>184</sup> Generally, however, it is a commentary on society in Sutherlandshire. Sutherland provided a copious quantity of evidence to show how sheep farmers benefited from unfairly low rents in the area, and made frequent reference to Patrick Sellar, James Loch and their infamous ‘burnings’.<sup>185</sup> Along with attacks on the Duke of Sutherland – accusing the current Duke of reneging on promises made over land reclamation – Sutherland neatly linked the past with the present.<sup>186</sup> His assertion that ‘the system of estate management that burnt us out of Kildonan Strath has been consistent and continuous’ was typical of many of his early public speeches, and was a theme he would continue to exploit.

The evocative recollections of the Sutherland Clearances led to a stern rebuke from Lord Napier himself, who accused Sutherland of ‘aggravating the intensity of the case’ – leading to the witness admitting that ‘burning’ was usually just a local shorthand for ‘clearances’.<sup>187</sup> Charles Fraser Mackintosh later allowed Sutherland to restate his belief that burning took place with a few ‘leading questions’.<sup>188</sup>

Remarkably, however, nothing was made of Sutherland’s prominent role in the Highland land agitation, save from Fraser Mackintosh allowing him to state that his involvement was one of ‘conscience’, and that he had ‘profited nothing by it... nothing but opprobrium, and lost [his] time, and means to some small extent’.<sup>189</sup> The fact that Sutherland’s Irish links were not probed, given the questioning which John Murdoch faced – is also notable.<sup>190</sup> Sheriff Nicolson, Fraser Mackintosh and the other commissioners must surely have been aware that Sutherland had been an active member of the Land League of Great Britain, but this was not taken up. Even if it is accepted that Fraser Mackintosh, whose distaste for Irish politics has been noted, was attempting to recast himself as a radical crofters’ advocate, this does not explain the

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<sup>184</sup> *Napier Commission*, qq. 38215, 38216. His age, given as 30, was wrong however. He was 35 at this point.

<sup>185</sup> *Napier Commission*, q. 38220.

<sup>186</sup> *Napier Commission*, q. 38339

<sup>187</sup> *Napier Commission*, q. 38224

<sup>188</sup> *Napier Commission*, qq. 38333ff.

<sup>189</sup> *Napier Commission*, q. 38347

<sup>190</sup> *Napier Commission*, q. 44495

reticence of his colleagues.<sup>191</sup> It was rumoured that Sutherland would be appearing before the Commission for a second time, in Glasgow, which might have allowed for a more general discussion about the agitation in the city and Sutherland's role in it, but in fact he did not reappear, and the opportunity was lost.<sup>192</sup> Ironically, one of Sutherland's first actions after returning to Glasgow was to report on the progress of the Highland agitation to the Irish National League.<sup>193</sup>

Throughout Britain and Ireland, the Third Reform Act – finally enacted in 1884 after several delays, with a redistribution of constituencies following in 1885, extended the vote to all male householders and lodgers, many for the first time. Many Radicals and Socialists, not surprisingly, saw a tremendous opportunity for the workers, and set about organising their forces. The Highlands and Islands were one area in particular which were set to benefit, with a vast increase in the electorate and the development of a small body of candidates who, with land reform at the top of their agenda, subsequently became known as 'Crofter MPs'.

There was, of course, great excitement amongst those in the Highlands who were aware of the opportunities presented by the extended franchise. The *Oban Times* ran an editorial stating that 'the passing of the Franchise Bill, admitting as it does an additional two million voters to the electoral roll, is one of the most important measures ever enacted in this country.'<sup>194</sup> Some Radicals, such as Neil Brown of Greenock, even suggested that a concerted effort be made to manufacture a 'Crofters' Party', and like the 'Irish Patriots' keep the Liberals and Tories divided, so that they could hold the balance of power and wield more power.<sup>195</sup>

Sutherlandshire, which had seen a virtual monopoly on representation at Westminster since the mid nineteenth century by members of the Duke of Sutherland's family, was one of the areas which reformers hoped would return a 'Crofter' MP in 1885. The number of those eligible to vote had increased from 325 people to 3,185.<sup>196</sup> Many of

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<sup>191</sup> Cameron, *Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh*, 77, 91-115

<sup>192</sup> *Oban Times*, 20 Oct. 1883

<sup>193</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 6 Nov. 1883

<sup>194</sup> *Oban Times*, 17 Jan. 1885

<sup>195</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Jun. 1885; *Glasgow Observer*, 30 May 1885.

<sup>196</sup> MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 148



the newly enfranchised were crofters who, like Angus Sutherland, might have been expected to possess strong and bitter folk memory of the Sutherland Clearances.<sup>197</sup>

Sutherland continued a vigorous agitation – especially against the House of Sutherland – throughout 1884. Furthermore, Highland Societies throughout Britain were well aware of his efforts, not only in Glasgow but, increasingly, in educating the crofters of Sutherlandshire on the land question.<sup>198</sup> The Liverpool correspondent of the *Oban Times*, for example, expressed delight that:

Many of our people are working like giants refreshed... There is Mr. Angus Sutherland, engaging Dunrobin Castle stem and stern at close quarters, as Nelson engaged the huge *Orient* at the Battle of the Nile... Angus is raking the decks fore and aft. His speech to the Sutherland men in the school room at Helmsdale is a piece of political economy which Mr. George might envy.<sup>199</sup>

By returning to his native county at regular intervals, Sutherland retained a high profile in the area, which would stand him in good stead against accusations of ‘carpet-bagging’ from hostile newspapers. It is also at this time that John Macleod, a young man from Gartimore, just outside Helmsdale, began to emerge as Sutherland’s loyal assistant.<sup>200</sup> John Macleod was only 22 years of age when Sutherland stood for Parliament in 1885, but he would remain a prominent figure in Sutherlandshire, and throughout the Highlands, for many years<sup>201</sup> The prominence of Macleod of Gartimore during Davitt’s tour shows how he had already become an important figure at a relatively tender age. MacPhail’s contention that organisation was the key to the success of the Sutherlandshire Association under Angus Sutherland and

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<sup>197</sup> This had been further stimulated by the publication of Alexander MacKenzie’s *History of the Highland Clearances* in 1883.

<sup>198</sup> A fascinating reference from 1884 suggests that the Glasgow Sutherland Association were also continuing to identify with other oppressed peoples. At its 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Gathering in February 1884, William Sutherland spoke on the laws of entail and primogeniture, before the meeting concluded with a ‘varied programme of Scotch, Gaelic and Negro songs’. *Oban Times*, 23 Feb. 1884

<sup>199</sup> *Oban Times*, 9 Aug. 1884

<sup>200</sup> As there are various renderings of Macleod (McLeod, Mcleod, MacLeod), as well as an alternative spelling – Gartymore – for his home village, I have used the most common spellings in contemporary sources throughout. Macleod was often simply known as ‘Gartimore’ in the press.

<sup>201</sup> In his eulogy of the leading figures of the crofting agitation, Joseph MacLeod wrote in 1917 that Macleod of Gartimore was ‘one who did much hard work in Sutherlandshire, and all over the Highlands, in connection with land reform... he was a politician of wide sympathy, and had a practical knowledge of the needs of his native land. He acted as county secretary for Sutherlandshire for many years, and was afterwards elected to represent his native county...’ J. MacLeod, *Highland Heroes of the Land Reform Movement* (Inverness, 1917), 157

Gartiemore, is nowhere more obvious than the thorough way in which the various branches in the county were mobilised to give Davitt a memorable reception.<sup>202</sup>

It was Gartiemore who, alongside Angus Sutherland, provided most of the organisation work required in uniting the various local associations into a single Sutherlandshire Association. At a meeting in Lairg in April 1885, the Association was launched, with Angus Sutherland as president, Gartiemore as secretary, and William MacKenzie, of Strathalladale, as vice-president. Gartiemore described how he had recently addressed twenty one meetings in the county, which had shown a remarkable degree of consensus, and had raised the cry of 'The Land of Sutherland for the People of Sutherland'. When the issue arose of finding a suitable candidate to represent the Sutherlandshire crofters in parliament, Gartiemore, in a 'speech of considerable length', nominated Angus Sutherland.<sup>203</sup> From this point onwards, Sutherland's candidature was a formality, and it signalled the start of the 'first contested election in Sutherlandshire for over half a century'.<sup>204</sup>

### **Highlanders and Irishmen, 1882-1884, overview**

The period between the 'Battle of the Braes' and the 1885 General Election saw unprecedented activity by agitators in the Scottish Highlanders. In spite of the impression of an Irish nationalist campaign in the Highlands the Irish national question was not on the agenda of those who visited the area.

At the Portree Conference in 1885, a major demonstration of how strong the crofting agitation was by that stage, Donald MacFarlane, the then parliamentary candidate for Argyllshire, asked the watching crofters whether 'they would have come there that day three years ago to demonstrate their grievances? They would not have dared to do it.'<sup>205</sup> MacFarlane was making the point that the crofters had come a long way in terms of self confidence and demanding their rights in the previous three years. McHugh cannot, of course, alone receive the credit for that – several other factors have to be taken into consideration – but it was he who was there in Skye immediately after the Battle of the Braes in order to harness and give direction to the nascent

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<sup>202</sup> MacPhail, *Crofters' War* p.92

<sup>203</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 29 Apr. 1885; *The Crofter*, May 1885

<sup>204</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 2 Dec. 1885

<sup>205</sup> *Oban Times*, 5 Sep., 12 Sep. 1885

agitation. As a tireless worker, an engaging public speaker and a lucid exponent of political economy, it would, in fact, be more surprising if his three month stay on Skye had not yielded any results at all.

McHugh was well satisfied with his time on Skye when he returned to Glasgow, and the receptions afforded to Michael Davitt, Henry George and others in the Highlands in the following months and years, along with the increasing intensity of the land struggle in the area, would have given him more grounds for satisfaction, but never complacency. When Michael Davitt heard the most advanced of his doctrines cheered when he visited Scotland later in 1882, he had McHugh to thank for preparing the ground for him six months before. This was true not only of Inverness, the only Highland town in which he spoke, but also in Aberdeen, a town which had also been exposed to McHugh's teachings.

Davitt's own tour thrust the divisions between the left wing Irishmen and the Parnellites into even sharper focus. Like the Glasgow representatives of the former LLGB, Davitt hoped to succeed in the crofting regions where they had failed in Ireland. Davitt's tour, referred to as 'The Scotch Campaign', not 'Highland Campaign', by Ferguson, was part of the wider plan to break down suspicion amongst Scots of Irishmen in the city.<sup>206</sup> It is also apparent from this, however, and from Ferguson's writings, that the Highlands were not considered a place apart in the land struggle.<sup>207</sup> The crofting regions, certainly, showed up what were, in the reformers' opinion, the worst manifestations of the inequitable land system. The other great social questions of the day, however, such as the housing crisis in the cities, and the general trade depression were also uppermost in their thoughts, and were also seen to

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<sup>206</sup> As has been noted, one of Ferguson's greatest hopes was that ill feeling between Irish and Scots in general, not only Glasgow based Highlanders, could be broken down. There was, indeed, evidence that he was starting to see some progress in this respect. In September 1881, it had been reported that Cameron and Ferguson's Publishers, of which Ferguson was a partner, had been threatened with a boycott 'on the part of his Scotch patrons who are not over friendly to the land reform cause' *Irish World*, 17 Sep. 1881. Little over a year later, however, Ferguson was able to speak on the subject of 'Federalisation', the creation of a federal United Kingdom, not only to Irish audiences, but to also 'the entire adult population of Lenzie'. The assembly consisted of members of the clergy, lawyers, doctors and merchants. Notably, when Michael Davitt's presence on the platform was announced, even though he was not speaking that evening, he was 'politely applauded by the upper classes of Glasgow's mercantile community.'

<sup>207</sup> The attitude of these men to the Highlands was, essentially, an extension of a belief expressed in *Justice!* In January 1884, that 'in the great social struggle which is fast approaching it is essential that Englishmen and Irishmen work side by side for the benefit of both peoples'. *Justice!*, 19 Jan. 1884

stem directly from the land issue. If land nationalisation was not eventually accepted by the majority of the crofting population, as it had not been by the Irish smallholders, the region still provided a focal point, and a wealth of anecdotes and parables, for the urban agitation. Indeed, a recent scholar has argued that 'there is no doubt that the campaigns of George and Davitt broke the mould of conventional politics' in Scotland.<sup>208</sup>

The changing tone of the *Oban Times* partly filled the radical void left by the *Highlander*, at least in some of its coverage of the Highlands, if not yet Ireland. It also created an impression of unity in the crofters' movement, and indeed was arguably vital in making the crofters from the disparate parishes in the Highlands feel part of a larger movement. The regional correspondence from Liverpool and Glasgow helped to cement the idea of alliance between Highlanders and the Georgite / Irish land reformers. A majority of native Highlanders seem to have favoured peasant proprietary at most, although usually simply a version of the '3 F's', extended to guarantee more land.<sup>209</sup>

The popular image created by the news from the *Oban Times*, and the reactions of their rivals, however, demonstrate that the city based agitators, who would form the core of the SLRL, were becoming better organised and starting to get their message accepted by increasing portions of British society.

Although attention has often focussed on Skye, an island which hosted McHugh's LLGB mission, Henry George (twice), and the Land Restoration Leagues of Scotland and England, activity on the island between these visits seem to have been somewhat haphazard. The different parts of the island, although often passing resolutions of support for each other, did not, generally, act as one. The most extreme radicalism was embodied in John MacPherson, but his influence was limited to Glendale, and

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<sup>208</sup> Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics*, 105

<sup>209</sup> *Napier Commission*, qq. 9185-9191. Lachlan MacDonald, owner of Skeabost, told the Napier Commission that whilst there was a demand for land reform, it was not for nationalisation. 'Fancy what would be said if the Chancellor of the Exchequer were to say "we have paid more than the national debt, let us confiscate the rest", or if a banker said "you have been depositing in the bank, and I have paid you interest for twenty years, but I will pay you no more and I will keep the principal." You are going into French Communism. Those people I look upon as enemies of society, and certainly they have misrepresented the crofters.' MacDonald, as a generally sympathetic landlord, clearly thought he was closer to the crofters than the external agitators.

whilst the *Oban Times* was able to report enthusiastically on the progress being made on the island, the only overarching organisation – the HLLRA – ensured that the question of land nationalisation was kept subservient to the practicality of achieving any kind of reform. The presence of external agitators in the area from time to time, was not enough to imbue the desire for anything more than the HLLRA programme in most parts of the island.

Thus, a contrast can be made with Sutherlandshire which, in Angus Sutherland, had not only a native agitator, but one who was a very advanced radical. Owing to his links with Ferguson, McHugh, Scots such as Shaw Maxwell, Angus Sutherland was able to make his reforming platform unambiguously one of land nationalisation. Importantly, he also realised the importance of organisation along the lines of the defunct Irish Land League, and set about trying to achieve a similar body. Sutherland was also canny enough to realise that such a project was not possible in 1884 on a Highlands-wide scale, and concentrated his attention solely on his native county.





## CHAPTER FIVE: LABOUR, IRISHMEN AND THE CROFTERS' MOVEMENT, 1885-1887

There are so many things to be achieved for Ireland – amongst others the restoration of her native parliament which alone could deal with the nationalisation of the soil of Ireland – that the leaders of the people can ‘agree to differ’ as to the final settlement of the land question till Ireland is mistress of her own destiny.<sup>1</sup>

Michael Davitt, Glasgow, Nov. 1884

It were better that 100 men were really united on the Land Question than that a multitude got together with different views. Let the chaff go.<sup>2</sup>

John Macleod (‘Gartiemore’), Portree, Sep. 1885

The time period covered by chapter five, 1885 to early 1887, was a crucial one for the main characters in this thesis. Henry George’s visits to Scotland in 1884 and early 1885, if not persuading the crofters of the justice of land nationalisation, had at least awakened a debate on the subject in the Highlands, and had provided a boost to urban-based agitators, such as Edward McHugh and John Ferguson, who sought to widen the popular appeal of the land question. The main subject before the country was, however, Irish Home Rule, which, to a certain extent, forced Irish radicals like Ferguson and Davitt to stress their faith in Parnell. The decision of Joseph Chamberlain, in whom so much hope had been invested by the radicals, to leave the cabinet over the issue of Home Rule served to confuse loyalties even further.

This was also a vital time in the Highlands. The Napier Commission’s report had been met with almost universal derision in 1884, but it had at least proved that the crofting agitation had been noticed. Furthermore, the Liberals seemed intent on passing some form of legislation for the crofting districts. With the franchise being extended, 1885 saw large numbers of Highlanders voting for the first time, and also saw a large scale effort on the part of Highland land reformers to harness the potential of this new electorate. By the same token, many of the men mentioned in the previous chapters, who had taken an early interest in the Highland land issue, were well aware that the extended franchise could be used to increase the cause of labour in the cities. By

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<sup>1</sup> *The Exile*, 15 Nov. 1884

<sup>2</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Sep. 1885

looking at the direction their political careers took, it is possible to stress further the intent of the early 'Land League' missions in the Highlands.

It has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters that whilst the 'Irish Land League' has been held responsible for sending Edward McHugh to Skye, it was in fact the more 'socialist' LLGB which was responsible. Furthermore, it was probably even the 'left wing' of this body, including Ferguson, Shaw Maxwell and Glasier, for example, which had the most influence in choosing the envoy.<sup>3</sup> McHugh certainly belonged to this wing, and although it is fair to agree that he first became politically active by 'attending weekly debates in the Irish Democratic Hall' in Glasgow with Richard McGhee, and that he must have been a strong enough advocate of Irish Home Rule to rise eventually to a prominent position in the LLGB, he does not appear to have spoken on the subject of Irish nationality after 1882.<sup>4</sup> Even those other men who, with McHugh, made up the 'left wing' of the Irish movement in Glasgow, spoke out on Home Rule, especially after it became the main political issue in the whole of Britain, as well as Ireland, after 1885.

McHugh appears to have been unique in being a purely social reformer, possibly believing that an agitation for Home Rule would be better left to those who believed more strongly that it could bring about the desired reforms.<sup>5</sup> McHugh's lack of

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<sup>3</sup> Caution must be exercised when using terms such as 'socialist' when describing these social reformers. 'Establishment' figures, and the press, variously described radicals as 'Communist', 'Socialist', 'Nihilist' and so on, with little discrimination. Furthermore, the Radicals themselves gradually disintegrated into various factions, with the Single Taxers squabbling with the Socialists. Henry George himself wrote in 1891 that he feared his friends McHugh and McGhee, with their involvement in the Dockers' strike, had drifted into Socialist ways. Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left', 115

<sup>4</sup> For brief biographies of Edward McHugh and Richard McGhee, see Eric Taplin's entries in J. Bellamy & J. Saville (eds.) *Dictionary of Labour History*, Vol. VII (1974)

<sup>5</sup> Almost all of McHugh's allies in Glasgow are recorded as speaking out in favour of Home Rule or against the Coercion Act between 1885 and 1889. For example, see the following references from the *Glasgow Observer*. Michael Davitt: 31 Oct. 1885 (Wellington Place, Glasgow), 19 Feb. 1887 (Literary Institute, Edinburgh), 26 Mar. 1887 (Glasgow City Hall), 9 Jul. 1887 (St. Andrews Halls, Glasgow), 14 Jul. 1888 (Glasgow Green); Richard McGhee: 29 May 1886 (Legislative Independence Branch of the Irish National League, on 'Gladstone's Home Rule Proposals'), 16 Apr. 1887 (Home Government Branch of the I.N.L., on 'How to Meet Coercion'); John Ferguson: 31 Oct. 1885 (Wellington Place, Glasgow), 13 May 1886 (Home Government Branch of the I.N.L., on 'Home Rule'), 23 Apr. 1887 (Glasgow City Hall), 27 Aug. 1887 (Motherwell); James Shaw Maxwell: 23 April 1887 (Glasgow City Hall), 11 Feb. 1888 (Legislative Independence Branch of the I.N.L., on 'The Present Policy of the Government in Ireland'), 2 Feb. 1889 (Indignation Meeting in Glasgow against the Coercion Act), 26 Oct. 1889 (Charles Russell Branch of the I.N.L., against Tory policies); John Murdoch, for example, also contributed a long series of articles entitled 'Home Rule' in the *Highland News* throughout 1891

conviction in relation to Home Rule, then, reinforces the claims made in the previous chapters in relation to his beliefs and his teaching in Skye.

Examination of the other two principal characters of this thesis, during a similar time span, also continues themes which have emerged in the preceding chapters. Although the Home Rule issue saw Michael Davitt giving generous, and in this regard, sincere, support to Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party, other areas of policy were not so clear. As in 1882, Davitt saw Scotland as something of a refuge from 'narrow nationalism'. Addressing several Scottish audiences on Home Rule at this time, he was also able to speak freely about the growing strength of the labour movement, which was gaining increasing support, especially in Glasgow. For an illustration of the multi-faceted nature of Irish nationalism, and the primary interests of those former Irish Land Leaguers who were concerned with the land – and labour – issue, this chapter will examine the splits amongst the Glasgow Irish during 1885 and 1886, when John Ferguson and his allies, including Davitt and McHugh, once more set their faces against mainstream nationalism.

This chapter will, furthermore, show how the Irish Parliamentary Party, especially after the accession to Parliament of several 'Crofter MPs' in 1885-1886, were able to use the good will built up by McHugh, Davitt and Ferguson in the Highlands for their own benefit, even though Parnell and his followers had, on several occasions, shown scant regard for the crofters, or indeed any cause other than their own. Even though Parnell may have despised Davitt's desire to unite the British and Irish democracy, speeches made in the Commons by several Parnellite members at this time suggest that the people of Ireland and the Highlands had an age-old bond, and could unite against the Saxon oppressors.

Just as the tensions between the 'radical' and 'orthodox' Irish nationalists of Glasgow, which followed lines laid down as early as 1879, came to the surface after 1885, so

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and 1892. Interestingly, Henry George complained in December 1884 that his Scottish tour had been badly organised, and that his close friend McHugh was 'not possessed of the talents for [organisation].' Even though his role as advance agent for George is one for which he was noted, McHugh's abilities clearly lay in expounding George's philosophy, rather than preparing platforms and venues for him. See J.R. Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left: The Impact of American Ideas on the Scottish Labour Movement from the American Civil War to the end of World War One' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1998), 101

the 1885 election seemed to bring out divisions within the Highland land movement which had hitherto been kept in check. The work which men such as Ferguson, Davitt and Angus Sutherland had undertaken to break down prejudice against Irishmen in Scotland seemed to be having some success, and indeed this was manifest in the co-operation between radicals from both backgrounds in assisting the SLRL run candidates in the 1885 election. The way in which Donald MacFarlane former MP for County Carlow and convert to Catholicism, was elected to represent Argyllshire, and the support he was given by the *Oban Times*, also demonstrates that larger numbers of people in Scotland were willing to dismiss what the *Oban Times* referred to in 1887 as ‘the fierce and brutal prejudices of the past’.<sup>6</sup>

There was still much work to be done, however, and this chapter will examine the Sutherlandshire election contests of 1885 and 1886, which will demonstrate the difficulties facing Angus Sutherland in his quest to organise a radical body in his native county. While Sutherland had had a long association with Irishmen in Glasgow, it was his radicalism on the land issue – deemed impractical – and his lowly social status in comparison with his rival, the Marquis of Stafford, which were the main issues in 1885. The decision of the veteran advocate of Highland land reform, John Mackay of Hereford, to side with the Marquis was, however, a turning point in the election, and points to a much longer held sense of resentment at the way Angus Sutherland had attempted to use the Highlands as a platform for social revolution, against the wishes of a majority of the Highland crofters. The 1886 election saw a much less bitterly fought election campaign, after the retirement of Stafford, but a much closer examination in the press of Sutherland’s links with Ireland and the Georgite radicals of Glasgow.

As well as demonstrating the diverse, and often divisive, nature of both the Irish and Highland socio-political reform movements, this chapter will also look at the progress made in terms of press and public opinion in Scotland. To this end, it will open with an examination of how Duncan Cameron’s *Oban Times* and Alexander MacKenzie’s *Celtic Magazine* had come to support an amended version of the 1881 Irish Land Act for the Highlands, and will also include some observations on the way the Highland land agitation was perceived in the *Glasgow Observer*, the voice of the Glasgow Irish

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<sup>6</sup> *Oban Times*, 14 May 1887



community. With the 'Plan of Campaign' getting under way in Ireland in 1886, a direct comparison between Ireland and the Highlands was again possible. With an increasingly large number of supportive newspapers backing the crofters, notably the *Highland News*, which Angus Sutherland's supporters took over as an electoral vehicle, and the radical *Scottish Leader*, the picture presented was very different from that of 1879.

### **Support for moderate Highland land reform**

Hunter has described a decrease in agitation among the crofters upon the appearance of the Napier Commission, as they saw a possible legislative solution to their problems.<sup>7</sup> It would seem that the *Oban Times* became bolder in its line when the crofting agitation was temporarily quietened in 1883, and perhaps faced with a resurgence of lawlessness in 1884 it reverted to its assertions of the early days of the 'Crofters' War'. Just as then, it did not want to be responsible for starting a snowball of agitation which could lead to violence on an Irish scale. As agitation revived in 1885, the *Oban Times* preached caution. Even at the end of 1884 when things were so bad that Skye was 'surrounded by the forces of the government', the editorial advice was to 'keep the laws... peace will prevail'.<sup>8</sup>

Duncan Cameron's motives for allowing this radicalism in his paper have been highlighted, but unquestionably the *Oban Times* was a very different publication in 1885 than it had been in 1879.<sup>9</sup> It started 1885, for example, by proclaiming that 'the Highland lairds are on their knees', and celebrated the successful general election at the end of the year by stating that 'from the Mull of Kintyre to the Butt of Lewis, the land is before us'.<sup>10</sup> It had become a strong advocate of the crofter cause, and one which has slowly come to accept the similar conditions of the Irish tenantry, if not yet

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<sup>7</sup> 'The onset of winter 1883-4', he continued, 'was accompanied by a growing realisation that an officially imposed solution to the problem was still far from imminent; and unrest accordingly manifested itself once more.' J. Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976), 147.

<sup>8</sup> *Oban Times*, 22 Nov., 29 Nov. 1884

<sup>9</sup> For Duncan Cameron's political ambition, see *The Crofter*, 1 Aug. 1885; E.A. Cameron, *The Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh, Crofter MP* (Aberdeen, 2000), 145-6; I.M.M. MacPhail, *The Crofters' War* (Stornoway, 1989), 154-155; I.M.M. MacPhail, 'The Skye Military Expedition of 1884-5', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, xlvi (1972-4), 81; For a mocking speech relating to Cameron by Cameron of Lochiel, and a lukewarm defence by Alexander MacKenzie - 'he is a young man of limited knowledge and experience' - see *Celtic Magazine*, Feb. 1885

<sup>10</sup> *Oban Times*, 24 Jan., 12 Dec. 1885

support for Home Rulers. It reflected, and quite possibly influenced, a much more politically aware crofting community. Because of the justifiable preoccupation for much of the latter part of 1885 in instructing crofters on how to vote, a lack of editorial material on 'non-constitutional' methods of agitation, such as rent-strikes and boycotting, make it hard to discern the 'official view' of the paper. For certain, though, it had become much more pro-active, willing to influence the crofting community rather than necessarily waiting for radical correspondents to shape opinion.

The role of the new editor had a certain impact, and the establishment in 1885 of a special section in the *Oban Times* devoted specifically to HLLRA news can be attributed to him.<sup>11</sup> There are two other factors which enable the reader to discern this change of attitude, however. Coinciding with Henry George's tour in Skye at the start of the year was the passing of the new Franchise Bill, and the *Oban Times* was not slow in stressing its significance, stating that the admission of millions of new names to the electoral roll was 'one of the most important measures ever enacted in this country'.<sup>12</sup> During the latter part of the year the paper gave unashamed and unequivocal support to the candidature of Donald H. MacFarlane in Argyll.<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, MacPhail's assertion that 'the *Oban Times*, which did not begin to champion the crofters' cause until 1882, when Duncan Cameron became editor', is flawed. His following statement, that the paper was 'still very much a Highland newspaper before that', is also rather ambiguous. MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 11. Indeed, in spite of Hunter's claim that Cameron was 'intensely radical', his espousal of the HLLRA programme, hoping to achieve the '3 F's' for the Highlands, marks him out as being no more radical than, for example, Charles Fraser Mackintosh, John Mackay or Alexander MacKenzie. Cameron promised to press for the establishment of a land court to provide fair rents for all, and end to 'capricious eviction' as long as that fair rent was paid. 'The tenant', he went on, 'must also be indemnified for his own labour and compensation in any case of deprivation must be given.' *Oban Times* 17 Jan. 1885. See also J. Hunter, 'The Politics of Highland Land Reform, 1873-1895', *Scottish Historical Review*, liii (1974), 51

<sup>12</sup> *Oban Times*, 17 Jan. 1885. From this point onwards, the *Oban Times* devoted a lot of energy to Highland land reform, giving ample space to ideas and resolutions of any local HLLRA who cared to write in.

<sup>13</sup> In the run up to the election, the reader was given a full-page feature, including a large picture, portraying MacFarlane as an almost messianic figure. It furthermore told readers to 'wrest the seat from the noxious house of Argyll.' This all culminated with hints on voting in the week before the election, stressing the secrecy of the vote, and showing an 'example' voting form with a cross boldly marked against MacFarlane's name. See, *inter alia*, *Oban Times*, 7 Nov. 1885, 21 Nov. 1885. This can be seen as a bold move on behalf of the paper, for it led to attacks from two fronts. A meeting of the Scottish Protestant Alliance warned the people not to 'vote for a Catholic because he offers you crofts.' Correspondence on the subject of MacFarlane's Catholicism and Irish nationalist background raged for several weeks. Not only did the *Oban Times* risk alienating the bulk of its mainly Presbyterian readership, it also incurred the wrath of the landed classes. The two issues, indeed, are linked, with the proprietors of Argyll accused of trying to 'whip up an Orange fury', and suggestions that the *Oban*

second reason for the increased radicalism in the *Oban Times* was the behaviour of Sheriff Ivory, a man who would become so vilified on Skye that by winter 1885-6 effigies of him were being burnt in Portree.<sup>14</sup>

When Alexander MacKenzie journeyed to Ireland in October 1884, his expressed intention was to examine the Irish Land Act of 1881 from a Highland perspective.<sup>15</sup> To this end, he came down firmly in favour of the Act, implying that the benefits of it should be extended, in some form, to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Arriving in Derry, Mackenzie was surprised that in 'one of the most Orange parts of Ireland' there was a great deal of support for the aims of the old Land League and the Land Act.

MacKenzie followed the west coast down to Mayo, via Sligo, and marvelled at the benefits Gladstone's 1881 Act had bestowed on one of the poorest parts of the country:

...the houses bore an outward appearance of comfort and prosperity, out of all comparison with the corresponding classes in the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland...

Taking the opportunity to visit Michael Davitt's home at Straide, MacKenzie pointed to the gratitude the Irish felt to both Parnell and Davitt, but primarily the latter, for all they had done in the people's cause, especially in gaining the 1881 Land Act. MacKenzie also seemed impressed by what he learned whilst riding by train to Dublin in the company of two Catholic priests, that the majority of the clergy in Ireland had supported the Land League, except over the 'No Rent' manifesto. Again, this begged comparison with the Highland ministers, some of whom were amongst the crofters' leaders, notably Donald MacCallum of Waternish, and many of whom were condemned for failing to speak out against landlordism. The main message from the article, however, seems to be that legislation along the lines of the Irish Land Act was all that was required to improve the condition of the crofters. In spite of his praise of

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*Times* was being boycotted by the country gentlemen of the county. *Oban Times*, 17 Oct. 1885, 24 Oct. 1885

<sup>14</sup>As mentioned above, Cameron's editorial policy had been to 'let peace prevail', but the increasingly aggressive behaviour of Ivory towards the crofters appears to have led him, and his paper, down a more radical path. *Oban Times*, 5 Dec. 1885

<sup>15</sup> *Celtic Magazine*, Nov. 1884, Dec. 1884

the beauty of the Irish landscape, McKenzie's analysis went in the face of all of the Irishmen, and radicals such as Angus Sutherland, who were involved in the Highland land question. In spite of the strong support for reform from both McKenzie and Duncan Cameron, this could only hinder the progress of the land nationalists, who pressed on with their own programme, determined not to be thwarted as they have been in Ireland.

For an illustration of the different reform ideologies, it is necessary only to look at the 'crofter demonstration' held at Glasgow on Henry George's last evening in Scotland, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1885. 'Fionn' was quick to bring out the differences between the agitators, but did so in a manner designed to emphasise that support for root-and-branch reform of landlordism was growing:

According to some of the so-called organs of public opinion, the land law reformers were working in antagonism to land restoration, and the crofters wished to have nothing to do with anything more advanced than the '3 F's'.<sup>16</sup>

This meeting, chaired by the President of the SLRL, William Forsythe, saw the first resolution moved by John Murdoch. The resolution stressed the equality of man in the eyes of God, condemning the dispatch of marines to Skye, and thanking Joseph Chamberlain for his support. The mention of the radical leader brought with it such loud cheering that proceedings had to be temporarily suspended.

Shaw Maxwell followed Murdoch by stating that Mr. Chamberlain should have supreme power in the new parliament, and then gave way to Rev. Donald MacCallum of Waternish. The minister re-iterated the necessity of sending 'worthy men' to parliament since the franchise had been extended, but shied away from the specifics of the land issue. Even Henry George, in spite of giving statistics on poverty, did not go into detail on land nationalisation. This event, also featuring John MacPherson of Glendale, was clearly a showpiece to highlight the land issue, not a time for deciding how to solve it. Presenting a united front was all important. 'Fionn' closed with a summing up of where the land issue stood at this point:

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<sup>16</sup> *Oban Times*, 31 Jan. 1885. It was also noted that, unable to attend the meeting, John Ferguson sent a telegram from Ulster, 'expressing good will, and hope for the cause'. This gave 'fresh occasions for the meeting to show and shout its hearty approval.'

Mr. George's visit to Scotland closed... with the very remarkable and pleasing demonstration of the oneness of purpose and soul of impulsive men of tradition, sentiment, and song away in the Highlands, as represented by MacCallum, Murdoch and McLardy, with the calculating and inductive men of the south, so well represented by the Forsythes, the Simpsons, the Maxwells and the Cherries, no less than with the kindred McGhees, McHughs, McKean and Campbells...<sup>17</sup>

Of course, there is a gross over-simplification about the crofting agitation being an amalgam of Highland tradition, Lowland acumen and Irish spirit, but the point is clear. The crofting movement had come to be seen as more than some sort of 'Fenian conspiracy', and in spite of there being an Irish dimension (perhaps Davitt's name should have been added to McGhee, McHugh, McKean and Campbell) it was happy to nestle amongst a general worker's agitation.

This was accentuated in the subsequent month and years, with several land law reform demonstrations.<sup>18</sup> Indeed the working class agitation of the south saw in the crofters a way of spreading a more militant form of discontent:

Highlandmen! Crofters, cottars, delvers and others! Stand up like men before your oppressors! The oppressed toilers of England and the millions of disinherited people are watching your actions. Their hearts are with you in your battle for rights and liberty. God save the people!<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Oban Times*, 31 Jan. 1885

<sup>18</sup> For example, Sep. 1884 – Dingwall; Sep. 1885 – Oban & Portree; Sep. 1886 – Bonar Bridge.

<sup>19</sup> *Scotsman*, 10 Nov. 1884; *Oban Times* 15 Nov. 1884. A further example of this English support for the crofters came from the Birmingham Land Restoration League, whose secretary, Dominick Daly, wrote to 'the Chairman of the Kilmuir Crofters' Association' in 1884: 'The following resolution was adopted at a meeting of the Birmingham Land Restoration League held in the Grand Hotel, Birmingham, on Monday night, 10<sup>th</sup> inst.:— Resolve that this meeting of the Birmingham Land Restoration League desires to express its heartfelt sympathy with the crofter tenants of the Skye and Western Islands of Scotland in all legal opposition to landlord oppression, and earnestly urges them to persevere steadfastly in that opposition. And this meeting while earnestly counselling the said crofters to strenuously endeavour to keep within the bounds of legality, further desires to express its readiness to give them any moral help in its power, recognising that the struggle in which they are engaged is one of high national significance and importance, and calculated to accelerate the development to a vital issue between the rights and interests of this nation as a whole and the immoral and unnatural pretensions of "owners" of God-given land which a few have monopolised to the exclusion and disadvantage of the many'. NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/18/10; *Inverness Courier*, 13 Nov. 1884



As MacPhail stresses, the authors of this bill had little detailed knowledge of the Highlands and Islands (it advocated blowing up railways, for example), but the crofter struggle had clearly some symbolism in the eyes of Southern radicals.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the various radical causes which have been mentioned in this thesis: Highland land reform, Irish Home Rule, land nationalisation and the growth of general labour politics, all became intricately linked during the period 1885-1887. In order to present these links in more detail, the next section will look at how these different interests, all competing for time and attention, affected relationships amongst the Irish political community, especially in Glasgow, in the mid-1880s.

### **Crofters, Labour and the Glasgow Irish**

Davitt returned to Scotland in November 1884, which presented him with an excellent opportunity to chart the progress of the land, and specifically the crofting, agitation. With the presence of so many members of the SLRL on the platform, he was not in any great danger of a bad reception from Irish fundamentalists.<sup>21</sup>

With John Ferguson, as ever, taking the chair, Davitt spoke of the 'gallant islanders of Skye and Lewes', but it was in the subsequent addresses that the clearest signs of links between Ireland and the Highlands emerge. William Simpson of the SLRL showed the position of the crofters in the wider workers' struggle by evoking the Peterloo Massacre, and calling for the Scottish people to act now to help them, as this would be of more use than building monuments to them later. Even more significantly, Mr. James Simpson supported the resolution, and in doing so said that 'the crofters in Skye had received their lessons, not, as had been said, from Mr. Henry George, or from Mr. Shaw Maxwell, but from Mr. Davitt and Mr. Parnell, whose views had been translated into the Gaelic language, and read by the people of the Highlands and Islands'. Finally, Rev. Thos. Keane thanked the main speaker, impressing upon the audience that:

The Highlands since the rebellion of 1745 have been utterly prostrate and disorganised,... the transformation effected in the Highlands by the example of Mr. Davitt and the Irish Land League is as a change

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<sup>20</sup> MacPhail, 'The Skye Military Expedition of 1884-5', 69-70

<sup>21</sup> *The Exile*, however, felt it necessary to reassure readers that 'Mr. Davitt is the last man who would do anything to lessen the cohesion and unity of the Irish Parliamentary Party, or diminish the authority and prestige of Mr. Parnell.' *The Exile*, 15 Nov. 1884

from death to life, and might be likened to what the prophet saw in a vision, when the breath of life blew over the valley of death, stirring up the blanched bones and clothing anew the skeletons with flesh and blood...

Although there were signs of continuing bitterness between Davitt – and other ‘left wing’ nationalists – and Parnell, especially over the proposed electoral pact with the Tories, Davitt still remained faithful in addresses on the Home Rule.<sup>22</sup> After a refreshing tour around the Holy Land, returning via Paris, Davitt’s speeches in British cities during 1885 and 1886 were almost all taken up with the Home Rule issue.<sup>23</sup> At several meetings in Glasgow during October 1885, however, he remarked upon the progress that had been made in encouraging Scottish support for Gladstone’s measures. The *Oban Times*, reporting a Land Law Reform demonstration in the city which had also been attended by John MacPherson, the ‘Glendale Martyr’, noted that Michael Davitt had been cheered by a mixture of Irish, Lowlanders and Highlanders.<sup>24</sup> Davitt told the recently formed Tradeston ‘John Dillon’ Branch of the National League, that:

He would like to see the kindest possible feeling exist between the people of Scotland and Ireland (cheers). He did not know anyone outside of Scotland who had more sympathy with the Scotch character or who had read Scotch history more closely than he had done, and he was sorry that here in this enlightened nation, among a people who had struggled for liberty in the past, a few bigots could be found who had insulted the religious feelings of the Catholic people of this country.<sup>25</sup>

Although the likes of John Ferguson, Michael Davitt and Edward McHugh were, at this point, clearly out of step with the Irish Nationalist leaders, the rejection of Home Rule by some prominent members of the SLRL forced them to assert their nationality as well as their concern for social and land reform.<sup>26</sup> The following year saw a similar

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<sup>22</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 6 Aug. 1885. Davitt’s letter to *United Ireland* – Parnell’s mouthpiece through its editor, William O’Brien, shows increasing exasperation at Parnell’s actions. *Oban Times*, 1 Aug. 1885, also refers to their strained relationship. Davitt’s loyalty continued, however, as is witnessed by a letter to Earl Cowper at the end of 1885. See M. Davitt, ‘Do the Irish Really Desire Home Rule?’, in *The Times*, 1 Jan. 1886

<sup>23</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9544, Notes on Palestine, etc.

<sup>24</sup> *Oban Times*, 31 Oct. 1885

<sup>25</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 31 Oct. 1885

<sup>26</sup> See (e.g.) *Glasgow Observer*, 29 Aug. 1885, in which John Ferguson is described as being ‘disgusted’ at William Forsythe’s rejection of the need for Irish Home Rule. This did not stop ‘Davitt

pattern, with anti-coercion speeches against the Tory Government taking place alongside demands for Home Rule, pushing land reform further down the agenda. In all of these issues, however, the battle for Scottish public opinion was seen as being of the utmost importance, and John Ferguson and the Glasgow Irish continued to publicise events.

Just as the 'Kilmainham Treaty' in 1882 had been anathema to those in the Irish movement who firmly believed in a much wider set of social reforms, such as land nationalisation, Parnell's electoral pact with the Conservatives in 1885 brought further strife. This time the division was even more serious, with Davitt threatening to split the Nationalists.<sup>27</sup> The contempt with which this 'left wing' was held by the 'mainstream' nationalists is encapsulated in a quotation from the *Catholic Herald* in 1887, which wrote patronisingly of Davitt:

Poor Michael, since the Irish nationalists *of the genuine type* found it necessary to cut his company, he has been wondering in the mazes of political error.<sup>28</sup>

John Ferguson and the Home Government Branch split the ranks on a local level, advocating support for the Scottish Land Restoration League candidates, and their avowedly Georgite platform, even if it meant keeping Tories out and therefore depriving the Irish MPs the balance of power in Westminster. One episode in particular allows a glimpse at McHugh in his role as an uncompromising Georgite agitator, unafraid to confront conventional wisdom amongst the Glasgow-Irish, and attempting to 'spread the light', as George's followers invariably termed their crusade.

In late November 1885, John Redmond addressed a large meeting of Irishmen in Glasgow, and assured them that it was their duty to 'adhere strictly to the terms of the manifesto of their illustrious leader, and to give a solid vote for the Conservative candidates.'<sup>29</sup> As the resolution was about to be proposed, Edward McHugh began to

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and the Land Reformers' being condemned by the Govan Branch of the Irish National League, a resolution which was swiftly counter-attacked by the Home Government Branch. *Glasgow Observer*, 12 Dec., 19 Dec. 1885, 2 Jan. 1886

<sup>27</sup> T.W. Moody, 'Michael Davitt and the British Labour Movement, 1882-1906', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ser. iii (1953), 63

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in *Glasgow Observer*, 28 May 1887

<sup>29</sup> John Redmond (1856-1918) was already a prominent figure in the Irish National movement, having been Clerk in the House of Commons in 1880, and MP for New Ross from 1881 to 1885. After 1885 he

make his way from the middle of the platform, in order to confront Redmond. The fact that he was immediately met with 'a storm of hisses and booing' suggests that this was either a premeditated interruption, or that the views of McHugh, Ferguson and the other 'left wingers' were so well known that the sight of the former 'Organiser' for Scotland could only mean one thing.

After Redmond had managed to pacify the audience, McHugh was allowed a hearing, and asked the audience:

Whether the Irish people were directed to vote against John Murdoch, who, for forty years past, had been working in connection with the Irish movement?<sup>30</sup>

Again, McHugh apparently appealed to the basic nationalist sentiments of the onlookers – reminding them of Murdoch's past connections – in order to promote the wider concerns of the 'advanced' nationalists. It was also, of course, against the principles of this group to vote Conservative, the party, as they saw it, of landlords and vested interests. Redmond, nevertheless, replied that only those candidates specially mentioned by Parnell himself were to take precedence over the Conservatives, and that did not include Murdoch. The results of the subsequent election showed the power of Parnell's opinion, with John Murdoch's insult of receiving just 1.0 % of the vote in Partick being added to the injury of the seat being won by Alexander Craig Sellar, the son of the demon of the Highland Clearances, Patrick Sellar.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the most successful of the SLRL Candidates, James Shaw Maxwell, who received a respectable 14.4% of the vote in Glasgow Blackfriars / Hutchensontown, was said to have received hardly any Irish votes.<sup>32</sup>

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represented North Wexford, and in 1888 was imprisoned under the Coercion Act. After 1891 he led the Parnellite minority in Parliament, and eventually reunited the party in 1900. Noted for his loyalty to Parnell, he has even been referred to as 'Parnell's heir', but after securing the introduction of the Home Rule Bill in 1912, his ambitions were thwarted by the outbreak of the Great War, and the Easter Rising of 1916 and its aftermath alienated him from many Irish people, and broke his health. He died on 6 March 1918, and was buried in his native Wexford. See R. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (Harmondsworth, 1990), 434; A. Byrne & S. McMahon, *Lives of 113 Great Irishwomen and Irishmen* (Dublin, 1990), 182

<sup>30</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 28 Nov. 1885; This claimed even more for John Murdoch than did his own election publicity, which said that he had been 'for five and twenty years the champion of the cause of the crofters.' Quoted from the SLRL Manifesto, signed by Wm. Forsythe and Jas. Cherry, reproduced in *Glasgow Observer*, 21 Nov. 1885.

<sup>31</sup> F.W.S. Craig, *Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918* (London, 1974)

<sup>32</sup> Moody, 'Davitt and the British Labour Movement', 64. (McGhee to Davitt, 14 Dec. 1885)

The subsequent recriminations divided the Irishmen in Glasgow into those who gave precedence to social issues and those who continued to champion the national cause above all. A resolution at the Home Government Branch called for the organiser of the Irish National League in Scotland, Owen Kiernan, to be struck off for what it called 'his attack on Michael Davitt... calculated to disunite the Irishmen of Scotland.'<sup>33</sup> The splits in Glasgow were not simple but Davitt was perceived by nationalists as having sacrificed his principles on the bonfire of land nationalisation.<sup>34</sup> McHugh, as might be expected, was firmly in the Davitt camp, and he himself called for Kiernan to resign when addressing a meeting of the John Dillon Branch of the Irish National League in Tradeston.<sup>35</sup>

By this point, therefore, it is quite clear that although closely associated with the Irish Party, most of those men supporting the crofters, and land and labour reform in general, were on the fringes of Irish nationalist politics. Whilst Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule brought Davitt back to the fold to a certain degree, McHugh does not seem to have been involved with the national question after this point, barring a single debate on the 'Plan of Campaign' in February 1887 when, as usual, he gave 'a very interesting and exhaustive lecture, which was listened to with rapt attention throughout.'<sup>36</sup> In general, however, whilst he was still seen on platforms at large Irish meetings in Glasgow, and of course when Henry George was in town, he tended to remain an interested observer rather than a speaker.<sup>37</sup>

In order to discover in more detail how the relationship between Irishmen and Highlanders still had the potential to cause controversy on a local level in the Highlands, the thesis now examines the Sutherlandshire election campaigns of 1885

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<sup>33</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 19 Dec. 1885

<sup>34</sup> For Ferguson, see *Glasgow Observer*, 29 Aug. 1885; For Davitt's speech in Glasgow prior to the election see *Glasgow Observer*, 31 Oct. 1885; For Kiernan's feud with the Home Government Branch, which had been a long running one, see *The Exile*, 4 Oct. 1884; *Glasgow Observer*, 12 Dec., 19 Dec. 1885, 2 Jan. 1886. It was also recorded that Joseph Biggar refused to address a meeting at which he had heard Davitt was to be present. H.M. Hyndman, then editor of *Justice!*, remarked that 'this lofty exclusiveness has drawn a letter from the only Irish leader who supports land nationalisation... Davitt's crime in the eyes of the Irish Parliamentary Party is that he would expropriate a class not to benefit another class but the nation.' *Justice!*, 16 Aug. 1884

<sup>35</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 2 Jan. 1886

<sup>36</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 26 Feb. 1887

<sup>37</sup> See (e.g.) *Glasgow Observer*, 26 Mar. 1887, 23 Apr. 1887, etc.



and 1886. The earlier chapters demonstrated the close links between Angus Sutherland and the Glasgow Irish, as well as his debts to Henry George and John Murdoch. Having spent a great deal of time since 1882 organising the Sutherlandshire crofters, Angus Sutherland now had a chance to see how much impact his propaganda had made and how much he had been able to break down suspicion against radicalism and 'Irish' ideas.

**'Bearding the lion in his own den'. Angus Sutherland and the 1885 election campaign in Sutherlandshire<sup>38</sup>**

Although the SLRL was campaigning vigorously in Glasgow, and was helping to develop an organised labour movement which would, by 1888, be able to campaign independently, electoral success in 1885 was non-existent. One of their close associates, however, whilst not standing as a 'Land Restoration' candidate, was making a bold move in his native Highland county. In a county which had seen Parliamentary representation concentrated wholly in the hands of the ducal family for generations, the task before the crofters in selecting a candidate was not straightforward.

The extent of the power the Sutherlands enjoyed had been demonstrated in 1874, when Ronald Leveson-Gower, the Duke's brother, was asked to make way for his nephew, the Marquis of Stafford, as the heir had attained his majority and was eligible to sit in Parliament.<sup>39</sup> The question of finance clearly had to be an issue for any prospective opponent. Meek argued that 'it seems likely that [Donald MacFarlane] was the most prosperous of the five pro-Crofter MPs, who emerged in the 1880s. It can be said that they were all well-to-do men, who had prospered in professions beyond the Highlands'.<sup>40</sup> Whilst Angus Sutherland had clearly been a successful teacher, this did not mean that he had the financial wherewithal to conduct an election campaign against the House of Sutherland, or to spend time in parliament, without help from the Sutherlandshire Association, or other reform bodies.

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<sup>38</sup> Mr. James Innes, a Canadian MP from Guelph, Ontario, who was present at one of Sutherland's meetings in Golspie 'purely by accident', wished Sutherland every success and said that he 'admired his pluck in bearding the lion in his own den'. *John O'Groat Journal*, 2 Sep. 1885

<sup>39</sup> I.G.C. Hutchison, 'The Nobility and Politics in Scotland, c.1880-1939', in T.M. Devine (ed.) *Scottish Elites* (Edinburgh, 1994), 131

<sup>40</sup> D. Meek, 'The Catholic Knight of Crofting: Sir Donald Horne MacFarlane, MP for Argyll, 1885-86, 1892-95', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, lviii (1992-94), 75. Charles Fraser Mackintosh, however, can be seen as having a long standing relationship with Inverness.

There were some voices of dissent over the choice of Angus Sutherland as the man to compete with the Marquis of Stafford. 'Scotus', for example, writing in *The Crofter*, advocated the candidature of another prominent Sutherlandshire native, John Mackay, CE, of Hereford. Ostensibly, this was because Mackay had been a successful businessman and would be able to support himself financially if elected to the Commons. 'Scotus' feared that Sutherland's living costs would not be able to be met by the crofters he hoped to represent, in spite of Gartimore's assurances.<sup>41</sup>

Mackay was a well respected figure, a native of Rogart, who had long been a prominent advocate of the crofters.<sup>42</sup> It has been noted that, although he desired the amelioration of the condition of the crofters, and was a financial backer of the *Highlander*, Mackay's views were never as radical as those of John Murdoch. By extension, with Murdoch and Angus Sutherland sharing close opinions on almost every issue between 1878 and 1892, Mackay might have been seen as a more acceptable candidate in 1885 by those with less broad views on land and social reform. The differences between Mackay and Sutherland were especially marked on the issue of Ireland, both on Irish Home Rule and the extent to which crofters should ally with the Irish on the land issue. As early as 1880, Mackay had shown anti-Irish opinions whilst expressing his opinions on Peasant Proprietorship.<sup>43</sup> Taken to task for this, he denied being anti-Irish *per se*, rather that he was against Irish nationalism, and especially Parnellism.<sup>44</sup> Mackay was, therefore, often a spokesman for those who

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<sup>41</sup> *The Crofter*, Sep. 1885 (He quotes the *Scotsman* in relation to Angus Sutherland's election expenses.) Furthermore, whilst *The Crofter* itself – a short-lived newspaper operating from London and aiming to politicise the crofter population – was wholehearted in its support for Angus Sutherland after his candidature was announced, it appears that this announcement may have taken the editors by surprise. They may even have expected Mackay to have emerged as the crofter candidate. Whilst the organ only had a short life – running to six issues – it still managed to feature all of the other leading crofter candidates on its front cover – carrying portraits and brief biographies. The cover of the April 1885 edition, however, featured John Mackay, apparently expecting him to be standing for parliament. *The Crofter*, April 1885; Details of the other covers are as follows: Mar. 1885 – Donald MacFarlane; Apr. 1885 – John Mackay, Hereford; May 1885 – Dr. Roderick MacDonald; Jun. 1885 – Professor J.S. Blackie; 1 Aug. 1885 – Charles Fraser Mackintosh; 1 Sep. 1885 – Dr. Gavin Brown Clark.

<sup>42</sup> It was he, for example, who prevented John Murdoch's *Highlander* from going bankrupt in 1877. Mackay was also one of the vice presidents of the Highland Land Law Reform Association of London. In 1883, before the Napier Commission, he claimed that he was not only speaking for the people of Rogart, but also for the 'natives of Sutherland in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Queensland and Ceylon.' J. Hunter, *For the People's Cause: From the writings of John Murdoch* (Edinburgh, 1986), 27; MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, App. E; I. Grimble, *The Trial of Patrick Sellar* (Edinburgh, 1962), 118

<sup>43</sup> *Highlander*, 18 Jun. 1880

<sup>44</sup> *Highlander*, 23 Jun. 1880

believed John Murdoch and his followers were too close to the Irish land agitation, to the crofters' detriment.<sup>45</sup>

It has further been argued that, in 1885, Mackay not only disapproved of Sutherland's close relations with the Glasgow Irish, he also simply rejected the extreme measure of Georgite land reform which Sutherland was expounding.<sup>46</sup> As well as venting his feelings in the *Highlander*, Mackay confided in his friend, Professor J.S. Blackie, as early as 1882 that an independent Highland movement was needed in order to stop the inevitable Irish influence.<sup>47</sup> Antagonism with Sutherland, who was intimately involved with the Irish, could scarcely be avoided. The eventual opposition of Mackay to Angus Sutherland would, as will be seen, have profound implications for the 1885 contest. On the simple issue of candidature, however, Sutherland's supporters were quick to attempt to assuage fears such as those voiced by 'Scotus'. Admitting that John Mackay was worthy of great praise and honour of the Sutherland people, H.C. Gillies wrote that he was sure Angus Sutherland would not have accepted the challenge without first consulting, and receiving the 'hearty approbation' of, Mackay.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> R.M., possibly Reginald Macleod, scion of Dunvegan, wrote to complain that the *Highlander* was too political, adding that 'we are not all of the same mind', *Highlander*, 18 Jun. 1880; A couple of weeks later, when Mackay was advocating a system of peasant proprietorship, another correspondent complained that the *Highlander* was too strong on the land question, *Highlander*, 30 Jun. 1880

<sup>46</sup> H.J. Hanham, 'The Problem of Highland Discontent, 1880-1885', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., xix (1969), 63

<sup>47</sup> Hunter, 'Politics of Highland Land Reform', 48; National Library of Scotland, MS2636 (Blackie Papers), f.315, Mackay to Blackie, 12 Aug. 1882

<sup>48</sup> H.C. Gillies was Sutherland's predecessor as secretary of the FCS, something Sutherland acknowledged in recognising that 'much of the success of the Federation' was down to him, *Oban Times*, 1 Jan. 1881. Like Sutherland, he was very much in favour of politicising urban Highlanders. During a speech on the Valtos rent affray, Gillies had promised that the Federation would 'use every means in its power' to prevent evictions on Skye, *Highlander* 11 May 1881; *Oban Times* 14 May 1881. His stature in the land movement is indicated by a complimentary supper held in his honour at Ancells, Glassford Street, Glasgow in 1883, at which Sutherland, 'Fionn' and John Murdoch were present, *Oban Times*, 24 Mar. 1883. He was also a member of the committee of the HLLRA, *Oban Times*, 29 Mar. 1884. Indeed, at a later meeting in Rogart, Mackay's home parish, Sutherland said that he 'had a delicacy in coming forward for the representation of the county considering that Mr. John Mackay, Hereford, who had done more for the county than any other, should be the proper representative. He had come forward on the distinct understanding that Mr. Mackay had declined.' Again this suggests that, in spite of Sutherland's constant agitation over the past few years, and involvement, for example, in the Napier Commission, many still viewed Mackay as the natural leader of the Sutherland crofters. *John O'Groat Journal*, 27 May 1885; *The Crofter*, Jun. 1885

The Sutherlandshire election campaign of 1885 was a lengthy affair, with Angus Sutherland's opening speech taking place in May, a full six months before the poll. The maiden meeting for the crofters' candidate took place on a night of heavy rain at Bonar Bridge, with Sutherland receiving, predictably, an excellent reception. As was customary for an honoured visitor, the horse pulling Sutherland's carriage was unyoked and taken for the last leg of the journey by members of the crowd. A Strathnaver plaid was also presented, before Sutherland set out his election manifesto at the Drill Hall.<sup>49</sup>

Those familiar with Sutherland's political and social views up until 1885 would not have been surprised by many aspects of his speech in Bonar Bridge.<sup>50</sup> In standing as a parliamentary candidate, however, Sutherland was compelled to express opinions in issues which had, hitherto, not fallen within the scope of his agitating. Thus, he announced that women should have equal voting rights with men, and that he would give full support to reform of the House of Lords from a hereditary to an elected body. Both suggestions met with cheers, as did his advocacy of universal free education, an area in which, as a teacher, Sutherland had a clear interest. A more democratic system of local government was also mooted. It was clear, however, that there would be one issue which would dominate the campaign:

Every question at the present time paled before the great land question – (cheers) – a question that affected not only the Highlands but the large cities, and was taken up even by that great political Sadducee, the *Scotsman*...

Besides attacking the press, reiterating the earlier claim that newspapers first and foremost desired to be on the 'winning side' of any debate, Sutherland pointed out that 'for centuries Sutherland had been politically asleep, but it had at last wakened up, and organisation was being carried forward hopefully.' As with his earlier speeches at the outset of the Highland land agitation, Sutherland was keen to portray a previously docile and submissive people beginning to realise their power. Furthermore, and vitally in a situation where his main opponent was the son of the Duke of Sutherland, Angus Sutherland continued in his political use of history:

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<sup>49</sup> A similar item was given to Davitt in 1887, see *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887

<sup>50</sup> For a full account of the speech, see *John O' Groat Journal*, 27 May 1885

The past of Sutherland, he maintained, could not be separated from the present. He would be willing to bury the past, but it could not be done. They had wandered in the desert of oppression for two hundred years. Now the electors were to be increased from three hundred to three thousand, and as there was no middle class in Sutherland – no class between the Tories and the democracy, so there would be no confusion as to the issue before them (Cheers).

In fact, the Marquis of Stafford was nominally a Liberal, but clearly Sutherland wanted to create the impression of a sharp class divide in the minds of the voters, and in spite of the Marquis' recent overtures, did not want crofters to have faith in the House of Sutherland. In spite of the rather vague use of 'burnings' related to the Clearances in the area, which had been questioned by the Napier Commission, Sutherland again informed the Bonar Bridge spectators that:

In the parish of Kildonan he had estimates furnished to him which showed that at the Clearances property to the value of £200,000 had been burned belonging to the people.

Sutherland's attempt to belittle the Marquis and his family were aided by a supportive chairman, he was asked 'what would Mr. Sutherland do to equalise the fact that labourers in the district were working hard all day for 2s. 6d. while the duke of Sutherland was spending £100 sunning himself in the Mediterranean'. The Marquis, however, in order to secure his seat, also lurched towards Radicalism, including a commitment to abolishing the House of Lords, and Peasant Proprietary.<sup>51</sup> Although this was seen as a disingenuous move by Sutherland and his followers, it at least served to blur a little the distinction between the 'crofter' candidate and the 'landlord' candidate.

By 1885, the land question in the Highlands had reached a fairly sophisticated level. No longer was it simply a question of landlord against tenant – just a fierce a debate went on between the reformers themselves over which was the best system to supplant the present one. Sutherland was still, at this stage, firmly in the George camp along with his Glasgow SLRL colleagues. Others, such as Charles Fraser Mackintosh or John Mackay, did not go so far – demanding instead a Highland version of the Irish '3

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<sup>51</sup> For a presentation of his radical manifesto, issued at Bonar Bridge, see *John O'Groat Journal*, 17 Jun. 1885



F's', just as Alexander MacKenzie had done after his visit to Ireland. At a large Land Law Reform meeting in Portree, at the height of the election campaign in September 1885, various reformers, including the potential Crofter MPs, converged on Skye to discuss the various options open to them.<sup>52</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of the conference from the perspective of the Sutherlandshire Association is that, whilst most of the other delegates discussed various points of the land question, Sutherland and Gartimore focussed on organisation. An insight is also gained into the state of the Sutherlandshire Association at this point, there being twenty-one branches in the county. Although most of them had been organised, originally, by the Edinburgh and London HLLRA, a county association had been formed on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1885, which now oversaw operations in Sutherlandshire.<sup>53</sup> Gartimore began to stress the need to ensure parliamentary representation by 'real men'.<sup>54</sup> Whilst most of the delegates would surely have agreed with that statement, however, what Gartimore said next must surely have jarred those present who had been disquieted by the authoritarian way in which Angus Sutherland and his friends had politicised the FCS:

Mr. Macleod then referred to the great meeting the crofters had in Sutherlandshire on the previous Friday. The result of that meeting was to make the whole people thoroughly united, which was absolutely necessary in the present critical crisis, and so near the general election. It were better that 100 men were really united on the Land Question than that a vast multitude got together with different views. Let the chaff go. Well, they had a meeting at Golspie, a magnificent meeting, where there were no organisation, for the good reason that the Castle influence of Dunrobin was as baneful as that of Dublin Castle, as far as the reform of the land laws was concerned.<sup>55</sup>

In spite of saying that the Sutherlandshire Association would co-operate with other bodies, Gartimore was, nevertheless, emphasising that it was a distinct organisation. The reference to 'chaff' would also confirm suspicions amongst some present,

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<sup>52</sup> *Oban Times*, 5 Sep. 1885, 12 Sep. 1885; *Scottish Highlander*, 11 Sep. 1885

<sup>53</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 29 Apr. 1885

<sup>54</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Sep. 1885

<sup>55</sup> Although apparently controversial, Charles Fraser Mackintosh, the chairman at this meeting, joked afterwards that 'I must say this really is a wonderful day. I was just thinking that if the first Duke of Sutherland could by any possibility visit us here today, he would think that the world has come to an end.'

including John Mackay of Hereford, that in the Sutherlandshire Association of Angus Sutherland and John Macleod of Gartimore, there would be no room for dissent – be it on the land question or any other issue. In the short term, Gartimore’s stridency at Portree may well have been counterproductive.

Sutherland himself revealed nothing new at Portree, contenting himself to thanking friendly newspapers and telling people that ‘the burnt out people of Sutherlandshire and the oppressed people of Skye would come and see that they were at present moment working for a great common purpose.’ Speaking in close proximity to John Mackay, there was no reported signs of tension thus far. Portree, however, seems to have been the final straw for the influential Mackay who, fearful of a Radical take-over of his native county, subsequently threw his lot in with the Marquis of Stafford.

With the vigorous campaigns by both Sutherland and Stafford going on right up until polling day, it appears to have been a very closely fought contest, with even the *John O’Groat Journal* stating that it was ‘difficult for even the most experienced in electioneering to form anything like an accurate estimate of the result of the polling.’<sup>56</sup>

The ‘carpet-bagger’ accusation did not turn natives away from Sutherland, as he was welcomed at every meeting as a native, and usually as more of ‘one of the people’ than the Marquis. Ironically, it was agents outwith the county which concentrated most on trying to taint the crofter candidates as outsiders.<sup>57</sup> Accepting the metamorphosis of the Marquis of Stafford into a Radical, especially after his own Bonar Bridge speech when ‘the width of his views must have been a revelation to most people, and have already spoilt Mr. Sutherland’s popularity to some extent’, Sutherland’s opponents generally took the line that whilst both men had more or less

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<sup>56</sup> *John O’Groat Journal*, 2 Dec. 1885

<sup>57</sup> During the campaign, for example, the *Scotsman* belittled Sutherland in the following terms: ‘...In Sutherlandshire the carpet-bagger is represented by Mr. Angus Sutherland who comes, we believe, from Glasgow. He has nothing in his budget but the stereotyped promises as to land, and he has not given the slightest hint that he would be of any service to the county in the House of Commons.’ Quoted in *John O’Groat Journal*, 7 Oct. 1885. The *John O’Groat Journal*, based in Caithness, made a similar point, albeit in a more subtle manner: ‘Men of local interest are not so much in request now as formerly; but, notwithstanding all that, has been said to the contrary, there is as much “clannishness” still left in the north as will give an influential native an advantage over a stranger. In the case of Sutherlandshire, both may be said to be natives, but Mr. Angus Sutherland’s interest is of a purely sentimental abstract nature.’ *John O’Groat Journal*, 24 Jun. 1885

the same views on the land question, Stafford would undoubtedly have more influence, and ability to put the plans into action, than the crofter candidate.

The *Scotsman* stated that the Marquis 'has represented the county for years and has given conclusive evidence that if elected he can serve it well in the future.'<sup>58</sup> The *John O'Groat Journal* agreed with this analysis saying that the Marquis' 'ideas are capable of being put into actual practice', and condemning Sutherland as a vague, idealistic, mercenary. In addition, the editorial praised the crofters for the idea of running such an 'advanced' candidate as Sutherland, implying that they had done so simply to wring further concessions from the Ducal House.<sup>59</sup>

Sutherland's cause was, however, assisted by the high profile speech made by Joseph Chamberlain in Inverness in September, a speech at which he set out schemes for land reclamation by local authorities, popular representation by local government, and provisions for fair rent, free sale and compensation. Although neither spoke in Inverness, Sutherland and Gartimore not only took positions on the platform in front of 5,000 people in Bell's Park, they had also, along with Gavin Brown Clark, taken lunch with Chamberlain that afternoon.<sup>60</sup> Although Chamberlain had not been able to accept an invitation to speak at the Sutherland Association's Golspie demonstration earlier in the month Sutherland's meeting with the Radical leader was sure to help his standing in Sutherlandshire itself, and go some way to countering the accusation that, if elected, he could have no influence in the House of Commons.<sup>61</sup> In sending a copy of the meeting's resolutions to 'their future Prime Minister, Joseph Chamberlain', Gartimore clearly believed that they could have influence at the very highest level. The irony of this resolution, however, would only become clear in the next couple of years.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 7 Oct. 1885

<sup>59</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 24 Jun. 1885

<sup>60</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 25 Sep. 1885

<sup>61</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 4 Sep. 1885, *John O'Groat Journal*, 2 Sep. 1885

<sup>62</sup> Some radical journals had already commented sourly upon Chamberlain's self-professed radicalism. See *Christian Socialist*, Sep. 1885, Oct. 1885. An interesting connection with Chamberlain, and an indication of the widespread interest in the crofter question, can be found in the records of Cambridge University's debating society. On 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1885, the resolution was moved that: 'In the opinion of this House, the condition of the Scotch Crofters calls for an instant and radical reform of the rights possessed by landed proprietors'. One of the speeches in favour of the crofters was made by Trinity College's J. Austen Chamberlain, Joseph's son and future Chancellor of the Exchequer and Foreign Secretary. The motion was passed by seventy votes to fifty-four, but the same body the very next week

Although Sutherland's Irish connections in Glasgow, and his sympathy for Home Rule, had been long established, the issue was not stressed by his opponents during the 1885 election campaign. Just as he was not quizzed by the Napier Commission about any links with Irish Land Leaguers, the issue was given little prominence by the supporters of the Marquis of Stafford. It is perhaps because of this that modern researchers have not brought out the close relationship Sutherland enjoyed with the Glasgow Irish Land League in the early 1880s, or the strong speeches he made in favour of Home Rule and Irish-Highland co-operation after 1886. It is possible that, in spite of the 'carpetbagger' accusations, the hostile elements in the press were uneasy about stressing that a local man had been influenced by the Irish. Certainly, compared with the press coverage of Davitt and McHugh, Sutherland escaped lightly.

For the most part of the campaign, the emphasis was on local issues, notably the land question, and it was only at a meeting in Golspie Public School, in the days leading up to voting, that an attempt was made to associate Sutherland with the 'Parnellites'. Even then, this was done in a somewhat roundabout way, through the candidate's friendship with John Murdoch.<sup>63</sup> Inviting questions at the end of a speech which was 'taken up chiefly with an exposition of his views on the land question, Sutherland was pressed by a Mr. Symon, station master at The Mound, for his views in various contentious areas. In spite of Sutherland pledging himself to fight the 'dismemberment of the British Empire', Symon asked:

Has not Mr. Murdoch, who has been advocating your candidature, been a paid agent of the Parnellite party both in America and this country? Did you not in Strathnaver acknowledge Mr. Murdoch as your political father, and does it not therefore follow that you hold his views as a follower of Parnell? Did you not at Melness express your contempt for the English Radical members and your unbounded admiration for the Irish followers of Mr. Parnell?<sup>64</sup>

Sutherland denied both that John Murdoch was a follower of Parnell or the Parnellites, and that he had expressed his own admiration for Parnell. There is no

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passed a censure motion on Gladstone's government. *Annual Report of the Cambridge Union for 1885* (Cambridge, 1886), Lent Term, 3 Feb., 10 Feb., 1885

<sup>63</sup> Murdoch had, indeed, spent a good deal of time in 1885 touring Sutherlandshire promoting Angus Sutherland's campaign. *Oban Times*, 26 Apr. 1885

<sup>64</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 25 Nov. 1885

record of him having made such comments, although it is perfectly possible given the number of small gatherings he addressed that he may have said something in Parnell's favour. However, in spite of his friendship with the Irish party later in his career, most of his Irish contacts up to this point were in Glasgow and, specifically, with members of the Home Government branch who were radical social reformers as well as Irish Home Rulers. Whilst they might not necessarily have disliked Parnell, they had other priorities.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, it has been fairly well established that John Murdoch had something of a cool relationship with the Irish leader, if their acquaintance could even be called a relationship.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the *Northern Chronicle* which, as the predominant Tory newspaper in the north of Scotland, pushed the anti-Irish angle to its readers. It accused Murdoch of calling the Duke of Sutherland 'The Dunrobin Thief', and of calling attention of the people to:

The manner in which the Irish strengthened the hand of their members in parliament, and constrained attention to their demands, and they were told they must act in a similar manner. They were also asked to join with these Irish malcontents, and make common cause with them, as participating with them in Celtic blood. In short, Mr. Murdoch is one of Mr. Parnell's friends, and although Mr. Sutherland has been cautious in giving out his real sentiments, there can be no doubt that he, too, is a Parnellite, and that, if returned, he will be a supporter of that anti-British party...<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, whilst the Marquis of Stafford himself did not attack Sutherland over connections with Irish agitators, in spite of becoming a Liberal Unionist in 1886, he might have been quite confident in the knowledge that others would. Just as Angus Sutherland had John Murdoch campaigning on his behalf, so Stafford invited guests to the area to speak in his support. The Mayor of Wolverhampton, for example, came north to address a meeting of 600 people in Golspie, again towards the end of the

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<sup>65</sup> At around the same time as this comment, John Redmond, on Parnell's orders, was advising the Irish people of Glasgow not to vote for Murdoch or any other SLRL candidates. *Glasgow Observer*, 28 Nov. 1885

<sup>66</sup> J. Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection, The Highlands, Ireland and Nationalism, 1873-1922', in *Scottish Historical Review*, liv (1975), 180. Hunter describes how 'Murdoch had been contemptuously treated by Parnell and Dillon'. For fuller details, see W. O'Brien & D. Ryan (eds.) *Devoy's Postbag* (2 Vols. Dublin, 1948), i, 332-3, 386, 414-5, 433-4, 459, 487, 495, 504-08, 513, 521-22, 529-30, 534

<sup>67</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 18 Nov. 1885



campaign. He damned Sutherland with faint praise, and then raised the spectre of Home Rule – and the dangers to the people of Sutherlandshire in having such a political maverick as a representative.<sup>68</sup>

The second prong of the late assault on Sutherland was related to his involvement with the SLRL, which, along with Edward McHugh, Richard McGhee, John Ferguson, John Murdoch and James Shaw Maxwell, Sutherland played a prominent role in founding. Sutherland's membership of the SLRL was no mere piece of political opportunism, more a logical progression of his radicalism. Even prior to the eruption of the 'Crofters' War' at Braes, Sutherland had been flirting with the nascent socialist movement, being a prominent guest at a lecture given by Helen Taylor in Glasgow.<sup>69</sup>

Although he never considered standing as an official SLRL candidate, like Murdoch or Shaw Maxwell, Sutherland was nonetheless a Vice-President of the league. In spite of the claims of some that the Marquis of Stafford had 'Out-Georged Henry George' with his radical policies, Sutherland faced tough questions relating to his ideas on land reform at the close of the campaign, in Golspie.<sup>70</sup> After successful tours in 1884 and 1885, including a speech in Wick, George's star, at least temporarily, was in the ascendant in the Highlands and Islands.

Sutherland expressed support for Henry George in his view relating to private property, and defended the land tax advocated by the SLRL – 4s. in the pound – as potentially beneficial to Sutherlandshire. Although, perhaps influenced by his later standing in the Liberal Party, James Hunter claimed that 'of the land league's leaders only G.B. Clark had any socialist convictions', in 1885 Sutherland stood on at least as radical a platform as Clark.<sup>71</sup> After speaking about the 4s. land tax, Sutherland

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<sup>68</sup> He said that he 'looked upon Angus Sutherland with admiration... All praise ought to be given to Angus Sutherland but [he] ought not to turn out the Marquis of Stafford... Mr. Sutherland is hankering after a union with the Parnellites, to which Mr. Gladstone (loud cheers), Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Bright, along with the Marquis of Stafford, were opposed. It would be a bad day for Sutherland if it threw in its lot with that disloyal party. He therefore warned them of the danger of having connections with the Parnellite party and disunion'. *John O'Groat Journal*, 25 Nov. 1885

<sup>69</sup> *Glasgow News*, 21 Mar. 1882; Hutchison 'Politics and Society', 517. Organised by the Democratic Federation, Sutherland attended alongside Hyndman, George, Ferguson and Shaw Maxwell.

<sup>70</sup> MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 159

<sup>71</sup> Hunter, 'Politics of Highland Land Reform', 67; See also W.H. Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics: From Radicalism to Labour* (Edinburgh, 2000), 102. Fraser states that Sutherland merely advocated

admitted that, ideally, he wanted landlords abolishing altogether, though the tax would suffice for the present time. By gradually raising the land tax to 20s. in the pound, he stated, no revolution would be required to rid the country of landlordism.<sup>72</sup>

Again, this was an attempt to paint Sutherland as an extreme Radical. The same line was taken against Roderick MacDonald in Ross-shire, and it left some members of the supportive press remarking on the double standards at work.<sup>73</sup> In spite of the hegemony which the ducal House of Sutherland had held for over half a century, and the Marquis of Stafford's attempt to portray himself as a populist and land reformer, the outcome of the election in Sutherlandshire was in doubt until a relatively late stage. Indeed, a meeting at Stoer saw the Marquis announce that, if elected, he would be a Crofter MP, by dint of the fact that his constituency was made up overwhelmingly of crofters.<sup>74</sup> His ideas included a land court, security of tenure, fair rents, compulsory purchase for the enlargement of holdings, and the right of tenants to kill deer which strayed onto their land.<sup>75</sup>

Although meetings held in his support throughout the election campaign referred to Angus Sutherland as 'our future MP', there was more to this than mere pre-election rhetoric or bravura. There was a genuine feeling amongst Sutherland's supporters – both within Sutherland and in the cities – that he would be returned to the House of Commons.<sup>76</sup> Even the more hostile elements of the press were cautious about trumpeting the chances of the Marquis before polling day. Although it was hinted that Stafford was redressing the good start made by Sutherland as early as June – when the

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Peasant Proprietorship. Hanham, 'Causes of Highland Discontent', 63, however, blames Sutherland's defeat on the fact that he was a 'Georgite'. For the manifesto of the Scottish Land Restoration League, see *Oban Times*, 15 Mar. 1884. Kellas also noted Sutherland's presence at the instigation of the League, albeit as illustrative of the Liberal influence on the organisation. J.G. Kellas, 'The Liberal Party in Scotland, 1885-1895' (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University College London, 1961), 221

<sup>72</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 25 Nov. 1885

<sup>73</sup> It complained that 'one or two recent converts to Whiggism profess in one breath to be afraid of the extreme Radicalism of Angus Sutherland and Dr. MacDonald, and in another to proclaim that the Marquis and Novar are quite as advanced as the crofters' candidates. Consistency does not appear to be one of the virtues of the Whigs, the would-be dictators of the crofter electors'. *The Crofter*, 1 Aug. 1885; R.C. Munro-Ferguson of Novar was the MP for Ross-shire.

<sup>74</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 21 Oct. 1885

<sup>75</sup> *Scotsman*, 11 Nov. 1885

<sup>76</sup> See, e.g., *The Crofter*, 1 Sep. 1885, which assured readers that 'everything appears to be favourable towards [Sutherland's] interests.'

Durness crofters were reported as slightly favouring the Marquis – supporters hedged their bets thereafter.<sup>77</sup> It appeared that the contest was becoming too close to call.<sup>78</sup>

One of the main reasons why the outcome was hard to predict is that there were large local variations in levels of support throughout the county. Having stated that ‘the Marquis will safely land the parliamentary goal’, the *John O’Groat Journal* admitted that they had received a letter from Strathy, saying that the crofters there were land reformers and entirely disagreed with that assessment.<sup>79</sup> In north and west Sutherlandshire, a stark choice was presented between ‘the son of a Duke and the son of a crofter’, and in spite of the Free Church minister coming out in favour of the Marquis, the surrounding areas of Farr and Melness wanted it to be known that they had not been influenced by that decision.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, the morning of the poll saw ‘both sides... confidently congratulating themselves on their success.’<sup>81</sup> The count began at six in the evening, by which time a large crowd had assembled at Dornoch courthouse, and took two hours to complete. The tension of the campaign led to fears of public disorder, and several policemen were on duty, but the worst of the trouble on the day was when ‘youths of the disappointed opposition gave vent to their feelings in groans.’ These youths were Sutherland supporters, as the result, read by Sheriff Mackintosh, told that the Marquis had triumphed by 1701 votes to 1058.

In an area, as noted above, known for residual ‘clannishness’, however, the opinion of an individual could still carry a great deal of weight.<sup>82</sup> Even if the crofters of the coastal regions would not necessarily be swayed by the opinions of their ministers – although some surely would be – the decision of John Mackay, CE, Hereford, to support the Marquis had a major effect on the outcome. The trouble which Sutherland’s supporters – and Sutherland himself, as seen by his speeches in Rogart – had taken to show respect for Mackay, and to ensure the people that they were not

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<sup>77</sup> *John O’Groat Journal*, 3 Jun. 1885

<sup>78</sup> *John O’Groat Journal*, 23 Sep. 1885

<sup>79</sup> *John O’Groat Journal*, 23 Sep. 1885

<sup>80</sup> *John O’Groat Journal*, 21 Oct. 1885; MacPhail *Crofters’ War*, 160, also has details about Free Church opposition to Sutherland.

<sup>81</sup> *John O’Groat Journal*, 2 Dec. 1885

<sup>82</sup> This clannishness is discussed in some detail in D.W. Kemp, *The Sutherland Democracy* (Edinburgh, 1890), 43-46

attempting to displace the veteran as the crofters' chief advocate in Sutherlandshire show the importance which was placed on his support. As Mackay was, however, able to speak 'with Dukes as easily as he did with the crofters', and had indeed consulted with the Duke before giving evidence to the Napier Commission, it is clear that he would not have had any qualms about lending support to the Marquis.<sup>83</sup>

The decision by Mackay to side with the Marquis, made in late November, certainly influenced the election in the sitting member's favour, in a contest eventually decided by a margin of 643 votes. If some were wavering in their decision, especially given that this was around the time that Sutherland was being denounced as a Parnellite and land reform extremist by the Whig and Tory press, then Mackay's statement of support could have made up their minds.

A Gaelic poet also penned a tribute – 'Co-dhiù Thogainn Fonn nan Gaisgeach' – to the other constituencies for returning land reform candidates, with an unmistakable message for those who voted for the Marquis of Stafford:

*Na Cataich nach do sheas cho cruaidh  
'S bu chòir dhaibh aig àm a 'chruadail  
Bhiodh aca Sutharlanach suairce  
Chuireadh gruaim air Diùcs air Marcuis*

*... 'S ann tha tàir aig muinntir Chataibh<sup>84</sup>*

Whilst it was not yet the formidable pro-Sutherland organ it would become, and its coverage of the campaign had been minimal, the *Highland News* laid the blame for Sutherland's defeat squarely at Mackay's door.<sup>85</sup> The Sutherlandshire Land Law Reform Association annual meeting at Lairg in May 1886, led by Macleod of Gartiemore, also condemned Mackay's actions. The London society had agreed to

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<sup>83</sup> A.D. Cameron, *Go Listen to the Crofters: The Napier Commission and Crofting a Century Ago* (Stornoway, 1986), 40. Mackay had also sent apologies to the Marquis' meeting in Golspie, *John O'Groat Journal*, 2 Sep. 1885. For more reflections on Mackay's siding with the Marquis, see J.P.D. Dunbabin, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York, 1974), 270

<sup>84</sup> D. Meek, *Tuath Is Tighearna: Tenants and Landlords* (Edinburgh, 1995), 141. 'The Sutherland folk who did not stand/ As firmly as they ought in the struggle/ Could have had the gentle Sutherland/ Who would have brought gloom to the Duke and Marquis/... The people of Sutherland are a disgrace'.

<sup>85</sup> *Highland News*, 30 Nov. 1885. Indeed, it suggested that in spite of opposition from many quarters, it was Mackay who finally made the difference, and called on Mackay for an apology and an explanation of his behaviour.

erase Mackay's name from their books, although the Liverpool Association maintained a diplomatic silence.<sup>86</sup>

Whatever Mackay's precise reasons for his 'apostasy', Sutherland, Gartiemore and their allies knew themselves that there must have been a deeper reason for their failure. To take the example of the *Oban Times*' own constituency, Argyllshire. Here, Donald Horne MacFarlane, in that paper's words, 'wrested the seat from the noxious house of Argyll'.<sup>87</sup> If some factors worked against Sutherland – his Irish links, his lack of clerical support, alleged extremism, for example, the same problems affected MacFarlane at least as much. As a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party he, perhaps more than any other individual, helped ally the causes of land reform in Ireland and the Highlands in the minds of the people.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, John Murdoch admitted in Farr, Sutherlandshire, that 'it was superstition, not religious feeling, which kept the so-called pious men in the camp of the landlords.'<sup>89</sup> Sutherland's supporters denied until the last that church support for the Marquis played a major role. Sutherland's 'neighbour' in Caithness, G.B. Clark, also overcame large obstacles, such as accusations of Sabbath-breaking, anti-imperialism and socialism, to gain victory in the election.<sup>90</sup>

There were several concerns in the Sutherland camp after the election, but all of them relate to one overriding failure on their part. For all the talk of the campaign, for all the years Sutherland had politicising and mobilising first the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association and then the FCS, and finally the crofters of Sutherlandshire themselves,

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<sup>86</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 12 May 1885. Although the Liverpool caucus was very radical, Mackay had been closely involved with its members during the time of the FCS.

<sup>87</sup> *Oban Times*, 17 Oct. 1885. MacFarlane's opponent, MacKinnon of Ballnakil, was not related in the same way as the Duke of Sutherland and the Marquis of Stafford, but he was seen as a pawn of Inverary Castle. There had also been a tradition of members of the ducal house – Lord Colin Campbell and the Marquis of Lorne, for example – sitting for Argyllshire. Indeed, Campbell had been praised by Councillor MacDougall, of Liverpool, in a land reform speech at Oban, for 'showing his usual prudence in not putting up one of his own sons to contest the county.' The Duke of Sutherland, however, was not considered to be so wise, 'for he had put up his son... against Angus Sutherland, who would turn out the Marquis.' *Oban Times*, 19 Sep. 1885

<sup>88</sup> See also below, 346. Although he did not appear to have particularly strong opinions on the Irish land agitation. Meek, 'Catholic Knight of Crofting', 99, assigns MacFarlane's defeat in 1886 to his stance on Home Rule. The *Oban Times* blamed lack of organisation, especially among Liberals, and the absence of many voters at summer work. *Oban Times*, 24 Jul. 1886

<sup>89</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 21 Oct. 1885

<sup>90</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 2 Dec. 1885 contains a letter giving 31 reasons (plus appendix) not to vote for G.B. Clark.



there was a distinct lack of organisation within the Sutherlandshire Association. Whilst they complained that some men were literally shaking with fear as they cast their vote, worried about the possible consequences of voting against the Marquis, Angus Sutherland's supporters realised that the process of education was far from complete.<sup>91</sup> After all, MacFarlane had taken on the Argylls in Argyll and won. Furthermore, again a lesson from Argyll, Sutherland lacked a reliable, supportive newspaper. *The Crofter* had a small circulation, and was as much for exiles in the cities as for the crofters in the Highlands. *The Scottish Highlander*, Alexander MacKenzie's organ, was amenable to Angus Sutherland in 1885, but was largely concerned with Charles Fraser Mackintosh's campaign in Inverness-shire.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, the *Oban Times* was fully supportive of Donald MacFarlane as the 'crofter' candidate, urged against sectarianism, stressed the secrecy of the vote, and even produced a large picture of their candidate alongside a sample ballot paper, replete with a bold cross next to MacFarlane's name.<sup>93</sup>

The success of the candidates supported by the *Oban Times* and the *Scottish Highlander* was not lost on Angus Sutherland, and from this point onwards the *Inverness Highland News* became a vehicle for Sutherland's renewed parliamentary ambitions. After his eventual election, it became a platform for his views, and a means of showing the rest of the Highlands – and Highlanders in the cities – how popular he was amongst the Sutherlandshire crofting community.<sup>94</sup>

Organisation, so much stressed in the past, remained key to Sutherland's plans. From the start of the 1885 campaign, an attempt was made to show how well organised the Sutherlandshire crofters were. The disparate associations were united into the

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<sup>91</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 30 Dec. 1885

<sup>92</sup> Cameron, *Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh*, 156

<sup>93</sup> See *Oban Times*, 31 Oct., 7 Nov., 14 Nov., 21 Nov., 28 Nov., 5 Dec., 12 Dec. 1885

<sup>94</sup> The mechanics of the Sutherlandshire Association's take-over of the *Highland News* are not clear, other than that Gartimore – still only in his mid-20s – assumed the editorship at some time around late 1886 or early 1887. John Whyte – brother of Fionn – who had previously spent time as sub-editor of the *Highlander*, and the *Scottish Leader*, as well as being reprimanded for abusing his position as Inverness Public Librarian for being too radical – also joined the staff around 1887. Under the pseudonym 'Lachie', Whyte penned a popular regular column. For Whyte's career, see *Highland News*, 2 Aug. 1913. With John Murdoch also contributing regular pieces, the status of the *Highland News* as a radical advocate of land reform and Home Rule in the Highlands outlasted all of its late nineteenth century rivals.

Sutherlandshire Association, as noted above.<sup>95</sup> At the large land reform conference held in Portree that September, John Macleod of Gartiemore boasted to the assembled representatives that:

There were no evictions in Sutherland; for a very good reason; the people were so well organised that the landlord does not dare evict a single tenant...<sup>96</sup>

Touring the area in 1886, Malcolm MacNeill reported to the Government that 'the Land League appears to have gained a firm hold of the people in Sutherlandshire', but made no specific reference to the activities of the Sutherlandshire Association. He also blamed people such as Rev. Donald MacCallum, Alex MacKenzie, John Murdoch and John MacPherson for the progress the agitation had made, but neglected Sutherland or Gartiemore.<sup>97</sup>

Whilst Gartiemore toured Sutherlandshire tirelessly explaining the implications of the Reform Act to crofters, the Marquis had factors working equally hard on his behalf. The extent to which Gartiemore irritated the opposition was indicated by the burning of an effigy of him, not Sutherland, at the Marquis' victory ball in Invershin.<sup>98</sup>

In the future, more focus and direction, aided by the *Highland News*, was deemed necessary. Another reason for the election defeat, for example, was the shambolic state of the electoral roll in Sutherlandshire. Richard McGhee, the close confidante of Michael Davitt and colleague of Sutherland, Murdoch and McHugh in the SLRL, attributed the failure in such terms in a letter to Davitt:

In every instance, with one exception, where land reform candidates sought the votes of the crofters they have got them and have been returned with large majorities. Angus Sutherland's defeat can be

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<sup>95</sup> Frequently abbreviated to 'Sutherland Association', I have kept the full title throughout in order to avoid confusion between Sutherland the man and Sutherland the county.

<sup>96</sup> *Oban Times*, 12 Sep. 1885; *John O'Groat Journal*, 9 Sep. 1885

<sup>97</sup> NAS, GD 40/16/32, *Confidential Reports to the Secretary of Scotland on the condition of the Western Highlands and Islands, Oct. 1886* (Hereafter, *Confidential Reports*), 18. It must be noted, however, that compared with the detailed reports given for Skye and the Outer Hebrides by MacNeill, the western seaboard of the mainland is dealt with briefly, and none of the interior of Sutherlandshire is covered.

<sup>98</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 9 Dec. 1885; An editorial in the *John O'Groat Journal* accused Gartiemore of underhand tactics, explaining that 'Mr. Sutherland and his admirers continue to hold meetings, but are not willing to extend the privilege to the opposition.' *John O'Groat Journal*, 23 Sep. 1885

explained by the state of the voter's roll and the rules of the factors in Sutherlandshire. About one half of the names on the roll are dead or gone away.<sup>99</sup>

Although this excuse was not offered openly after the defeat, there are indications that there may have been some truth in it. In an attempt to minimise the effect of an apparently successful demonstration by Sutherland at Bettyhill on October 1<sup>st</sup>, the *John O'Groat Journal* claimed that neither the chairman nor the proposer at the meeting were even eligible to vote, 'such is the value of Mr. Sutherland's triumphal progress though the county...'<sup>100</sup> Instruction on the rights of crofters who had remained disenfranchised in spite of the Third Reform Act would be one aspect of the future organisational effort.

The theme of organisation, and a refusal to be downhearted after the election result was clearly evident at a meeting of the Kildonan branch of the Sutherlandshire Association at Christmas-time, 1885. Held in the West Public School, and with delegates from many other Sutherland parishes present, Angus Sutherland took the chair in front of decorations made up of evergreens, coloured lanterns, and a banner proclaiming 'The Land for the People':

He reviewed and traced the causes which led to their defeat in the recent contest for the county, and pointed to the lessons which could be learned from it. The Irish had gained their ends by persistency, and though they were first scoffed at, public opinion was now turning in their favour... There was political life in Sutherland now even though it had none in the past...<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers MS9346-470/7-8; P. Harding, 'John Murdoch, Michael Davitt and the Land Question', 108-9. McGhee used the example of John Brown, who had lived on a croft on the Duke of Sutherland's estate a hundred years earlier. Even though he had been dead for fifty years, the rents, rates and taxes were still paid in his name. In order to register to vote, his grandson would have had to approach the factor to get his name added to the estate records, rendering him liable to a twenty percent increase as a new tenant. Angus Sutherland raised the issue of this 'Death Premium' before the Napier Commission, aware not only of its injustice, but also the detrimental influence it might have on any extension of the franchise. *Napier Commission*, qq. 38292-38297

<sup>100</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 7 Oct. 1885

<sup>101</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 30 Dec. 1885

Although the 'young men' of the county had come out in force for Sutherland, he pinpointed the residual fear the old men had of voting against the ducal House as a major reason for the defeat. Again, organisation was the key.<sup>102</sup>

Speaking in relation to the Island of Skye, Malcolm MacNeill wrote that at the beginning of the agitation there might have been a great many old people who refused to take part either because of fear of landlord influence, or the expectation of future benefits, but this was no longer the case due to severe peer pressure.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, although the importance of organisation had long been stressed by Angus Sutherland and his allies amongst the Glasgow Highland and Irish communities, just as Michael Davitt had done at the start of the Irish land agitation, there was still a great deal of work to be done in Sutherlandshire. As time progressed, however, the Sutherlandshire Association was able to produce the most solid block of radical crofters and workers in the Highlands, more so, for example, than Skye.<sup>104</sup>

Several months later, the main voice of the Glasgow Irish community – the *Glasgow Observer* – described the plight of the Highland crofters, and expressed a desire to help them, but also raised what it saw as the main flaw in the crofters' programme of resistance against the landlords:

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<sup>102</sup> The idea of confusion was backed up by Daniel Kemp in 1890. He claimed that 'many of those who took an active part in the contest have told me that, while in principle they voted for Mr. Sutherland, they were right glad that Lord Stafford was returned; others have said that although they voted for Lord Stafford, their leanings were entirely with Mr. Sutherland.' Kemp, *Sutherland Democracy*, 48

<sup>103</sup> *Confidential Reports*, 4-5

<sup>104</sup> Whilst Skye received the most attention from the police authorities at the time, and thus from historians subsequently, their tactics did not change very much during the course of the Crofters' War. Although language seems to have become stronger, and violence more frequent, the basic course of action remained rent strikes or deforcements. See, NAS Home & Health Papers, HH1/4, Macrae to McHardy, 31 Aug. 1886. Writing from Staffin, Macrae told of how John MacPherson was 'determined to keep Sheriff Officers away' until the arrival of land commissioners; Chisholm to McHardy, 30 Aug. 1886. Writing from Uig, Chisholm described how about eight people had attended a meeting by J.G. Mackay in the area. Police reporters were forced to leave the meeting; HH1/18, Macleod to McHardy, 15 Sep. 1886. Macleod described the way in which John MacPherson had been travelling around the island, raising money to send delegates to the Bonar Bridge Conference. For a clear description of how Skye was organised by local leaders, but with nothing approaching the centralised Sutherlandshire Association organisation, see HH1/75, Ivory to Balfour, 17 Oct. 1886. Here, Ivory stated that 'I have considered it necessary to land marines to protect the Sheriff Officers while serving writs in the disturbed districts of Glendale (the head quarter of John MacPherson), Waternish (the head quarter of the Revd. Mr. McCallum), Kilmuir (the head quarter of John Macleod, shoemaker, alias 'Gladstone') and Valto (the head quarter of Norman Stewart, alias 'Parnell')'.

One mistake the crofters have made, and it is a very great one. They have no organisation. They have no combination. They have adopted the programme of the [Irish] National League without adopting its method of organisation, and, as a hopeless floating mass of units, they are left at the mercy of Sheriff Ivory to be directed into whatever channel his armed force may be pleased to tend them...<sup>105</sup>

The Irish aspect of Highland politics – as in British politics in general – became increasingly prominent after the 1885 election. There was strong support for Chamberlain's stance on Irish Home Rule, especially in the west of Scotland with its traditional links with Ulster. The Gladstonian Liberals – fearing a revival of Tory support in Scotland, were anxious to consolidate its position as much as possible.<sup>106</sup> The Liberal majority in Scotland fell from 52 in 1885 to just 14 in 1886, and the Highlands, where, as William Ferguson states, 'the Leaguers took the place of seceding Whig landlords as the core of the party', was an area where Home Rule might gain widespread support.<sup>107</sup> As it transpired, the Highlands and Islands gave, along with certain areas with large Irish populations such as Dundee and parts of Glasgow – the most solid support for Gladstone's policies.

### **Sutherland's 1886 campaign and early months in Parliament**

Angus Sutherland would have the chance to stand again for Sutherlandshire earlier than he could have anticipated. The variety of issues being debated in the House of Commons, predominantly the Crofters' Bill and Irish Home Rule, along with the ongoing agrarian unrest in Ireland and the Highlands, inevitably thrust a young man with strong views on such subjects to greater prominence. This exposure increased with his accession to Parliament in June 1886.

Whilst Sutherland and his supporters must initially have been preparing to spend time building up a vigorous agitation in Sutherlandshire, it was to be only a few months before they had a chance to redress the 1885 result. As it was the Irish Home Rule issue which created the opportunity, and was to be the dominant question in Great Britain as well as Ireland, it is not surprising that Sutherland's Irish connections,

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<sup>105</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 20 Nov. 1886

<sup>106</sup> M. Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1991), 418; W. Ferguson, *Scotland 1689 to Present* (Edinburgh, 1968), 329; J.F. McCaffrey, *Scotland in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1998), 76-77.

<sup>107</sup> Ferguson, *Scotland 1689 to Present*, 329



which surfaced only at the end of the 1885 campaign, would come under much closer scrutiny the second time round.

Land reform, and further radical reform of the 1886 Crofters' Act, was still of great importance to Sutherland, but Home Rule had taken over as the dominant issue on the national stage, which also influenced Sutherland's approach to politics. Although he now went on to make his name as a Home Ruler, Angus Sutherland rarely showed the same commitment to Georgite – or even Socialist – principles that he had done in 1884 and 1885. At least until after Michael Davitt's visit to the Highlands in 1887, however, Sutherland was known as an advocate of land nationalisation and, through Gartimore and the *Highland News*, the Single Tax movement would continue to have strong representation in Sutherlandshire for many years.

If the battle in Sutherlandshire had been lost the previous November, Angus Sutherland still felt that it was possible to win the war. As well as concentrating on political organisation, he told the thirty-second annual gathering of the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association in January, further education was necessary. Still, the work of the past five years, he insisted, was beginning to yield results.<sup>108</sup>

Whilst Sutherland was attempting to keep up the spirits of the Glasgow Sutherland natives, his right-hand-man was preaching similar doctrines in the county itself. At a disrupted meeting in the public school, Lairg, John Macleod of Gartimore spoke on the land question.<sup>109</sup> He differentiated between land redistribution and more extreme communism by explaining that 'the land was for the people, and no man could increase or diminish its extent, but riches in money and in houses were formed by

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<sup>108</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 3 Feb. 1886; *John O'Groat Journal*, 10 Feb. 1886. In continuing his more radical stance in favour of a Henry George style land tax, he reminded his Glasgow audience, in a manner reminiscent of John Ferguson, that 'until a satisfactory solution of the land question is arrived at, you need never expect a revival of trade.'

<sup>109</sup> He 'pointed out the results that had already been obtained, as well as the steps necessary to fix this vexed question... In the past, the people had either been forced out of the country, or were encouraged to leave it. It should now be the policy of the proprietors to encourage them to return and re-people the desolate glens and straths'. The *Northern Chronicle* carried a report of a disturbance at the meeting. A crowd of Mackay's supporters burst into the Public School, drowning out Gartimore's voice by playing bagpipes and banging the lids of the school desks. They said that it was revenge for a similar incident that had taken place at an earlier meeting, at Gartimore's instigation. 'Personalities were freely indulged in, and for a time the peace seemed to be in danger'. The next week, H. Mackay, blamed for being the ringleader, denied that there was any disturbance at all, admitting only to asking a couple of questions. *Northern Chronicle*, 10 Feb. 1886, 17 Feb. 1886

men themselves, and were their own property.’ This was a fairly standard piece of political economy, which echoed Henry George himself who, in his chapter against the injustice of private property in land, nevertheless admitted that ‘that which a man makes or produces is his own, as against all the world – to enjoy or destroy, to use, exchange or give. No-one else can rightfully claim it, and his exclusive right to it involves no wrong to anyone else.’<sup>110</sup>

Given these teachings it might have been expected that in Sutherlandshire, as in many other parts of the Highlands, the proposals of the Crofters’ Bill were met with some scepticism. The recently installed member for Argyllshire, Donald MacFarlane, referred to the Crofters’ (Scotland) (No. 2) Bill as a ‘miserable skeleton of a Bill’, which had to be ‘clothed with flesh and blood’ to make it suitable for the crofter.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Charles Fraser Mackintosh and various branches of the Sutherlandshire Land Law Reform Association (Sutherland Association) condemned the bill’s inadequacy.<sup>112</sup>

Nevertheless, the Sutherlandshire crofters were at least able to appreciate that the Highland agitation had started to bear fruit, and this in turn further accentuated the importance of organisation within the county. The annual report of the SLLRA, submitted by Gartimore, gave figures to illustrate the increasingly powerful political machine he and Angus Sutherland were honing. In 1885, he stated, the Sutherland Association consisted of twenty-one Branches and 1,540 individual members. There were 434 ordinary meetings called by the branches, and a further 103 general meetings. In addition, the Association was able to look to the support of its members in School Boards (twenty-five members) and Parochial Boards, responsible for poor relief (nineteen members).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> H. George, *Progress and Poverty: An inquiry into the cause and industrial depression and of increase of want with increase of wealth* (1943 edition (London, 1943)), 237

<sup>111</sup> *Oban Times*, 13 Aug. 1886

<sup>112</sup> Fraser Mackintosh argued that the Bill ‘did not recognise the expansion and enlargement of holdings; it did not give any compulsory powers to break up the large deer forests to provide room for the people who were overcrowded... as a legislative measure for the material improvement of the Highland people, it was not worth the paper it was written on’. *Inverness Advertiser*, 14 Aug. 1885; For Sutherlandshire Association, see *Northern Chronicle*, 17 Mar. 1886, 12 May 1886; *John O’Groat Journal*, 24 Mar. 1886; For a similar Gaelic perspective on the Bill, see ‘Oran air Bill nan Croitearan’, in Meek, *Tuath Is Tighearna*, 153, 256; *Oban Times*, 20 Mar. 1886.

<sup>113</sup> In the early days of the Irish agitation, Michael Davitt had advocated ‘the return of men imbued with nationalist spirit to all public bodies, from Parliament to boards of poor law guardians. The introduction of the secret ballot had released the rural voters from subservience to the landlords, and thus opened the

During the 1885 election campaign, although Sutherland had declared himself in favour of Irish Home Rule, the main focus of the election had been on the land issue. National events, however, forced the Irish Question to centre stage after the fall of the Liberals. The Home Rule Bill came before Gladstone's cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1886, precipitating the resignation of the two leading Radicals – Joseph Chamberlain and George Otto Trevelyan, along with some other minor ministers.<sup>114</sup> On April 8<sup>th</sup>, Gladstone introduced the plan to the public in a three and a half hour speech to the Commons. Its plan was to establish a Parliament and executive in Dublin, having power to legislate over all subjects which were not 'reserved' by Westminster. These subjects were generally those which affected foreign and colonial policy, trade and navigation, and postal services, along with coinage and legal tender. Irish judges were to be appointed by the Irish assembly, which would be bicameral in order to safeguard the position of the Protestants. Landlords would be bought out under a separate bill, and Irish MPs would be excluded from Westminster unless specifically summoned.<sup>115</sup>

Given his political development, it was natural that Angus Sutherland should be a keen supporter of Irish Home Rule. It was by no means clear, however, that his sympathies would be shared by the Sutherlandshire crofters. Whilst the Irish Land League of Great Britain had been swift in despatching Edward McHugh in April 1882, his immediate teaching and investigation had concentrated almost entirely on the Isle of Skye, and his teaching was Georgite and not nationalist. One historian has

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way for the return of genuine representatives...' (Speech at the New Park Theater, Brooklyn. T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), 236-7; *Irish World*, 26 Oct. 1878). Indeed, this had been IRB policy as early as 1871. See also W.L. Feingold, 'Land League Power: The Tralee Poor Law Election of 1881', in S. Clark and J.S. Donnelly Jr. (eds.), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest 1780-1914* (Dublin, 1983). Similarly, in 1881 he had urged that the Irish Land League should contest the annual elections to the boards of guardians. (*Freeman's Journal*, 22 Dec. 1880) The situation in Sutherlandshire was not at this pitch of organisation. Rather, it is likely that existing School and Parochial board members joined the Sutherlandshire Association rather than vice versa. Nevertheless, Gartimore displayed an awareness of the importance of getting supportive voices into positions of power, no matter how apparently trivial, and paved the way for later, more concerted efforts in the 1890 County Council elections. See below, 311. The still imperfect nature of the organisation was obvious, however, in that whilst the Association may have contained 1,540 members, only 1,058 people voted for Angus Sutherland. Whether this was due to the outdated electoral roll, late defections amongst moderate land reformers, swayed by John Mackay, or simply fear of voting against the Ducal House, it was a problem which Gartimore clearly had to address in the next contest.

<sup>114</sup> Trevelyan was Secretary for Scotland, and his resignation caused problems for the Crofters' Bill.

<sup>115</sup> R. Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London, 1995) 547-555; R.C.K. Ensor, *England, 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1965), 97; R. Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister* (London, 1999), 424-425.

even argued that Alexander MacKenzie, in arguing for 'all the productive land, arable and pasture' of the Highlands, was far in advance of the majority of the crofters.<sup>116</sup> If this thesis is accepted, how was it possible for Sutherland to make himself acceptable to electors, with views on land reform, and Ireland, far in advance of MacKenzie? Eventually, however, Home Rule – for both Ireland and Scotland – became inextricably tied up with a resolution of the land question.

As has been seen, some newspapers in the Highlands, notably the *Oban Times* and, latterly, the *Highland News*, had transmitted the radical views of the city based Highlanders and gradually become more politically involved themselves. Soon after being elected as MP for Caithness, at the same time as Sutherland was rejected in Sutherlandshire, G.B. Clark was lecturing in his home town of Kilmarnock on 'The Irish Problem'.<sup>117</sup> It is perfectly consistent with his earlier career as a member of the Democratic Federation, a land reformer and radical Home Ruler that he should have done so, but it also served to link the cases of the Irish and the crofters in peoples' minds. As has been pointed out, however, this was a matter of conscience for individual MPs, not some 'party line' to be toed.<sup>118</sup>

In June 1886, the news broke that the Marquis of Stafford was not to re-contest his seat. Explanations range from him feeling that, as the landlord's son, he was in an invidious position, to disillusionment with Gladstone's Irish policy.<sup>119</sup> His retirement, however, presented Angus Sutherland with an obvious opportunity.<sup>120</sup> At a meeting of

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<sup>116</sup> E. Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances Vol. II. Emigration, Protest, Reasons* (Beckenham, 1985), 80

<sup>117</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 17 Feb. 1886

<sup>118</sup> The Stornoway branch of the London HLLRA called for the return to Parliament of Angus Sutherland, G.B. Clark, Donald MacFarlane and, furthermore, on 'no account to support any party opposed to the just demand of the Irish race for Home Rule.' *John O'Groat Journal*, 30 Jun. 1886. Sutherland crofters meeting at Lairg unanimously approved Home Rule for Ireland if the same measure would follow for Scotland. *Northern Chronicle*, 12 May 1886. Similarly, their neighbours in Ross-shire, represented since the previous election by Dr. Roderick MacDonald, came out in favour of a 'Home Rule All Round' scheme. *John O'Groat Journal*, 23 Jun. 1886

<sup>119</sup> MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 160; Cameron, *Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh*, 214; D.W. Crowley, 'The "Crofters' Party", 1885-1892', *Scottish Historical Review*, xxxv (1956), 120; *John O'Groat Journal*, 2 Jun. 1886; *Highland News*, 31 May 1886; *Northern Chronicle*, 9 Jun. 1886

<sup>120</sup> *Highland News*, 31 May 1886. Upon hearing of the Marquis' decision, the *Highland News* was able to express firmly its belief that 'the one honourable course now open to the officialdom of Sutherland is to allow Mr. Angus Sutherland to achieve unopposed the reward of the struggle which he so gallantly and so creditably fought at the last general election. We venture to think that the plea that a member or representative of the ducal family will have infinitely more influence and be able to confer greater benefit on the people than a mere crofter's son will not be put forward again'. Whilst this comment

the Sutherlandshire Association, held a week after Gartimore's address in Helmsdale, Sutherland was adopted once more as the 'crofter' candidate for the county. Again, he stressed that he would accept the duty laid upon him, because he could not reject the will of the people. At once, however, the different tone of this election became apparent:

In regard to Ireland, he was in favour of Home Rule, and the state of that country was in many ways similar to Scotland, so Home Rule was needed here. If they had Home Rule for Scotland, they would not be overborne by the squires of England. The Irish members had ever stood by them, and in a great measure speaking the same language. The Irish had made themselves a party in the House because they stood firmly together and fought as one man. As he would ere be long around the county, he would be able to explain his views on these questions.<sup>121</sup>

The points made here further strengthen the impression that the demand for Scottish Home Rule found its clearest manifestation in the men who had also fought both for land reform and for Irish Home Rule. Two years later, Sutherland confidently told a meeting of Kildonan crofters that it was not necessary to expound his faith in the inevitability of Home Rule for Scotland:

Knowing, as you do, that I have advocated it for years. I rather think I was about the first, if not the first, Parliamentary candidate who publicly advocated Home Rule for Scotland.<sup>122</sup>

Although this ignored the fact that, under a Home Rule Parliament in, for example, Edinburgh, the influence and power of landlords such as the Duke of Sutherland might actually increase, that is presumably because that was not in Sutherland's vision of a progressive and democratic assembly.

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plainly attempted to popularise the view that Sutherland won a moral victory in 1885, only to be thwarted by stealth, it was also a pre-emptive strike against the *Highland News*' Whiggish or Tory rivals in the Highlands. In spite of Gartimore urging Sutherland to stand again at a meeting on home ground in Helmsdale, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting of the HLLRA expressing a similar wish, Angus Sutherland did not react immediately to the news of the Marquis' retirement. *Highland News*, 14 Jun. 1886; *John O'Groat Journal*, 23 Jun. 1886. The *Northern Chronicle*, indeed, reported a rumour that 'in some quarters it is considered doubtful whether Angus Sutherland, the rejected of last November, will again come forward'. *Northern Chronicle*, 16 Jun. 1886

<sup>121</sup> *Highland News*, 21 Jun. 1886

<sup>122</sup> *Highland News*, 15 Sep. 1888



The hostile elements of the press instantly seized upon Sutherland's outspoken support for the Irish cause. Indeed, the *John O'Groat Journal* referred to him as the 'Home Rule' candidate for Sutherlandshire.<sup>123</sup> Whilst both the *John O'Groat Journal* and the *Northern Chronicle* denounced his speeches as rabble-rousing, they rather disagreed upon where his main emphasis lay. The former wrote that 'it is expected this young man will join the Parnellites'.<sup>124</sup> The latter, on the other hand, complained that he 'proceeded at length to give his opinion on the Irish problem as an ardent supporter of Mr. Gladstone's present attitude on that question'.<sup>125</sup> In spite of playing up Sutherland's Home Rule advocacy, however, the *Chronicle* denied such a stance could boost the candidate's popularity.

The stage was also set – finally – for an attack on Sutherland's pro-Irish views. Although he did not have the same political history – and conversion to Catholicism – to hinder his progress like Donald MacFarlane, a letter from 'Huistean Caoil' was reminiscent of the way the member for Argyllshire was attacked by opponents in 1886.<sup>126</sup> This letter also included a plea against the disestablishment of the Church of Scotland, another radical plan Sutherland had embraced both in 1885 and 1886, but its main point was to encourage the electors of the county to make sure they elected a man who would be representative who would reflect their views. They should not allow themselves to be influenced by the extremism of the candidate.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 30 Jun. 1886. Contrast with the Irish *Glasgow Observer*, which noted Sutherland's success in 1886 as a 'Gladstonian gain'. *Glasgow Observer*, 17 Jul. 1886

<sup>124</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 30 Jun. 1886

<sup>125</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 30 Jun. 1886

<sup>126</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 7 Jul. 1886. 'Huistean Caoil' wrote that if 'the people of Sutherland are really prepared to go in with hand and heart for Home Rule for Ireland, then let them vote for Mr. Angus Sutherland (who openly declares himself in favour of that measure) to a man, but, if not, it becomes time to weigh up the matter very seriously; for, in my humble opinion, there was never a more serious question before the constituency. What, the people of Sutherlandshire returning a man who is prepared to argue Home Rule for Roman Catholics! A man on the same errand coming to the same county thirty years ago, would quickly be told to go about his business. If there is anything on earth that should gladden the heart of the Pope of Rome more than any other, it must be to see the people of the Highlands of Scotland advocating Home Rule for Ireland...' 'Huistean Caoil' is presumably a Gaelic rendering of 'Hugh of Kyle'. It is impossible to know whether this was the Kyle of Tongue, Kyle of Durness, Caol Raineach or elsewhere, however.

<sup>127</sup> A letter from 'Benji' on the Sutherlandshire contest also showed some of the bitterness that was present: 'The Sutherlandshire "Unionists" are very deficient in "wire-pulling". What possessed them to put Mr. Peters, Dornoch, forward at their meeting at Lairg, as the proposer of a motion antagonistic to Mr. Sutherland? Could they not have seen that the wicked land leaguers would immediately say that the learned gentleman would not at all be the worse of being an election agent for a Unionist candidate, especially if the said candidate would get £1,200 for a new carpet bag from the Hartington – Goschen Chamberlain alliance. No! No! My good "Unionist" friends. A candidate desires better assurances of

In addition to the political appeals of the 1886 election in Sutherlandshire, with Ireland inevitably looming large, there also appeared to be changes of a social nature taking place within the county. Whereas the 1885 election had shown up flaws in the political machinery of the Sutherlandshire Association, a great barrier to the success of the 'crofter candidate' was social. The older members of the community, in particular, were frightened to vote against the Ducal family.

Although Sutherland was eventually opposed by a 'Unionist' candidate, McLeod Fullarton – who spent little time attempting to gain the crofters' votes – there seemed little conviction even amongst opponents in the press that there would be a serious contest. Gone were the generations old ties to Dunrobin Castle, along with the Marquis' radical promises. The most negative comment that the *John O'Groat Journal* could muster, for example, was a warning, repeated from 1885, that a crofter's son could not carry the same weight as a Marquis.<sup>128</sup>

The *John O'Groat Journal* further admitted that there was little of the drama of the previous contest, with the result a 'foregone conclusion'. Nonetheless, upon the outcome being declared, Sutherland gaining 1,463 votes to Macleod Fullarton's 583, Sutherland's supporters celebrated by lighting a fire on Pittentrail Hill, above Rogart, a signal which then spread the news throughout the county.<sup>129</sup>

The election was, furthermore, fought against a backdrop of renewed agitation amongst the crofting community in Sutherlandshire, and the lawlessness persisted even though the attention on the Highlands at this time generally focussed on Skye. A seizure of farm pasture near Muie led to nine Sutherlandshire crofters being sent to prison for breach of interdict. Again, this was valuable propaganda for the new MP and the Sutherlandshire Association. Just because they had supplanted the landed interest in Parliament, it did not mean that they could let up their assault on

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success than can be given by self-elected officials, who are directly interested in oppressing the people, and who are actuated by petty spite and a desire to make Mr. Sutherland's election as dear as possible'. *Highland News*, 28 Jun. 1886

<sup>128</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 14 Jul. 1886

<sup>129</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 14 Jul. 1886; *Northern Chronicle*, 14 Jul. 1886; *Highland News*, 12 Jul. 1886; Craig, *Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918*. Thus, Sutherland's total of votes was lower than Stafford's had been in 1885. This is probably because of voter apathy relating to the one-sided nature of the 1886 contest.

landlordism. Gartiemore made a point of attending the trial of the Muie men, and providing full reports in the *Highland News* – describing them as the crofters ‘currently suffering imprisonment in the cause of land reform’.<sup>130</sup> The first stage of the land agitation in Sutherland may have been completed, but in some ways the work for Sutherland and Gartiemore was only just starting. They had to make the most of the prevailing unrest in the county, and the Highlands in general, and harness it to their political advantage.

**‘The only true democrat was the one who thought for himself’. Tension inside and outside of Parliament, 1886-1887<sup>131</sup>**

The months immediately after Sutherland’s election to the House of Commons revealed him to be a very active advocate of his constituents, and a member who had interests in a wide number of issues. It also showed a man with the sympathy and support of many of the Irish Nationalist members. Outside Parliament, Sutherland campaigned throughout Scotland for the Gladstonian Home Rule plan, and the end of his first session in Parliament was followed by his most prominent political event to date – one which confirmed him as a committed Home Ruler and land reformer – a tour of the Highlands and Islands with Michael Davitt.

From the moment he was elected to parliament, Angus Sutherland attempted to represent several groups of people, and he did so with vigour. Naturally, his first priority were his constituents in Sutherlandshire, but he also spoke out for the whole of the crofting community, and indeed at times he also took on the mantle of spokesman for the whole Scottish ‘democracy’.<sup>132</sup> He was also, of course, a vociferous mouthpiece for the Home Rule lobby (for Ireland and Scotland), and of Irish – Highland co-operation in general. It was also soon after his election that rumblings of discontent began to emanate from within the Highland land reform movement, either through jealousy or through a very real fear that Sutherland and Gartiemore – through their mantra of ‘organisation’ – were attempting to turn the

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<sup>130</sup> *John O’Groat Journal*, 2 Jun. 1886; *Highland News*, 14 Jun. 1886, 21 Jun. 1886; *Northern Chronicle*, 9 Jun. 1886. More breaches of interdict followed in the county, for example that by John Macleod (not the Secretary of the Sutherlandshire Association) and Alexander Polston, in Gartiemore early in 1887. See *Inverness Courier*, 22 Apr. 1887

<sup>131</sup> Speech in Glasgow on ‘The New Democracy’, *Highland News*, 22 Jan. 1887

<sup>132</sup> In addition, Sutherland paid particularly close attention to the travails of the fishermen and sailors – adding a new, but for his later career, very important – string to his bow.

Sutherlandshire Association into a vehicle for their own political ambitions, ambitions which were well in advance of the majority of the Sutherlandshire constituents.

As Sutherland travelled south in order to settle down in London prior to the opening of parliament, he was invited to address a meeting of Highlanders in Liverpool on the subject of the Tìree expedition.<sup>133</sup> The full extent of Tory coercion had not yet become apparent, and Sutherland attacked Gladstone's Liberals equally strongly. He condemned the Duke of Argyll, and stressed the theme of his early career as an agitator that if the landed interest used the law to ride roughshod over their tenants, those same tenants would lose respect for all laws. Having dealt with this issue – one which was later backed up by a resolution condemning such 'military despotism – a disgrace to the Liberal administration' – Sutherland moved on to broader issues. Referring to the representation of the crofting constituencies, he stated that:

With the exception of Argyllshire they had pronounced themselves for Home Rule, for they claimed it for themselves and were prepared to give it to the Irish people.<sup>134</sup>

Again, he attacked a Liberal party he would, in a very short time, become intimately associated with, in expressing his opinion that:

Mr. Gladstone had gone wrong on the Highland question, for he had commended the Crofters' Bill, which he considered an abortion.<sup>135</sup>

As Sutherland was, at this time, one of the most radical advocates of Land Nationalisation – befitting his position as a Vice-President of the SLRL – his

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<sup>133</sup> A dispute over the farm at Greenhill on the island of Tìree which the Duke of Argyll had let to a single crofter even though the island's HLLRA had resolved to raid and redistribute the land – dominated the Highland news in the summer of 1886. First, unaccompanied police were sent by the Liberals and, upon the accession of the Tory Government, A.J. Balfour, who took over the Scottish Office on June 30<sup>th</sup>, sent not only fifty policemen but also 200 marines to crush the disturbance. Eventually, eight crofters were given custodial sentences, leading to widespread outrage. See Hunter, *Crofting Community*, 163-5; *Oban Times*, 24 Jul. 1886 – 28 Aug. 1886, *passim*; *Scottish Highlander*, 12 Aug. 1886. The awareness amongst crofters of being politically united is shown by a resolution passed in Thurso expressing its disgust at the 'landlord tyranny' on Tìree. NAS, HH1/12: Resolutions of a meeting of farm servants and cottars held near Thurso on 14<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1886

<sup>134</sup> *Highland News*, 11 Aug. 1886

<sup>135</sup> Indeed, the debate on the Queen's speech at the start of the 1886 Session saw Angus Sutherland deny the crofters owed anything to the Liberals, and appealed to the Tories. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccviii, Col. 968 (30 Aug. 1886)

animosity towards Gladstone's scheme is not surprising. Indeed, his reaction, once more, is reminiscent of Michael Davitt's criticism of the 1881 Irish Land Act.<sup>136</sup>

Sutherland maintained the opinions expressed in Liverpool when he entered the House of Commons. Whilst his first recorded utterance was a brief request – agreed to – to adjourn a debate, it was only a short time afterwards that he made his maiden speech to the House. Sutherland had apparently not prepared for his speech, a part of the debate on the Queen's Speech, and indeed he claimed he would not have spoken at all if he had not been goaded by a previous statement from the then Secretary for Scotland – Arthur J. Balfour. Still, he was able to use similar rhetoric and to that which he had been employing in his extra-parliamentary agitation for the previous eight years. He stressed his crofter credentials, appealed to history, detailing the suffering of the Highlanders under the power of the landlords, and called for amendments to the Crofters' Bill. He told the Speaker:

I am, Sir, to all intents and purposes a crofter myself, and I think I ought to know a little about the people I belong to. Nevertheless, I have come now to the House to learn, for the first time, that the Crofters of Scotland really are different from what I have known them to be all my life... I believe that if the Highlands suffered more from one thing than another it is in the consequence of opinions of the Hon. Gentlemen who go up to the Highlands for the first time in their lives, and in the course of a sojourn of two or three days they think they know everything about the country, and that nobody knows anything about it except themselves... The Rt. Hon. Gentleman told us that the Sutherland Clearances have been undertaken from benevolent motives... that directly brings home to us the fact that all the trouble already existing in the Highlands arises from the policy which has been pursued there in the last hundred years... the whole blame attaches to the landlords of the Highlands because they have been practically impotent there for the last hundred years.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 488. '[Davitt] objected to it on the grounds that it sought to reconcile the irreconcilable interests of a "rent extracting landlord who produced nothing, and a rent paying tenant who produced everything..." The commissioners and sub-commissioners under the act were apparently all lawyers and land agents – "a nice lot of rogues into whose hands farmers and landlords have been placed by Mr. Gladstone's second attempt to patch up a peace in the agrarian war of Ireland." The general effect of the act, he thought, would be to plague the country with litigation, and leave the land question where it was.' See also *Inverness Courier*, 25 Jun. 1886, for a total condemnation of the Act by Sutherland.

<sup>137</sup> *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccviii, Cols. 873, 964 (Aug. 31 1886)



Sutherland also suggested that, with the bill in its present form, the Highland agitation would increase in volume. In appealing to the all sides of the House for an amendment to the Crofting Bill, Sutherland believed that it was 'unnecessary to appeal to our Irish friends', and alluded to the Home Rule issue, attempting to cement the support of the Irish nationalists for the crofters:

The similarity of the condition of affairs in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland has created a lasting sympathy between the two peoples. You will find that the people in the Highlands have not the slightest difficulty in understanding the Irish question, simply because the condition of the people in Ireland is exactly the same as that of the Highlands...<sup>138</sup>

Joseph Nolan, the member for Louth North, replied a little later to Sutherland's speech, displaying not only support for the crofters, but a remarkable degree of interaction with some of the more politically active Highlanders.<sup>139</sup> Speaking 'on behalf of my countrymen', Nolan spoke of the deep interest taken in Scottish affairs by the Irish people, and the shared identity between the two countries. He also gave an insight into the proactive role of the 'Highland Society of Liverpool' in promoting co-operation between Irish and Highland Gaels in the city.<sup>140</sup> Nolan explained that the

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<sup>138</sup> *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccviii, Col. 964 (Aug. 31 1886)

<sup>139</sup> Joseph Nolan was born in Louth in 1846, and although he began a career as a teacher in Ireland he later moved to Liverpool in order to take a position at the Reformatory School. In a strange career shift, he then became manager of the Aquarium and Casino at New Brighton. It was at political meetings in Liverpool that his desire to stand as an Irish Nationalist MP were nurtured, and when he became associated with the Highland Society of Liverpool. The Liverpool correspondent of the *Oban Times* also called attention to Nolan's efforts on behalf of the Highlanders. He stood as a Parnellite in Louth N. in 1885, defeating Philip Collan, and later remained loyal to Parnell during the O'Shea scandal. During his visit to Glasgow in 1888, he was seen as a highly influential member of the Parliamentary party, able to heal local rifts over the Mid-Lanark Bye-Election. Standing for Louth S. in 1892, he was unseated, and he unsuccessfully attempted to regain Louth N. in 1895. Eventually he represented the Louth S. constituency from 1900 until his retirement in 1918. M. Stenton & S. Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, Vol. 2, 1886-1918* (Sussex, 1978), 267-268. *Oban Times*, 18 Sep. 1886; *Glasgow Observer*, 7 Apr. 1888

<sup>140</sup> *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccviii, Col. 976 (31 Aug. 1886). Nolan said that 'We feel that as Irishmen our sympathies ought to be given to the people of a country who are allied to us in race, in language, and especially in the treatment they received at the hands of exterminating landlords... they are, further, like the people of Ireland in finding that the remedy which has been applied to their grievances is an altogether insufficient one. There is another reason, Sir, why I take a special interest in the crofter question, and it is this: In the Carlingford district there are a number of people who are similarly treated to the crofters of Scotland, seeing that they occupy barren and sterile land and find it necessary to eke out a living by fishing... I should like to say that at the time when the Crofter's Bill was about to pass the third reading I received a communication from the Highland Society of Liverpool, assuring me, in the strongest terms, if the Bill was passed it would not meet the difficulties of the case. Since then I have had the opportunity of consulting Highlanders of considerable intelligence, and they fully

blame that could be placed on the Land League / National League for violence was nothing compared to that of the landlords, and dismissed the patrician feelings of affection displayed towards the Highlanders as similar to 'Mokanna's love for mankind...'<sup>141</sup>

As well as representing the connections with his crofter constituents in Westminster, asking the Secretary for Scotland about loans to crofter / fishermen, for example, Angus Sutherland was also careful to remain active in Sutherlandshire itself. At a large land reform conference at Bonar Bridge, in September 1886, Sutherland described affairs on the estate of the Duke of Sutherland, as usual appealing to recent history.<sup>142</sup> The reference to Sutherlandshire's aristocracy living cheek by jowl with extreme crofter poverty, of course, is a variation on the main theme of George's *Progress and Poverty*, which set as its basic question the conundrum that the greatest poverty in the world is always found side by side with the greatest wealth.<sup>143</sup>

The Bonar Bridge Conference was meant to be the largest manifestation to date of the increasing self-reliance not only of the Scottish crofters, but also smallholders from Ireland and Wales, and has been presented as genuine proof of the existence of a pan-Celtic consciousness.<sup>144</sup> The pan-Celtic element of the meeting was, in fact, rather spoiled by absence of the Irish representatives who, according to G.B. Clark, were making 'a last appeal to the British Parliament to avoid a long and bloody war in

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endorsed what was said by the Highland Society of Liverpool'. This is a good illustration of the lip service which some Irishmen paid to the crofting agitation. As this thesis shows, however, the reality was much more complex. Mr. Kelly, MP (Donegal South), speaking in Rutherglen in 1886, used the crofter case to drum up support for Home Rule. 'The Irish party', he said, 'had many friends and allies hailing from Scotland, and among them many men who assisted with them in the cause of the poor crofters.' *Glasgow Observer*, 19 Jun. 1886

<sup>141</sup> Nolan further reinforced the connection between the Irish Nationalists and the 'Crofter' MPs by referring to G.B. Clark as 'my right honourable friend'

<sup>142</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 29 Sep., 6 Oct. 1886; *Highland News*, 1 Oct. 1886; *Oban Times*, 25 Sep., 2 Oct. 1886; *Scottish Highlander*, 30 Sep. 1886

<sup>143</sup> What is not clear here, however, is whether Sutherland was starting to soften his views on landlordism. If he was accepting that the Duke of Sutherland should have built a landing place for the fishermen, and that the 'Improvements' on the estate were simply not adequate, it is a less extreme position than advocating land nationalisation and the abolition of landlords, as he had done in the 1885 and 1886 elections. An admission of any landlord interference with the estate would not be acceptable in pure Georgite philosophy. As yet, however, Sutherland was still nominally a land nationaliser, and it may be that this confusion was simply in an effort to portray the oppressive and inconsistent nature of Dunrobin's land policy.

<sup>144</sup> P. Berresford Ellis, *The Celtic Dawn: A History of Pan-Celticism* (London, 1993), 70; P. Jones-Evans, 'Evan Pan Jones, Land Reformer', *Welsh Historical Review* iv (1968-69), 153

Ireland'. The conference was, therefore, a predominantly Highland affair, albeit with the additional presence of some influential and radical Welshmen, but it was no less important for the lack of Irishmen. After all, this was one of the very few occasions outside of the House of Commons that most of the 'Crofter MPs' were found together. With Donald MacFarlane out of Parliament for the time being, Sutherland, MacDonald, Clark, and Fraser Mackintosh all turned out for the Bonar Bridge conference. The importance of the meeting was in its ratification of the plan for a Highland Land League – unifying all of the existing reform bodies – and for its serious commitment to a 'Celtic League'. It is also an important event for understanding Angus Sutherland and the Sutherlandshire Association.

In prevaricating on the issue of unifying the reform bodies, Sutherland and Gartimore arguably showed their reluctance to relinquish any of the power they had built up within Sutherlandshire, by subsuming the Association into a centralised body. Sutherland commented that 'they were perfectly willing to go in for union, but they objected that under the cover of union they should be tied down to a scheme which they had no time to consider.' After being threatened with suspension from the meeting the Sutherlandshire delegates finally accepted the new Association.<sup>145</sup> The remaining meetings passed off harmoniously, with Sutherland stressing that the land laws were 'a violation of the first law of nature, that God made us all equal'. Furthermore, on more than one occasion, it was the total abolition of landlordism that was called for by the delegates, not mere law reform.<sup>146</sup> In fact, the strength of feeling on this extreme measure was acknowledged by the *John O'Groat Journal* which, in a curious change of tone, suggested that:

We do not think we err in saying that the abolition of landlordism is a doctrine favourably received... The Bonar Bridge demonstration was a fair, reasonable and constitutional means of activating great reforms.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Briefly, the objects of the new organisation were stated to be: first, to restore to the Highland people their land on equitable conditions, and to resist, by every constitutional method, the depopulation of the Highlands by eviction, forced emigration, or any other means; second, to abolish the game laws; third, to amend the laws relating to sea, lake and river fishing; fourth, to restore to the people their foreshore rights; fifth, to reform the administration of the law, and generally to promote the welfare of the people throughout the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

<sup>146</sup> G.B. Clark and E. Pan Jones were especially vociferous in this regard.

<sup>147</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 29 Sep. 1886. If this indicated that Sutherland's earlier contention that the press would, in general, support the winning side, he could not expect to have it all his own way. Conservative opinion was unyielding in its ridicule of the participants, with Angus Sutherland coming

Angus Sutherland's elevation to the position of Member of Parliament for the county also had an undoubted galvanising effect on the Sutherlandshire Association. Indeed, such became its apparent power, and radicalism on social and political issues, that rumours of a split began to emerge. These rumours would never be shaken off and, eventually, there was a split in the Highland land reform movement. The fact that a number of the Highlanders desired land reform and no other political involvement could already have cost Angus Sutherland victory in the 1885 election. If he and Gartimore moved too quickly, or did not bring a large majority of their supporters along with them on such issues as Ireland, the potential for dissent was clear.

At a meeting held in Clyne Old Free Church, on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1886, John Macleod of Gartimore described the provision of the Crofters' Act and attempted to encourage his listeners, and those who would be reading about the speech in the newspapers, by showing the power of organisation. Not only had organisation started to confer benefits, it was only by standing together that the task ahead could be completed.<sup>148</sup> In what amounted to an advertisement for the Sutherlandshire Association, Gartimore added that the Clyne officials had told him the membership in the area was 'not as high as it should be':

Nothing he did gave him less pleasure than urging his countrymen to join the Association. The righteousness of their objects, and the purely moral manner in which they sought to overcome evil with good should be sufficient to recommend the Association to all really good men. Although in existence for such a short time, it had been their privilege to confer lasting benefits upon the people of Sutherland...

These benefits, said Gartimore, included the Crofters' Act, an average rent reduction of 50%, the abolition of the 'Death Tax' and the 'entire removal of petty estate tyranny.'<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of a 'large number' of members being enrolled after

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in for special attention. The *Scottish News* reported that 'by far the liveliest speakers were Mr. Angus Sutherland, the member for Sutherland, and Dr. Clark, member for Caithness. Mr. Sutherland is as much above history as Emperor Sigismund is above grammar. He talked fluently about the feudal system and other historical matters which, although a school teacher, he evidently does not yet fully understand'. Quoted in *John O'Groat Journal*, 6 Oct. 1886

<sup>148</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 24 Nov. 1886

<sup>149</sup> As discussed above, 222, the abolition of the Death Premium would also have implications for organisation within the county.

the meeting, this need to appeal for people to join showed that Gartimore and Sutherland's ambition of an entirely united, radical force was still far from reality, no matter how much they talked it up in the press.

Whilst this was, perhaps, the most advanced form of political organisation in the Highlands at this time, the Sutherlandshire Association still fell some way short of the almost universal peasant mobilisation of the Irish Land League between 1879 and 1881. Angus Sutherland's friends amongst the Glasgow Irish community, whilst being entirely sympathetic to the crofters, remained to be convinced of the strength of the movement amongst the crofters themselves.

Throughout 1886, the *Glasgow Observer* had kept careful tabs on events in the Highlands, and especially in Tiree during the 'expeditions'. In the summer, an editorial had claimed that 'the movement inaugurated at Irishtown in 1879 by Michael Davitt and his colleagues, is slowly, but surely working out the ruination of landlordism in Scotland.'<sup>150</sup> When the expedition on Tiree was met by a force of passive resistance, the *Observer* told its predominantly Irish readers that:

The inhabitants looked silently on and laughed, a significant mode of combat which the old Irish Land League must get the credit for having initiated...<sup>151</sup>

Still, the failure of the crofters to take matters to the extremes of Ireland was strongly criticised at almost the same time as Gartimore was pleading the case to the crofters of Clyne:

The crofters have been adopting of late the tactics of the Irish tenant farmer without, we regret to say, either the vigour or the earnestness which characterised the Irish agricultural revolution... Their 'ticket' is that if the interests of the Crofters should be first and the landlords after. In so far as they have borrowed their doctrines from the Irish Land League, and in their own interests it is to be regretted that they have not followed them to a conclusion.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 31 July 1886

<sup>151</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 7 Aug. 1886

<sup>152</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 20 Nov. 1886. Describing the relationship between Sheriff Ivory and the crofters, the *Observer* stated that matters needed to be addressed outside, as well as inside, Parliament: 'No doubt the matter will be very exhaustively tried in the course of the coming session, but vital questions will present themselves before February next, and the most eloquent denunciations of Dr.



The *Observer* rather echoed the beliefs of the radical Liverpool correspondent of the *Oban Times*, a man who appears to have been on good terms with a number of Irish parliamentarians. Just before the 1886 election, the correspondent related a chat he had had with a pair of Nationalist MPs, who told him that the Highland members were not highly regarded because they were too easily led and did not 'carry the fight to the gate'.<sup>153</sup> Since Angus Sutherland had entered Parliament, a man well known in Irish circles in Britain, the situation might have improved, but as 1886 drew to a close it is clear that the organisation of Sutherlandshire, let alone the rest of the Highlands, was lacking.

What was more positive for Sutherland and Gartiemore, however, was that a new phase of co-operation between themselves, the Glasgow Irish Nationalists, and Labour activists, was under way. Although there had, as has been seen, tacit links for a long time between the Glasgow Irish and the crofters, circumstances dictated that these links would not be strengthened further. The year 1886 had seen the passage of a Crofters' Act which many felt to be substandard and in need of amendment, as well as a national crisis over Irish Home Rule which redefined the boundaries of British politics. At last, it was possible that the crofters might be able to help the Irish in their aspirations as much as the Irish could assist them.

Similarly, given the activity of the 'left wing' of the Glasgow Irish Land / National League, and the SLRL, with John Ferguson, Edward McHugh, James Shaw Maxwell and Angus Sutherland all involved, it is, perhaps, inevitable that Sutherland should also have used his new position to become a spokesman for what he called the 'new democracy'. Had it not been for this new democracy, he would not have been in parliament. The emergence of a Labour Party separate from the Liberals also meant that the crofter advocates were also involved in various areas of national politics.

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Cameron, or the most laudable excuses of Mr. Angus Sutherland, will fail to replace the crofter tenants in possession of their holdings. What is wanted is organisation. Have the crofters studied the Winter Campaign in Ireland, and are they willing to adopt its principles? Persecuted and run to earth as they have been by unrelenting landlordism, it is essential that some plan of campaign should be adopted by them during the winter months, lest they may awake in the springtime and find themselves dispossessed not alone of their harvests, but of their homes.'

<sup>153</sup> *Oban Times*, 1 May 1885

The details of the police expeditions to Skye and Tiree during the Autumn of 1886 had been well covered in the Irish press in Glasgow.<sup>154</sup> The weekly meetings of the Irish National League also provided a forum for debate on the crofters, with the Home Government Branch, as usual, to the fore. In the Autumn of 1886, for example, both James Cherrie (on 'The Reign of the People') and James Shaw Maxwell addressed the branch, and it would have been remarkable if they had not mentioned the land struggle going on at that time in the Highlands.<sup>155</sup> In addition, Shaw Maxwell and John Ferguson attempted to speak to a wider audience, debating land nationalisation before the Glasgow Young Ireland Society.<sup>156</sup>

At a large meeting of Glasgow Irish and Highlanders a week later, Dr. Charles Cameron called for a government inquiry into the Skye expedition before handing the floor to John Ferguson. The speech which followed was classic Ferguson, displaying the cost to the towns of rural depopulation and showing off his knowledge of Scottish history by comparing Sheriff Ivory with Claverhouse. He echoed the sentiments of the *Glasgow Observer* in demanding that the crofters stand their ground firmly.<sup>157</sup> In conclusion, Ferguson took a line often used by Davitt, and celebrated the fact that:

The wealthy classes no longer get the masses to boo at him just because he happened to be an Irishman. Men were getting united in the holy bonds of democracy to serve their class, work for their country's good, and to drop into the grave of the past all the national and religious animosities which had hitherto divided them, and like true patriots to stand by the industrial and useful classes...<sup>158</sup>

The reaffirmation of Glasgow Irish / Highland links given by Ferguson, therefore, predated by six months Michael Davitt's tour around the Highlands. Along with the Bonar Bridge conference and the resolutions passed there, a real – and open – unity between various interest groups in Britain and Ireland emerged. In spite of the lack of

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<sup>154</sup> See, e.g., *Glasgow Observer*, 7 Aug., 9 Oct., 16 Oct., 30 Oct. 1886

<sup>155</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 28 Aug., 30 Oct. 1886

<sup>156</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 18 Sep., 25 Sep. 1886; *Irish Tribune*, 18 Sep. 1886. This activity was not confined to a few of the leaders of the Home Government Branch, as is shown by the fact that a resolution condemning Sheriff Ivory's activities on Skye was passed unanimously. *Glasgow Observer*, 6 Nov. 1886

<sup>157</sup> The news that J. MacKay and Norman McLean had been arrested for slandering Ivory, and that 'further arrests of leaders' were expected, was met not with boos, but with cheers. As in the Irish Land Wars, and the early Highland agitation at Braes and Glendale, Ferguson and the others present knew the power martyrs could have for the cause.

<sup>158</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 13 Nov. 1886

Irish representation at Bonar Bridge, the *Glasgow Observer* showed the Irish interest in alliance with the other Celts, workers, and Gladstonian Liberals was strong.<sup>159</sup>

Angus Sutherland was one of the main figures at the centre of this activity, and spent the winter of 1886-7 lecturing on Home Rule for Ireland and Scotland, as well as on land reform and the need for amendments to the Crofters' Act.<sup>160</sup> A letter from J.G. Mackay, in praise of those who assisted the crofters of Garalapin (Skye), also shows the men with whom Sutherland was associating. Mackay called special attention to the roles of Sutherland, John Ferguson, David McLardy and Dugald Maclachlan in having deforcement charges against the crofters dropped.<sup>161</sup> All were men associated with the SLRL, as well as Ireland and the crofters, and Sutherland showed great stamina in maintaining a high profile not only in his constituency and at Westminster, but also amongst his long standing allies in Glasgow.

At a meeting in the Religious Institution Rooms, Glasgow – again chaired by David McLardy – Sutherland gave a speech which appeared to show that great strides had

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<sup>159</sup> It also supported the Welsh Tithe Agitation: See *Glasgow Observer*, 4 Sep. 1886, 11 Sep. 1886, 23 Jul. 1887. For Celtic League, see *Glasgow Observer*, 15 Jan. 1887

<sup>160</sup> He was, at one point, rumoured to be going on a tour of America, but nothing came of this report, possibly owing to his delicate health. *John O'Groat Journal*, 6 Oct. 1886

<sup>161</sup> *Scottish Leader*, 17 Jan. 1887. The *Scottish Leader's* sympathetic portrayal of the crofters' struggle led to at least one meeting in Sutherlandshire passing a resolution that everyone present should buy it. See *Highland News*, 12 Feb. 1887. David McLardy was a stalwart 'Single Taxer', who had been attending Highland meetings in Glasgow at the same time as Angus Sutherland in the late 1870s. (*Oban Times*, 9 Feb. 1878) Although there is nothing linking him with the Irish Land League in the city, he certainly developed extremely close friendships with Sutherland, McHugh and John Ferguson. He was present at the first annual meeting of the SLRL, and later became President of its successor body, the Scottish Land Restoration Union. (*Glasgow Observer*, 30 May 1885; *Highland News*, 27 May 1893, 7 Mar. 1894; *Single Tax*, Jul. 1894, Sep. 1894) In between these times, he attended most of the main speeches in Glasgow relating to the land question, and became a prominent, and advanced, Liberal in Glasgow's Exchange Ward. (*Highland News*, 22 Jan. 1887, *Scottish Leader*, 17 Jan. 1887, 19 Jan. 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 24 Mar., 14 Jul. 1888; *Single Tax*, Nov. 1899) McLardy was also elected president of the Glasgow Crofters' Aid Committee in 1887, continuing his close co-operation with Ferguson and Sutherland, and in the 1890s was involved in the Highland Land League. (*Highland News*, 22 Dec. 1888, 12 Aug. 1893, *Single Tax*, Sep. 1894) *Single Tax* ran a sketch / portrait of McLardy in 1894, referring to him as an 'uncompromising disciple of Henry George, and he gave the vote of thanks after McHugh's lecture on Henry George in 1900. (*Single Tax*, Dec. 1894, Nov. 1900) With his wife, who also spoke stridently on social issues, McLardy toured America and Australia / New Zealand in 1902-3, promoting the Single Tax. (*Land Values, passim*, Nov. 1902 – Oct. 1903) Alongside Edward McHugh and Richard McGhee, he attended the Land Values Conference in Manchester in 1910. (*Land Values*, Nov. 1910) McLardy was credited with playing a 'prominent part', with the SLRL and McGhee. ('A Short History of the Land Values Movement in Great Britain', in *Land Values*, May 1915)

been made in all the areas in which he had agitated since 1878. He claimed that the history of the country was at a 'transitional stage', and that:

This crisis was recognised by every thinking man, and by parties, however divergent their political opinions might be... He maintained that the only true democrat was one who thought for himself... The crucial test at the moment was the question of Ireland, and he asked, if they could not trust the democracy of Ireland, how could they have any faith in the democracy of Great Britain? A number of people had asked him how far he was prepared to go in the question of Home Rule for Ireland. His reply was, as far as the Irish people want – and so also in regard to Scotland, and England, and Wales (applause). He thought that the great cause of democracy was pretty well assured, but they must consider how their forces could be most effectively organised and kept in readiness for the work they would at no distant time accomplish.<sup>162</sup>

The night after this speech, Sutherland called for better understanding between the British and Irish people at a meeting of the Edinburgh Sutherland Association.<sup>163</sup> Again, this links him ideologically with Davitt and the 'left wing' of the Irish National League. In Parliament, too, after it had reconvened, Sutherland spoke not only of land reform for the Highlands, but likened the rule of law there to that in Ireland, and warned of similar social and political consequences if the situation remained unchanged.<sup>164</sup> Whilst this simply reiterated what Angus Sutherland had been saying since he first emerged as an agitator, it surely put the point over to a larger audience, and reinforced the parallels between the two communities. Furthermore, Sutherland's point was once more given strong backing by an Irish Nationalist MP.<sup>165</sup> Pierce

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<sup>162</sup> *Highland News*, 22 Jan. 1887; *Scottish Leader*, 19 Jan. 1887

<sup>163</sup> *Scottish Leader*, 20 Jan. 1887

<sup>164</sup> Sutherland argued that 'justice was not administered [in the Highlands] in the spirit as it was in England and in the Lowlands of Scotland. Unfortunately, those in the Highlands who had the dispensing of justice belonged to a different social class to those to whom justice was dispensed... If Her Majesty's Government were emulous of the fame of Irish officials, and wanted a similar result in the Highlands to what had been brought about in Ireland, he could see no better way of bringing about the result than to continue the course they had hitherto adopted... It was a notorious fact that the present disturbed state of the Highlands had arisen from the power that had been placed in the hands of the landlords'. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccx, Col. 1592 (15 Feb. 1887)

<sup>165</sup> Pierce Charles de Lacey Mahony was born in Dublin in 1850, of Co. Kerry ancestors, going on to be educated at Rugby School and Magdelene College, Oxford. After this, he attended the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester, where he won the Haygarth Gold Medal in 1875. He became a JP for counties Kerry and Limerick, a member of the Irish Piers and Roads Commission, and of the Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls. As an Assistant Land Commissioner from 1881-1884, he would have been thoroughly conversant with the 1881 Land Act, and of its comparisons and contrasts with the Crofters' Bill. A loyal supporter of Parnell, he sat for Meath N. from 1886 to 1892, but in spite

Mahony, the member for Meath North, gave a long speech in support of Sutherland and the crofters, and showed a sound grasp of Highland affairs:

We are suffering from the defects of the 1881 Act because the advice of the Irish members who understood the question was not taken. Why are the Crofters suffering from the defects of the Crofters' Act? It is because the advice of the Scotch members who especially understood the question was not taken at the time the Crofters' Act was passed.<sup>166</sup>

In the cities – especially Glasgow – and in Parliament, therefore, Angus Sutherland was able to rely upon backing from the Irish sources, as well as radical social reformers. Back in Sutherlandshire, it seemed that his 'honeymoon period' with constituents was ongoing. Meetings at Helmsdale, Rogart, Rosehall and Brora in the first few weeks of 1887, organised by Macleod of Gartiemore, all expressed great support for their member. Indeed, the personality cult growing up around Sutherland was manifest in Brora, where an oil painting of their MP, by a local artist, gazed down upon the audience.<sup>167</sup>

In spite of the immense amount of effort Gartiemore was putting in to organising the Sutherlandshire Association, and the work being done by Sutherland in the House of Commons, it is apparent that the unity for which they were striving was not materialising. Whilst the evidence indicates that Angus Sutherland remained extremely popular in the constituency, there was certainly a faction opposed to himself and Gartiemore.

Opposition stemmed from within Sutherlandshire, presumably from those who were, like John Mackay of Hereford, satisfied with the degree of land reform offered by the

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of contesting Meath N. (1893), St. Stephen's Green, Dublin (1895) and Wicklow W. (1918) he never regained his seat at Westminster. He received a CBE in 1920 and died in October 1930. See Stenton & Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, Vol. 2*

<sup>166</sup> Mahony also highlighted other aspects of similarity between Highland Scotland and Ireland. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccx, Col. 1592 (15 Feb. 1887)

<sup>167</sup> *Highland News*, 5 Feb. 1887, 12 Feb. 1887; At Helmsdale, two large meetings took place, one of which featured Gartiemore condemning the Duke of Sutherland in a 'powerful' and 'scathing' verbal attack (*Highland News*, 1 Jan 1887). The other Helmsdale meeting saw G.G. Macleod again detailing the benefits of organisation and the fruits of the agitation to date (*Highland News*, 29 Jan. 1887). At Rosehall, Gartiemore led an attack on the Primrose League (*Highland News*, 22 Jan. 1887). At Rogart Donald Ross 'gave some seasonable advice, and expressed the pleasure it gave him to hear the shouts of a hundred thousand throats applauding the return of Angus Sutherland to Parliament'. (*Highland News*, 15 Jan. 1887)



Crofters' Act and were loathe to involve themselves in any broader political issues. However, there may have been a wider split between the reformers, forcing Gartimore, at one stage, to deny that there was a rift between the Associations of Sutherlandshire and neighbouring Ross-shire.<sup>168</sup>

In February, 1887, a meeting of the Creich Branch of the Sutherlandshire Association gave an indication of some of the tensions ahead. Even though Gartimore was present, the chairman of the meeting, Alexander MacKenzie, 'characterised the tactics of Mr. Sutherland in endeavouring to prevent the people from getting the benefits of the Crofters' Act...'<sup>169</sup> This is the same line as taken by Mackay, who had emerged as a Liberal Unionist, and his supporters – that the agitation had been successful, the 1886 Act had wrung sufficient concessions from the Government, and all of the talk of amendments from Sutherland, Clark and the others merely prevented the Act's proper implementation. Evidence of a larger, if covert, campaign to undermine Sutherland can be gleaned from Gartimore's defensive reply, however. At this stage, no reports of dissent had been seen in the press. Yet Gartimore still felt compelled to explain that:

It was said that [Angus Sutherland] was incapable, physically and mentally, to hold the position he did... We were told that the leaders of the movement were wolves in sheep's clothing...

Then, according to the report, he 'counselled all of those present to be united, and stand, shoulder to shoulder.' As yet, however, there was no clue as to who was making the accusations denied by Gartimore, although the reference to Sutherland's poor health is intriguing, for it is the first mention of a problem which interrupted his subsequent Parliamentary career on numerous occasions.

Whilst the tension within the Highlands clearly mirrors the events of four or five years previously, when many resented the increasing politicisation of the FCS, there were other external factors which would naturally have fostered suspicions of, or grudges against, Sutherland and Gartimore at this time. It was a meeting of the SLRL, rather than any Highland body, for example, which decreed in March that there should be

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<sup>168</sup> *Highland News*, 12 Feb. 1887

<sup>169</sup> *Highland News*, 12 Feb. 1887. It is not made clear whether this Alexander MacKenzie was the author of *A History of the Highland Clearances*.

‘one grand Scottish Land League under the convenorship of Angus Sutherland’.<sup>170</sup> Amongst those who thought this a necessary step were John Ferguson, David McLardy and James Cruikshank, all staunch Sutherland allies.<sup>171</sup> Rumours also abounded that it was Sutherland and Gartimore who were deciding between themselves who would represent the ‘crofting’ constituencies at future elections – in order to purge the land movement of Unionists. Added to Sutherland’s rapid rise through the Liberal ranks – by February 1887 he had already been elected to the executive council of the Scottish Liberal Association, there was plenty of scope for jealousy or suspicion.<sup>172</sup> This alleged scheming, yet again, had a familiar ring to those who recalled Sutherland in the days of the FCS.

When the alleged ‘split’ came into the public domain, however, it was presented as a dispute between the Sutherland Association and the London HLLRA. Furthermore, the correspondent of the *Invergordon Times*, who brought the affair to light, was in no doubt that it was Sutherland and his friends who were responsible for the tension.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> *Highland News*, 12 Mar. 1887

<sup>171</sup> The Rev. J.M. Cruikshank was an extremely radical Sutherlandshire native, and minister in St. Rollox United Presbyterian Church, Glasgow. During the late 1870s, he was present at meetings of the Glasgow Sutherland Association alongside Angus Sutherland and John Gunn Mackay. (*Highlander*, 8 Feb. 1879) At the outbreak of trouble in Valtos and Braes, Cruikshank was prominent at several of the indignation meetings, alongside David Macrae and others. (*Scotsman*, 6 May 1881, 6 May 1882; *Oban Times*, 22 Apr. 1882, 13 May 1882) He was also vociferous in support of the Reform Bill. When Henry George spoke in Glasgow in 1884, Cruikshank opened his meeting at the City Hall. (*A Sermon by Henry George in The City Hall Glasgow, on Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1884* (Glasgow, 1884)) Cruikshank returned to his native Sutherlandshire in order to give radical backing, alongside John Murdoch, for Angus Sutherland’s campaign in 1885. (*John O’Groat Journal*, 2 Sep., 11 Nov. 1885) Michael Davitt’s speeches in Scotland in 1887 saw Cruikshank proposing or seconding motions on subjects ranging from the royalties of mine owners, to the Bodyke evictions, to Home Rule for Scotland and Ireland. It also transpired that he suffered abuse from some of his parishioners for his radicalism. (*John O’Groat Journal*, 10 Feb. 1886; *Northern Chronicle*, 3 Feb. 1886 *Glasgow Observer*, 26 Mar. 1887, 9 Jul. 1887; *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 Mar. 1887) He continued to campaign on behalf of the crofters, and the SLRL / Single Tax movement, until his death in 1898. He was buried in Sighthill Cemetery, Glasgow. (Scottish Land Restoration League Pamphlet, *A Sermon by Henry George in City Hall, Glasgow, on Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1889*; Scottish Land Restoration League Pamphlet, *The ‘Single Tax’ Faith: An address by Henry George in the Temperance Institute, Bridgeton on Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1889*; *Highland News*, 26 Jul. 1890, 12 Aug. 1893, 27 Jan. 1894; *Single Tax*, Mar. 1896, Apr., May 1898)

<sup>172</sup> *Highland News*, 12 Feb. 1887

<sup>173</sup> In praising the work of the London Association, the correspondent accused Sutherland and Gartimore of attempting to ‘throw mud darts’ at the London leaders, and the interest of the Sutherlandshire men in Home Rule, along with their own political ambition, were seen as the main reason why: ‘The wire-pullers, into whose hands the control of the Sutherlandshire Association has fallen, will have their desserts in due time for all the abuses they have heaped upon, and the malice they have hurled at, the friends of the cause. The object is only too evident. It is simply meant to drive out of the movement any and all who stand in the way of their ambitious schemes. This is what was done by the Celtic Federation leaders, now the “Glasgow Helmsdale Heroes”, with what result is now a matter of history’. Reported in *John O’Groat Journal*, 9 Mar. 1887

The report accused the Sutherland faction of attempting to discredit any land reformer not in favour of Home Rule, naming John Mackay as an example, and of arranging all of the crofting districts so as to be represented by Home Rulers. In addition, the accusation continued, the Glasgow Helmsdale axis sought to revive the question of Church of Scotland disestablishment, something which Sutherland had been using his influence within the Liberal Party to achieve.<sup>174</sup>

The member for Sutherland is quite willing to vacate his seat in favour of Mr. Gilbert Beith – so says rumour – and he will fight Mr. Finlay [Liberal Unionist member for Inverness Burghs].<sup>175</sup>

Still, reassured the *Invergordon Times*, ‘it only takes a small pinprick to let the wind out of a balloon, and it may happen that a very slight disturbance will overturn the castles in the air now being built on no other foundation than presumption by the Glasgow Helmsdale anti-Unionists. To be forewarned is forearmed. Let the people of Sutherlandshire beware!’.

In spite of these rumours as to Sutherland’s ambition, which were to persist – with varying degrees of strength – for some time, his adherents within Sutherlandshire generally rallied round, and his standing in Glasgow and the House of Commons remained high. A meeting of the Rogart crofters in March, admittedly under

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<sup>174</sup> *The Times*, 20 Oct. 1887; M. Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism* (Brighton, 1975), 122: ‘A similar deputation from the Scottish Liberal Association slunk almost unnoticed away from the conference chamber. After Randel had spoken, the crofter MP Angus Sutherland rose with the intention of placing Scottish disestablishment on an equal footing. But Schnadhorst would not deny Wales her hour of glory, and was probably responsible for advising Kitson to inform the Scotsmen that the agenda could not suddenly be reconstructed to take account of their views.’

<sup>175</sup> Gilbert Beith was the son of Dr. Alexander Beith, of the Free Church of Scotland. He was born in Kilbrandon, Argyllshire, in 1827, and was educated at his father’s manse and Stirling Academy. He apprenticed at a manufacturing firm in Glasgow, going on to work for Messrs. Oswald, Stevenson and Company before starting his own export business in 1856. He was thereafter chairman of Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. An advanced Liberal, he advocated Home Rule and was a loyal supporter of Gladstone’s policies, especially regarding religious equality (disestablishment) in Scotland and District Councils. He was also a high ranking, if honorary, member of the Edinburgh HLLRA, although Tories believed that – because of his ‘disestablishment proclivities’ – this was more part of a plot to overthrow the church than an attempt to change the land laws. Beith sat for the Central Division of Glasgow from November 1885 until July 1886. He then returned to Parliament for Inverness Burghs in 1892 and sat until his retirement in 1895. The contest with Finlay in Inverness Burghs is significant because Finlay was a keen proponent of establishment. He died on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1904. Stenton & Lees, *Who’s Who of British Members of Parliament*, Vol. 2, 29; *Northern Chronicle*, 12 Mar. 1884; G. Beith, *The Crofter Question and Church Endowments in the Highlands, viewed Politically and Socially* (Glasgow, 1884)

Gartiemore's chairmanship, gave hearty support to their MP.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, even the *John O'Groat Journal* earned an immediate reply to the report it had culled from the *Invergordon Times*. In this letter, 'Democratic Radical' claimed that, after a decade of service to Sutherlandshire, it beggared belief that Angus Sutherland would de-camp to Inverness Burghs, even if the Invernessians wanted him to. He praised Sutherland for awakening the people of the county to their 'age old rights', for educating them, and for organising them. Furthermore, he continued,

The crofters of this county are strong supporters of Home Rule. The associations in London and Glasgow are evidently firm believers in centralisation. While grateful to these bodies for what they have done and are doing, we hope they are not going to be so arbitrary as to expect us to accept their nominee without demur. If we did, we should only be putting up another tyranny in place of the one so recently thrown down.<sup>177</sup>

James Hunter has described the tension between the HLLRA and the SLRL, and it is likely that the genesis of Sutherland's problems with the 'gossips', as Sutherland was a prominent member of the latter body, could have been here as well as in Home Rule politics.<sup>178</sup>

It must be remembered that Angus Sutherland's views on Home Rule were well known before his election, and that in 1886 around two-thirds of the voters cast their vote for him. Sutherlandshire had, to that extent 'gone in for Home Rule', but the fierce passions the topic aroused throughout Britain and Ireland made a degree of opposition inevitable. The often rapturous reception afforded to Michael Davitt in Sutherlandshire a month later if it did not prove the country's support for Home Rule, at the very least paid testament to Gartiemore's skills as an organiser, and mobiliser of his political allies. In their pursuit of the fallen star Joseph Chamberlain, also attempting to put forward his views on the Irish Question whilst ostensibly speaking about a solution to the Crofter Question, Angus Sutherland and Michael Davitt

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<sup>176</sup> *Highland News*, 19 Mar. 1887. On the same weekend, the Portskerra / Melvich Branch of the Sutherlandshire Association played down the importance of newspaper reports, resolving that 'Mr. Sutherland, MP, is not such a person as the newspaper gossipers would have you believe, but quite the contrary... some would have us believe that there is discord between the MP and his constituents, one person, writing to a newspaper that prints any amount of dirt against the Sutherland leaders and others, criticised and condemned the policy of our branch for the attitude it assumed towards Mr. Sutherland'.

<sup>177</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 16 Mar. 1887

<sup>178</sup> Hunter, 'Politics of Highland Land Reform', 67

undertook an exhaustive tour of the Highlands and Islands. The practical value of the support given by Ireland – from Glasgow from Parliament, and elsewhere – would meet its biggest test.

#### **‘No-one is held in greater respect by the men of the Highlands’ – Davitt in 1887**

Gladstone had precipitated a split in his party and caused defeat in the 1886 General Election after his conversion to Home Rule for Ireland. Chamberlain’s defection with his ‘Liberal Unionist’ colleagues, most importantly Hartington, allowed the Tories back in to government. Both Davitt and Angus Sutherland had been well known for their stance in support of Gladstone over the Irish issue. In March 1886, for example, Davitt warned Chamberlain in front of a large crowd in Plymouth that he should not try and stand in Gladstone’s way.<sup>179</sup> Three weeks later, Davitt was speaking in Gladstone’s favour to a crowd of Irishmen in Glasgow.<sup>180</sup> Moody wrote that Gladstone’s attempt to get a Home Rule Bill through Parliament in 1886 had convinced Davitt of his integrity, and that Davitt thereafter ‘regarded the Liberal party as entitled to generous support.’<sup>181</sup> The passing by the Tories of the ‘Ashbourne Act’ – denounced by Davitt as a ‘Landlord Relief Bill’, had only strengthened his conviction that the Liberals alone could grant Home Rule and radical land reform.<sup>182</sup>

Since his major speech in Inverness in 1882, Davitt’s philosophy on land had remained essentially unchanged. He had toured zealously in the intervening years, spreading propaganda for land nationalisation and becoming ever more involved in trade unionism and the nascent labour movement with his old friends John Ferguson, Richard McGhee, and Edward McHugh. After the extension of the franchise in 1885, Davitt became even more aware of the potential strength of the working classes throughout Great Britain and Ireland. In a remarkably visionary speech in London’s Hyde Park on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1885, Davitt called for Universal suffrage, state ownership of mines, municipalisation of land, a maximum working day of eight hours, and the

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<sup>179</sup> *Oban Times*, 27 Mar. 1886

<sup>180</sup> *Home Rule: speeches of the Earl Spencer and the Right Hon. John Morley, MP, at Newcastle, April 21, and of Michael Davitt at Glasgow, April 20, 1886, in support of Mr. Gladstone’s home rule bill.* (Glasgow 1886), 23-31

<sup>181</sup> Moody, ‘Michael Davitt and the British Labour Movement’, 65; R. Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London 1995), 532, 547-555.

<sup>182</sup> Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 485; *Freeman’s Journal*, 18 Aug. 1885; TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9375, f.998, Davitt to MacGowan, 7 Jan 1889



abolition of the House of Lords, in addition to calling for Home Rule for Ireland.<sup>183</sup> Later that year, he renewed his acquaintance with Scotland when he campaigned in October on behalf of the SLRL in advance of that year's election.<sup>184</sup>

Davitt made a further visit to Scotland in advance of the 1886 General Election, speaking in Glasgow and Galashiels in order to promote the 'case of Ireland before the Scotch people.'<sup>185</sup> Again, many Highlanders and Scots were present at his speech, such as Angus Sutherland, John Murdoch, James Cherrie and J. Shaw Maxwell, as well as the Indian Nationalist Krishnalal Datta, and old friends Edward McHugh and Richard McGhee.<sup>186</sup> He made no reference to the crofters, leaving this aspect for John Murdoch to address, but rather to the general 'democracy' of Great Britain, and argued that Home Rule provide a firm base for all the other social reforms they desired. After taking part in many other Home Rule speeches prior to the General Election, Davitt spent the second part of 1886 in America.<sup>187</sup>

In the meantime, however, the case of the crofters, and the promotion of Irish Home Rule amongst the Highland community, was kept up with great enthusiasm by John Ferguson, the *Glasgow Observer*, and other Glasgow agitators. Thus, when he arrived back in Ireland, with his new wife, Mary, in January 1887, the Home Rule issue was unresolved, and the 'Plan of Campaign' was under way. Davitt had much to keep him occupied, but he was cheered by the progress that Irish propaganda had made in the minds of the British people.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 29 Jun 1885

<sup>184</sup> Moody, 'Michael Davitt and the British Labour Movement', 64

<sup>185</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 24 Apr. 1886. James Connolly later criticised Davitt's return to the national question. 'For the sake of harmony in the ranks', he wrote, 'he also supported and campaigned for a party – the Home Rule party – whose leaders were the bitterest enemies of the newly enfranchised workers of the Irish cities.' J. Connolly, 'Michael Davitt: A Text for a Revolutionary Lecture', in O. Dudley Edwards & B. Ransom (eds.) *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings* (London, 1973), 211. This text originally appeared in *The Harp*, Aug. 1908.

<sup>186</sup> For Davitt's relations with Indian Nationalism, see C. King, *Michael Davitt* (Dublin, 2000), 45

<sup>187</sup> His other speeches included London, Dublin, Llandudno, Barrow, Castleisland, Oxford, Kensington *Glasgow Observer*, 6 Feb. 1886, 13 Feb. 1886, 20 Feb. 1886, 5 Jun. 1886, 12 Jun. 1886, 3 Jul. 1886. *The Times*, 22 Feb. 1886, 17 Mar. 1886 He left to the States in July, see *Glasgow Observer*, 31 Jul. 1887; TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9547, 'Lecture Tour in the USA, Aug. 1886 – Jan. 1887'.

<sup>188</sup> The *Glasgow Observer* celebrated the fact that 'Michael Davitt is again in his native land, and his presence bodes further trouble for Irish landlordism... the democracy of England, Scotland and Wales were on their side, and the vast majority of American born Irish were staunch advocates of the Plan [of Campaign].' *Glasgow Observer*, 5 Feb. 1887

Davitt had kept quiet, at Parnell's behest, at the time of the Plan of Campaign, busying himself instead with improving the lot of the working man.<sup>189</sup> When he arrived in the Highlands in 1887, therefore, he had a wider range of issues to put before his audiences. The beginning of 1887 had been a particularly busy time for Davitt, being involved both in his crusade for land nationalisation and also in supporting Gladstone's Liberal Party in the push for Irish Home Rule. He had already made two short visits to Scotland, addressing the Conference of the Scottish Liberal and Radical Associations in February on the subject of Home Rule, a meeting also attended by John McPherson, the 'Glendale Martyr'.<sup>190</sup> Although Davitt did not discuss the crofters in his speech at the Edinburgh Literary Institute – instead defending the Plan of Campaign as 'preferable... to the plan of the blunderbuss and the revolver' – he did repeat calls to the 'democracy' of Scotland to support the Irish people. The *Glasgow Observer* noted that 'Scotchmen are finding [Davitt] is not only a man of great ability but also of great moderation, and that they can listen to no more worthy instruction on the Irish Question.'<sup>191</sup>

The attempt to further relations between Scotland and Ireland was not only one of Davitt's ambitions, it was policy of the Irish National League to 'impregnate the Scottish mind with Irish ideas'.<sup>192</sup> The vital importance of succeeding in this matter was underpinned by a belief that a further general election was imminent.<sup>193</sup>

After speaking in Edinburgh, Davitt went to London for a conference with Parnell, and headed for a couple of weeks on the continent.<sup>194</sup> His next activity in Scotland, a month after his Edinburgh speech, was a mini-tour of the Clyde area, intended initially to promote unity between the workers of Britain and Ireland. Plans were put in place for Davitt to speak to the miners of Lanarkshire and the Highlanders of Glasgow, but events in Ireland forced a change of plan.<sup>195</sup> Davitt's set-piece St.

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<sup>189</sup> King, *Michael Davitt*, 49

<sup>190</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9612 f8–8v; *Freeman's Journal*, 8 Feb. 1887; *Scottish Leader*, 9 Feb. 1887; He kept in touch, via Ferguson, with Edinburgh's Irish community, and it was at this time that he was taken to visit the then home of Hibernian F.C., Hibernian Park, and laid a sod of shamrock-bedecked turf on the centre spot. J. Lugton, *The Making of Hibernian* (Edinburgh 1995), 103

<sup>191</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 12 Feb. 1887

<sup>192</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 19 Feb. 1887

<sup>193</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 26 Mar. 1887

<sup>194</sup> *The Times*, 4 Mar. 1887

<sup>195</sup> The *Glasgow Observer* noted that 'Mr. Small, miners' representative, states that arrangements are being made with Mr. Michael Davitt to address several meetings of miners in Lanarkshire. The fire,

Patrick's Day address in Glasgow detailed the history of English oppression in Ireland, although he added that

If the condition of things were not what they were in Ireland at the present time, it would be a pleasant duty to devote my remarks this evening to the crofter question, but I have to content myself with stating that this triumph in Ireland over landlordism and Castle Rule would herald a victory for the crofters of Scotland and the artisans of Great Britain.

Thanks for Michael Davitt at this meeting were proposed by his close friend and colleague Richard McGhee, and seconded by the ubiquitous Edward McHugh.<sup>196</sup> In donating the proceeds of the event to the 'Crofters' Fund' – a fund overseen by John Ferguson, Angus Sutherland and David McLardy – some of the loss of publicity was counterbalanced. The opportunity for Highland issues to be aired was also given to Rev. J.M. Cruikshank, who was announced as 'the crofters' friend', and received such a vociferous welcome that the *Freeman's Journal* wrote that the cheers might have been for 'some trusted Irish soggarth standing on a Munster hillside...' Cruikshank, the long time friend of Angus Sutherland, spoke equally passionately on Irish and Highland matters:

It was their duty to help the crofters of Scotland, and the struggling democrats of every part of Great Britain when they were fighting the same enemy as they were contending in Ireland... They were not only fighting the battle of the Irish against landlordism and Castle Rule, but they were fighting the cause of true democracy, for the labourers, artisans and mechanics of the three countries.<sup>197</sup>

Indeed, in spite of the lack of substance to Davitt's speech relating to the Highlands, John Ferguson and the *Irish World* were able to give the crofters' struggle great publicity in Irish America.<sup>198</sup> In the days following this meeting, Davitt continued up

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spirit, and enthusiasm of Mr. Davitt, adds Mr. Small, will create a revolution in Scotland such as has never been seen before. We understand that Mr. Davitt proposes delivering a lecture on St. Patrick's Night in the City Hall, Glasgow. The proceeds of the meeting will be devoted to the Highland Crofters' Fund, and the meeting in all probability will be held under the auspices of the Glasgow Home Government Branch of the Irish National League of Great Britain.' *Glasgow Observer*, 26 Feb. 1887

<sup>196</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 26 Mar. 1887

<sup>197</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 26 Mar. 1887; *Freeman's Journal*, 22 Mar. 1887

<sup>198</sup> *Irish World*, 2 Apr. 1887. The report ran as follows: THE CROFTERS MARCHING ON: From John Ferguson, of Glasgow, a gentleman whose services in the Irish cause are well known and well appreciated, we have news of big work being done in Scotland... On March 21 the City Hall in Glasgow... was crowded by a mass multitude who came to listen to a lecture by Davitt, the proceeds of

the Clyde coast, addressing Liberal audiences in Helensburgh and Dumbarton, with a pro-Home Rule and strongly anti-Joseph Chamberlain message.<sup>199</sup> As if to underline the point of Davitt's speeches, the *Highland News* celebrated the fact that 'old prejudices against the Irish had totally disappeared.'<sup>200</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* reiterated the support shown by Scots for the Irishman, describing the Helensburgh gathering as being 'almost exclusively of Scotchmen'. In spite of the speech being entirely taken up with condemning the Tories, Chamberlain and Coercion, 'the reception accorded to the distinguished Irishman was of the heartiest description. The whole town seemed to join in honouring him, and the return train was delayed for his convenience.'<sup>201</sup>

If there was any disappointment at the omission of Highland issues from Davitt's speeches, it would be tempered by the fact that, less than a month later, he would find the time to visit the Highlands and see the condition of the crofters in person. The tour was seemingly arranged jointly with Angus Sutherland and John Macleod of Gartimore, the Sutherlandshire Association exerting a great influence on Davitt's choice of venues on the tour. It was the Sutherlandshire Association which, upon hearing of the prospective tour of Joseph Chamberlain had, at a meeting in Dornoch, decided to invite Michael Davitt north.<sup>202</sup> It is almost certain that Davitt had met Sutherland at one of his many Glasgow meetings, and the connection with John Murdoch and John Ferguson meant that there were many people on hand, if necessary, to convince Davitt to accompany Sutherland around the region.

Most of the Scottish newspapers heralded the arrival of Michael Davitt in one way or another – delight or disdain. The *North British Daily Mail* ran the following piece:

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which are to be devoted to the Crofters' Fund... We need hardly say that we are in hearty sympathy with the crofters and that we shall continue to give the movement all the aid in our power. We hope that their kindred on this side of the Ocean who, we are glad to observe, are now beginning to bestir themselves will follow the good example of the Irish American Celts and lend a helping hand in the good work of making it possible for industrious Scotchmen to live and enjoy the fruits of their labour in their own native land.

<sup>199</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9612 f.13v., f.14; *Helensburgh and Gareloch Times*, 30 Mar. 1887; *Dumbarton Herald*, 30 Mar. 1887

<sup>200</sup> *Highland News*, 26 Mar. 1887

<sup>201</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Mar. 1887

<sup>202</sup> *Scottish Leader*, 23 Apr. 1887

There is much interest being manifested in the visit of Mr. Davitt to the North of Scotland by the crofters and land reformers. No-one is held in greater respect by the men of the Highlands than is the great Irish patriot. He has always been regarded as a man whose sympathies were not by any means exclusively confined to the wrongs of his own countrymen, causes which operate equally in Scotland to the disadvantage of the people... Mr. Davitt arrived in Glasgow yesterday evening, and was met by a number of the crofter representatives, who gave him a very cordial greeting on alighting from the train at Central Station.<sup>203</sup>

Upon meeting these representatives, it transpired that even up until a few days previously Davitt himself had not known anything of the plans, all having been arranged by Sutherland, Gartimore and local bodies. With resolutions pouring in, and invitations to address over 30 groups, Davitt had to limit his appearances to ten meetings because of his time restrictions.

He did, however, express a wish to bring the Celts of Ireland and Scotland closer together, and therefore be able to work together in throwing off the 'yoke of landlordism'. His chief stated object in visiting was to 'place the case of Ireland before the Scottish people of those parts, and to inquire into the social condition of the crofters, the character of their organisation, and to confer with them as to the best methods of securing justice not to Ireland alone, but Scotland also.' The Irish press, however, was clear that Davitt was in Scotland to deliver a series of speeches to the crofters in reply to Joseph Chamberlain.<sup>204</sup>

The years covered by this chapter, 1885-1887, saw many of the trends outlined in preceding chapters continue. Although most of the Irish involvement in the crofting agitation had, as has been indicated, come from 'internationalist' radicals, Irish MPs were now quite happy to associate themselves with the Highland land question. In their quest for allies over the Home Rule issue, both Gladstonian Liberal and Irish Nationalists appeared throughout Scotland in subsequent years. The radicals

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<sup>203</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9612, f.14v.; *North British Daily Mail*, 23 Apr. 1887

<sup>204</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Apr. 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 30 Apr. 1887



themselves were far from united at this point, but were becoming increasingly confident in an urban context.<sup>205</sup>

Thus, the implicit point that – amongst the Glasgow radicals – the crofting agitation was part of a much broader programme of social reform in the British Isles, became increasingly explicit. In this regard, the rumoured plan being concocted by the Glasgow Single Taxers – men such as John Ferguson and David McLardy – to bolster Angus Sutherland’s position in the Highlands, takes on added significance. With the cities providing increasing opportunities for the Single Taxers, it is not fair to suggest they abandoned the Highlands. The Highlands had provided an excellent opportunity to incubate radical land reform ideas, but the SLRL in particular never hid the fact that they considered the land question a universal one, not one confined to rural Ireland or Scotland. With a trusted ally such as Angus Sutherland now ensconced as MP for a large Highland constituency, and with urban matters taking the attention of Ferguson and McHugh, it is not surprising that they hope to radicalise the Highlands from a distance, through Sutherland and Gartimore.<sup>206</sup>

This chapter has also shown that, especially during the 1885-1886 election campaigns, long time tensions between Highland land reformers were developing into open conflict. With the added divisions over the Irish question, and indeed the growing demand for Scottish Home Rule, this would deteriorate still further before the time of the next election, in 1892. Having gained some degree of redress through the 1886 Crofters’ Holdings Act, the moderate reformers could see little point in continuing the agitation, and became ever more convinced that men such as Angus Sutherland were simply furthering personal ambition by keeping the land issue alive.

Michael Davitt’s tour to the Highlands can partly be seen as countering Chamberlain’s similar visit in relation to Irish Home Rule, and partly as a promotion of land nationalisation. Davitt, as was seen in chapter 4, was keen to prevent Scotland settling, as Ireland had done, for mere tinkering with the land laws. The 1886

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<sup>205</sup> For the various socialist and radical groups active in urban Scotland in 1884-1887, including the Social Democratic Federation, Scottish Land Restoration League and Socialist League, see Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics*, 110-114

<sup>206</sup> See below, 334, for the long term influence of Gartimore and the *Highland News* on Georgite ideas in the Highlands.

Crofters' Act, if accepted without amendment, would have meant that more radical solutions of Davitt, Ferguson and McHugh would again be thwarted. Above all, however, the visit of the 'Father of the Land League' to the Highlands and Islands in 1887 can be seen in the context of Angus Sutherland's continuing efforts to create a solid radical block in the region, centred around the county which he now represented in Parliament.

## CHAPTER SIX: LAND AND IRISH HOME RULE POLITICS IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS, 1887-1894:

We conceive of him as an unselfish idealist, who in his enthusiasm for a cause gave his name and services freely at the beck and call of men who despised his ideals and would willingly, but for their need of him, have hung himself as high as Haman.<sup>1</sup>

James Connolly, 1908

This chapter will examine the political support given by the Highland crofters, especially of Sutherlandshire, for Irish Home Rule after 1887.<sup>2</sup> It will start by examining the tours made of the region by Joseph Chamberlain, Michael Davitt and Angus Sutherland in 1887, and discuss why the Highlands was considered such an important area for these men. As will be seen, the influence of Angus Sutherland, rather than Davitt, pervaded the tour, and Sutherland certainly made best use of Davitt's 'unselfish idealism'. This is not to suggest that Sutherland 'despised Davitt's ideals', but there is no evidence to suggest that the Irish Parliamentary Party sanctioned the visit. Davitt relied solely on Sutherland and his assistant, John Macleod of Gartiemore, to arrange the meetings. The remarkable uniformity shown at Davitt's meetings in the Highlands, in terms of general format, resolutions passed or banners displayed, testify to the degree of success the Sutherlandshire Association had achieved in its quest for organisation.

Subsequently, this chapter will go on to examine Angus Sutherland's political activity, including visits to Ireland in support of Home Rule and the role of the Sutherlandshire Association in Highland politics. What will become clear is that the attempts made over the years to politicise and organise the Sutherlandshire crofters became increasingly refined. It is also apparent that, although agitation on exclusively Highland issues remained important under the new Tory / Unionist administration, especially relating to land and emigration schemes, Angus Sutherland saw the Home Rule issue as a way of underpinning his support in Sutherlandshire. By extension, it

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<sup>1</sup> J. Connolly, 'Michael Davitt: A Text for a Revolutionary Lecture', in O. Dudley Edwards & B. Ransom (eds.), *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings* (London, 1973), 210. Haman (Aman) was an oppressor of the Jews, and was eventually hanged on a gibbet fifty cubits high. (Esther, 7:10)

<sup>2</sup> Although Skye has long been considered the centre of the land agitation in Scotland, it was Sutherlandshire which, owing mainly to Sutherland and Gartiemore's efforts, had the best organised body of crofters. The fact that it was an entire county, whereas Skye was a part of Inverness-shire, also makes it a more logical unit for study.

will also be shown both that members of the Sutherlandshire Association did not feel limited to discussing the land question, and also that leading Irish and Gladstonian Liberal politicians did not consider the Highlands a place apart, but an integral part of British political life.

The final part of this chapter will examine the later lives of Edward McHugh and Angus Sutherland. Although McHugh's involvement with Trades Unionism has received attention from historians – in more depth than his activity in the Highlands – it has not been linked explicitly with his presence on Skye. And yet, the brief examination of McHugh's later career will reinforce the impression that all his work in relation to the Highlanders was part of a lifelong commitment to Henry George and his ideals. Angus Sutherland's later career has also received little recognition, although it was generally for his role with the Fishery Board for Scotland, rather than as a 'Crofter MP', that he was remembered at the time of his death. Although Sutherland's radicalism had certainly been tempered by the mid 1890s, his career development was not as Hunter and MacPhail have suggested.

### **'Wet Nurse to the Tory Party' – Joseph Chamberlain in the Highlands**

The most obvious reason for the timing of Davitt's trip to the Highlands was to counter, or at least rival for column inches, the similar tour made by Joseph Chamberlain at the same time.<sup>3</sup> The importance of the counter-attack was heightened by the possibility of an imminent general election. Chamberlain had visited the

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<sup>3</sup> The *Northern Chronicle* believed strongly that the Davitt tour was purely an attempt to discredit Joseph Chamberlain. It wrote that 'the people who failed to induce the Highland crofters to ostracise Mr. Chamberlain resorted to a desperate sort of consolation in asking Mr. Michael Davitt and his showman, Angus Sutherland, to come North, with his Irish-American oratory and Henry Georgism. The founder of the league, "whose footsteps were fatally dogged by crime", the excusing friend of Ford... is, if we are to believe noisy fisher lads and professional spectators in Highland discontent, a fit guide, philosopher, and friend for the hitherto moral, loyal, and Godly children of the Gael...' *Northern Chronicle*, 4 May 1887. A correspondent for the *Scottish Highlander* also gave the opinion that Davitt's visit had 'the object of checkmating Mr. Chamberlain's move, which is not looked upon as in the best interests of the crofters or in the cause of land reform.' *Scottish Highlander*, 14 Apr. 1887. The *Freeman's Journal* stated that it 'never had any fear of Mr. Chamberlain's pro-Unionist visit to Scotland, but if we had entertained any doubt on the point it should necessarily have been expelled by the circumstances of Mr. Davitt's brilliantly successful tour over the same ground.' It further explained the Scottish support for Home Rule was now irreversibly strong, and praised the Scottish people for their determination in the face of 'relentless propaganda' from the *Scotsman* and *Glasgow Herald*. [Davitt] has found the population aglow with an ardent desire to aid their friends in Ireland in their agrarian and political movement, and it is apparent that another General Election, no matter how soon it comes, will show that, so far as Scotland is concerned, the spread of the Home Rule idea has been swift and far-reaching.' *Freeman's Journal*, 2 May 1887

crofting regions on the back of his 1885 election pledge of 'Three Acres and a Cow', a plan that would have seen large estates broken into smallholdings. He was accompanied by his friend and fellow radical Liberal Unionist Jesse Collings.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Chamberlain had become well known as a radical but had been forced from the political mainstream after splitting the Liberal Party over Home Rule. This also led, in spite of prior support, to his being reviled by supporters of Irish Home Rule. The *Highland News*, one of the most vociferous supporters of the measure in Scotland, argued that 'however bright and promising and full of hope Mr. Chamberlain's earlier days were, yet of late his career has been one of disappointment.'<sup>5</sup> The *Irish World* was even stronger in its language, calling Chamberlain a 'disgusting hypocrite'.<sup>6</sup>

Davitt believed that Chamberlain's strong anti-Home Rule stance had been engendered by a personal attack on him in Parnell's *United Ireland* newspaper. Parnell had decided that Gladstone would be a more useful ally than Chamberlain in a possible leadership contest, and therefore was happy to ruin Chamberlain's proposed visit to Ireland.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, John Ferguson believed that Chamberlain would have been a more useful ally than Parnell in his land reform campaign, and had tried to retain his sympathy. He stated that,

I have read with shame and anger the insulting narrow fanatical article of *United Ireland* against you. Ireland won't endorse it. Davitt will answer it wisely. I begin to fear a lot of those young fellows... now desire to keep up strife and are afraid you will become a power in

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<sup>4</sup> Collings was a Birmingham businessman and a prominent local politician who had been elected as a Radical Liberal MP for Ipswich from 1880 (unseated on petition), and Liberal Unionist for Birmingham Bordesley in 1886. He had supported smallholders in England and was also, for a time, Vice-President of the HLLRA. Hunter stresses that this role was 'virtually honorary', but there is otherwise little reason to question Collings' sincerity in supporting the crofters' cause. His importance to Chamberlain is clear, for he was at once a popular figure amongst the crofters and an advocate of Unionism regarding the Irish question., D.E. Meek (ed.), *Tuath Is Tighearna: Tenants and Landlords, An Anthology of Gaelic Poetry of Political and Social Protest from the Clearances to the Land Agitation (1800-1890)*, (Edinburgh, 1995), 320; J. Hunter, 'The Politics of Highland land reform, 1873-1895', *Scottish Historical Review*, liii (1974), 51.

<sup>5</sup> *Highland News*, 19 Mar. 1887

<sup>6</sup> *Irish World*, 2 Apr. 1887

<sup>7</sup> Parnell's biographer F.S.L. Lyons attributed Chamberlain's Unionism to the contempt with which he was treated by the Irish leader at this time, and having been forced to call off the planned visit. F.S.L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977), 289



Ireland as well as England. Be just and fear not and you will beat them.<sup>8</sup>

The thought of Joseph Chamberlain touring the Western Highlands and Islands on behalf of the Liberal Unionist cause would have created unrest in the minds of both Michael Davitt and Angus Sutherland. Sutherland in particular – his organisation of the Sutherlandshire Association increasingly based on support for both land reform and Home Rule – had reason to feel wary.<sup>9</sup> Davitt would have been worried by the effect any Unionist politician would have on the nascent working class movement he had helped to nurture, as he had always equated the Unionist party as being the ‘landlord party’.<sup>10</sup> Although a letter from ‘Boreas’ in Ross-shire reassured people that Chamberlain would ‘make no political capital’ in the Highlands, Chamberlain received, at worst, a cordial reception in the region.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ferguson even hoped that support from Chamberlain would ‘puncture this windbag of intimidation’ – Parnell – when the nationalists were opposing George and the radicals in 1885. University of Birmingham Library, Joseph Chamberlain Papers, JC8/6/3G/2 Ferguson to Chamberlain 29 Jun 1885. I am indebted to Dr. Ewen A. Cameron for this reference. Even H.M. Hyndman, the prominent socialist, referred to Chamberlain in glowing terms in 1885. He claimed that ‘Joseph Chamberlain, in particular, has done so well for us that we know that it only rests with us to say when, if we think it worth our while, we shall gather him into the fold of the true social and political faith’. See H.M. Hyndman, ‘The Radicals and Socialism’, *Nineteenth Century*, Nov. 1885, 835. Many years later, Michael Davitt told Chamberlain that ‘most of your admirers in Ireland (of which I counted myself as one) considered you to be the one English statesman from whom Home Rule, or its equivalent, might reasonably be expected to come... the unprovoked and unjustifiable attack which was made upon you at the time in *United Ireland* and against which I protested as grossly unfair has, rightly or wrongly, been seen as possibly the reason... why you were so strongly opposed to Home Rule so shortly afterwards.’ Chamberlain, however, denied this, claiming that his vision of ‘Home Rule’ was something akin to local government, not involving anything along the lines of separate parliament and that it was Gladstone, not himself, who had shifted position. TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9374/ 983 – 987, Davitt to Chamberlain, 6 Aug. 1903; Chamberlain to Davitt, 8 Aug. 1903. Ferguson’s early faith in Chamberlain’s behaviour being an aberration was on display in April 1886. He claimed at a speech in Glasgow that ‘a good man, who had gone wrong at this juncture, but whom he believed that they would be cheering again before very long, was Joseph Chamberlain’. *Glasgow Observer*, 24 Apr. 1886

<sup>9</sup> Upon his resignation from the cabinet over the Home Rule issue, Chamberlain claimed that although he may have been well known as a radical, he had always had the best interests of the Empire as a whole at heart. He stated that ‘I have cared for the honour and the influence and the integrity of the Empire, and it is because I believe these things are now in danger that I have felt myself called upon to make the greatest sacrifice any public man can be expected to make.’ *Hansard*, 9 Apr. 1886, col. 1183. For Joseph Chamberlain’s resignation letters to Gladstone, see C.H.D. Howard (ed.), *Joseph Chamberlain: A Political Memoir, 1880-1892* (London, 1953), 194

<sup>10</sup> Chamberlain expressed that it was his desire for the Glendale crofters to ‘lead a constitutional reform, as they had led the agitation, now that a franchise had been extended. They should draw up practical measures as if they were a parliament for the island.’ *Inverness Courier*, 29 Apr. 1887

<sup>11</sup> The *Freeman’s Journal*, for example, reported that ‘Mr Chamberlain, continuing his progress through the Highlands, spoke at Stornoway on Saturday. He has no reason to complain of the reception he has met. It would have been very easy for the Gladstonian Liberals, from their preponderating strength in the district, to make things extremely warm for the leader of the Liberal Unionists had they so chosen. They took a wholly different attitude.’ *Scottish Leader*, 21 Apr. 1887; *Freeman’s Journal*, 25 Apr. 1887

As a Liberal Unionist, Chamberlain had become associated with the Conservative party, and indeed at the beginning of his Scottish tour, in Ayr, he supported the new coercive measures introduced by the Tories. He stated that 'it was an abuse of language to call that coercion which was merely strengthening the law to punish evil-doers and protect the innocent.'<sup>12</sup> This led to some protests as he went on his way, mainly from Irish Nationalists or supporters of Gladstone. The *Times* reported that an effigy of Chamberlain was carted through Edinburgh and burnt at an Irish demonstration on Calton Hill, on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April.<sup>13</sup> As he headed north he was given a hostile reception by Gladstonians, notably at Forres, where the indignant *Northern Chronicle* correspondent noted that:

The behaviour of the more illiterate of the assemblage was nothing less than insulting, but the Rt. Hon. Gentleman appeared to be in no manner affected except by a quiet amusement.<sup>14</sup>

The Tory press also reported that even Chamberlain's life was in danger, and he had to be accompanied through the Highlands with a personal detective. This was not, the *Chronicle* assured its readers, to be seen as an insult to the crofters, rather to those who would 'lead them astray.'<sup>15</sup> In spite of the demonstration and alleged threats, there were no serious demonstrations once Chamberlain reached Inverness, barring an

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<sup>12</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 20 Apr. 1887. Chamberlain's itinerary for April 1887 was as follows: Ayr (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>); Edinburgh (15<sup>th</sup>); Inverness (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>); Dingwall (18<sup>th</sup>); Strome (19<sup>th</sup>); Lewis, including trips to Bayble, but staying in Stornoway (20<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>); Skye, including trips to Glendale and Kilmuir, but staying in Portree (25<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>); Pitlochry (30<sup>th</sup>).

<sup>13</sup> *The Times*, 16 Apr. 1887. The effigy consisted of a full-length figure of a statesman wearing a tall hat and supplied with an eyeglass. On the front of the hat was ticketed 'Joseph and his coat of many colours'... on the right arm was written 'nothing like coercion' and on several boards stuck on poles were the words 'would be successor to the grand old man', 'Welcome, renegade, welcome', and 'Traitor to the Liberal cause.'

<sup>14</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 20 Apr. 1887

<sup>15</sup> The correspondent bemoaned the fact that 'our crofter members are, with the exception of Mr. Fraser Mackintosh, folded in the coils of the Irish anaconda, but the Highland crofters retain the native courtesy of their race... they would think it an insult on themselves if any Irish blackguard came north to waylay or insult Mr. Chamberlain. It would seem that the Edinburgh police authorities had information which caused them to telegraph to Inverness, advising that Mr. Chamberlain should be well looked after, and that he should not be allowed to go about alone at night. We are sure that he can go about alone among Highlands with perfect safety by night or by day. The telegram can, therefore, only refer to Irish ruffianism, which is capable of anything, as the "watch for yourself" threat at Ayr indicated'. Chamberlain thought himself to have been 'extremely well received although threats had previously been used by the Gladstonians of opposition and even violence if we ventured into the country.' See Howard, *Political Memoir*, 270; *Northern Chronicle*, 20 Apr. 1887

attempted 'ostracism' at Dingwall.<sup>16</sup> The *Chronicle* was delighted to state that the crofters had received him well, even though 'he was tearing to pieces many of the fallacies which the agitators had taught them.'

Because the whole visit to the Highlands and Islands had very little influence on government policy, it has been hard to discern the reasons for Chamberlain making the strenuous journey. Garvin claimed that it 'meant a good deal to him at the time', but the rather vague explanation given for going in the first place was 'to fight in a Radical style for his old friends the crofters and to and to inspirit Liberal Unionism.'<sup>17</sup> Certainly, Chamberlain claimed to have had representations from every corner of the crofting region, and stressed again and again – in a somewhat defensive manner – that he had not come north for the sake of his health, and that if he was not welcome he could just go home. Following a mass meeting of crofters at Stornoway on 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1886, Chamberlain received a telegram requesting whatever assistance he could give them to 'secure reasonable requirements'.<sup>18</sup> In February 1887, he received a HLLRA deputation in London, and had a long conversation with John MacPherson of Glendale.<sup>19</sup> It is clear by his defensive stance that Chamberlain knew the sympathy the crofters had with the Irish, especially as he had to make clear that holding a Unionist position on the Irish issue did not disqualify him from speaking with authority on behalf of the crofters.

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<sup>16</sup> *Scottish Leader*, 22 Apr. 1887

<sup>17</sup> J.L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (2 Vols. London, 1932), ii, 307. Chamberlain himself, in thanking Sheriff Ivory for sending an account of the Skye expedition, said that 'I heard a good deal about the expedition in Skye but did not pay much attention to this matter as my special object was not to inquire into the administration of the law, but rather as to the amendments to the Crofters' Act which experience may have proved to be desirable'. NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/50, 10 May 1887, Chamberlain to Ivory.

<sup>18</sup> Alex Morison, of the Lewis Land League, also wired Chamberlain at this time to assure him of continued support. *Highland News*, 29 Dec. 1886

<sup>19</sup> For an interesting account of MacPherson's trip, see *Glasgow Observer*, 12 Feb. 1887. Since then, Chamberlain told a conference of fishermen and crofters at Dingwall, 'I have received resolutions from Dingwall, Strome, Wester Ross, Gareloch, Stranraer, Lewis, Harris, Barra, Skye and Islay, and in the circumstances I thought I had no alternative but to come. I had not the least desire to force myself upon you or to undertake extra work... Within the last few weeks or months I have seen signs of a hostile movement... there were some indications that many of the crofters had been persuaded that I was not really their friend, and had been encouraged to turn the cold shoulder to me. It has been said that I have come to serve my own political ends...' *The Times*, 19 Apr. 1887; *Northern Chronicle*, 20 Apr. 1887; *The Times* referred to 'Western Ross' and 'Isle'.

Away from the platform, Chamberlain did spend a great deal of time in the company of the crofters, examining their agricultural methods and hearing their grievances.<sup>20</sup> On Lewis, Chamberlain braved foul weather to visit Bayble and Shawbost, where he heard the usual grievances of lack of land and high rents. Several crofters also complained of lack of harbour facilities and poor communications, and it is on these issues that they appear to have put their faith in Chamberlain. As an agitator, Michael Davitt was able to use fiery rhetoric and pass any kind of resolution. As a leading politician, albeit an isolated one at this stage, Chamberlain was seen as a man who could directly influence events, in spite of his repeated exhortations not to exaggerate his power.

Whilst visiting the crofting townships, Chamberlain spoke little of the Irish question, although he did warn the crofters not to follow the example of the lawless Irish tenants. His set-piece speeches, however, were a different matter. The highlight of his Highland tour was an address to the Stornoway Liberal Association, on Sat. 23<sup>rd</sup> April, attended by over 1,200 people. Murdo Macleod, the chairman, introduced their distinguished guest by stating that he 'had come to the Highlands to get at the root of the crofter question, which had been agitating the whole kingdom for years.'<sup>21</sup>

His speech at Stornoway Drill Hall encapsulated all the main themes he had set out during his visit to the region, in tackling the land issue, the Home Rule issue, and warning the crofters that their agitation would be all the better for staying within the law. In a direct contrast to the Irish smallholders, he claimed the crofting agitation had the sympathy of the whole kingdom.

In addressing the land issue, Chamberlain spent a long time setting out the problems facing the community, and the benefits they had already gained through the Crofters Holdings Act, before offering any solutions. It is interesting that he upheld the idea of crofters having 'traditional rights', in spite of admitting the dubious nature of such

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<sup>20</sup> When he reached Glendale, he met up again with the 'martyr', John MacPherson, and in Uig he came face to face with John Macleod, who delighted in using the sobriquet 'Gladstone', Chamberlain's nemesis. *Scottish Leader*, 27 Apr. 1887, 28 Apr. 1887; For an interview with 'Gladstone' relating to the visit, see *Scottish Leader*, 3 May. 1887

<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 25 Apr. 1887; *Scottish Leader*, 23 Apr. 1887; Chamberlain wrote that 'we met the crofters in small meetings... and heard from them a statement of their grievances. At Stornoway, Inverness and Dingwall at the request of the local people, I addressed meetings on the Irish questions.' Howard, *Political Memoir*, 270



claims from a legal viewpoint.<sup>22</sup> He also referred to the redistribution of deer forests and sheep-walks, but it was a further three months before he came up with any concrete proposals, a widely publicised ‘Crofters and Cottars Migration and Relief Bill’. It was met with indifference in the crofting community, and with hostility from Liberals who may have supported his ideas but were not yet ready to forgive the author.<sup>23</sup>

The majority of the Stornoway speech, however, was given over to defending Chamberlain’s stance over Home Rule. He expounded his own theory of ‘Home Rule All Round’, in effect an increased form of local government which would have left Imperial power with Westminster but would have devolved local issues to regional assemblies.<sup>24</sup> Ireland would get an assembly not only in Dublin, but also Belfast. To the delight of his audience he assured them that ‘it would be wise to have an assembly meeting at, say, Inverness’, because ‘the Northern part of the Kingdom has conditions so different, and even a population whose traditions and habits are so different, from the southern portion of Scotland.’<sup>25</sup>

In spite of claiming that he had always been a ‘Home-Ruler’, it is this issue and his support for ‘Bloody Balfour’ and the Coercion Bill which caused the greatest

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<sup>22</sup> In an argument reminiscent of Henry George, Chamberlain stated that ‘...there are moral rights – equitable rights – which are equally entitled to respect, and that these rights exist in the case of these men is, to my mind, absolutely indisputable’. He accepted that until more land was given over to the crofters, there could be no peace or entertainment in the region, and went on to say that he believed ‘land is the gift of the Almighty, which is to be treated in every case as a trust, and not as the absolute possession of private owners and I believe that that trust must be considered to be unfulfilled as long as the land does not provide subsistence for the greatest possible number of human beings who are able to derive a comfortable existence from it’.

<sup>23</sup> Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, ii, 308; MacPhail, *Crofters’ War*, 181. See also Howard, *Political Memoir*, 270: ‘These proposals were printed; a copy is in the Chamberlain Papers, it is headed: “Private – Crofters and Cottars Migration and Relief Bill”. The Bill was to schedule the counties of Argyll, Caithness, Ross and Cromarty and Sutherland. A Crofters’ Commission was to be set up, with power to declare areas in the scheduled counties “Congested Districts”. Any crofter or cottar in a congested district might apply to the Commission for a new holding, which the Commission might assign to him if satisfied as to his ability to pay a fair rent and to stock and cultivate the land. Tenants were to pay a rent of 4% of the value of the holding for 49 years, and would then become owners of the land, paying thereafter an annual tax of ¼ of the rent. The Commission was to have powers of compulsory land purchase; disagreements with owners as to a fair price were to be settled by arbitration. The treasury was to issue £1,000,000 to the Commission for the purchase of land, at 3 ½ % interest. The principal was to be repaid over a period of 49 years’.

<sup>24</sup> For details of Chamberlain’s 1885 Central Board Scheme, see ‘Memorandum by Joseph Chamberlain, 25 Apr. 1885’, in C.D.G. Howard, ‘Documents Relating to the Irish Central Board scheme, 1884-5’, in *Irish Historical Studies* viii, no. 31 (1953), 255-7

<sup>25</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 27 Apr. 1887



opposition amongst the more radical crofters' leaders. He was politely greeted by the crofters themselves, but before he had even left Stornoway he had been attacked by the MP for Ross-shire, Dr. Roderick Macdonald, and Davitt and Angus Sutherland had already launched a counter offensive.

The purpose, therefore, of Chamberlain's visit was multi-faceted. His expressed desire was to improve the lot of the toiling crofter and to lead them into a constitutional agitation. Furthermore, he seems to have been genuinely concerned that the Highlands was becoming too influenced by Irish politics.<sup>26</sup>

It is open to debate just how much Chamberlain attempted to win the crofting community over to Unionism. The chairman of the Shawbost / Arnol / Uig Land League on Lewis, John Macmillan, stated that he was delighted such an important man should visit the crofters, and added that 'Mr. Chamberlain never spoke to a single crofter in Lewis about the Unionist doctrine, nor about another member of parliament, nor even about Home Rule'.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the Irish Home Rule issue had become a prominent one in the Highlands, and had been exercising the minds of many Highland Land League members. The *Oban Times*, for example, in an April editorial, stated that 'some people of very narrow vision cannot understand why Highlanders should sympathise with the painful struggle of Irishmen for freedom from caste-tyranny'.<sup>28</sup>

### **Attacks on Chamberlain by Davitt and Sutherland**

It is itself surprising that an *Inverness Courier* correspondent wrote that the people were 'surprised to see Mr. Sutherland stomping around the country' with Michael Davitt.<sup>29</sup> Not only would Angus Sutherland have railed against Chamberlain's unionist philosophy, and fully supported the boost Davitt could give to the anti-

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<sup>26</sup> MacPhail writes that 'In a letter, dated 8<sup>th</sup> May 1887, to Cameron of Lochiel, Chamberlain himself said that the situation was potentially dangerous unless appropriate measures were taken. He feared that at any moment there could be a rent strike in and a repetition of what happened in Ireland.' I.M.M. MacPhail, *The Crofters' War* (Stornoway, 1989), 181; Chamberlain did continue to take an interest in the crofters' situation. See Howard, *Political Memoir*, 281, 284, 297

<sup>27</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887

<sup>28</sup> *Oban Times*, 2 Apr. 1887

<sup>29</sup> Glasgow Irishmen and Highlanders, perhaps least of all, would have thought this remarkable, and indeed he was introduced in the *Glasgow Observer* as a 'zealous land reformer and lover of liberty'. *Inverness Courier*, 10 May 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 30 Apr. 1887

landlord movement in the Highlands, he had a very personal reason to counter Chamberlain and his followers. Reports in both the *Aberdeen Free Press* – a prominent Liberal paper – and the *Mail* indicated that Chamberlain was determined that his own nominees should fight the seats currently held by Dr. Clark (Caithness), Dr. MacDonald (Ross-shire) and Angus Sutherland (Sutherlandshire), at his own expense.<sup>30</sup> In spite of the tour's hectic schedule, Sutherland also took the opportunity to visit constituents when heavy rain prevented Davitt from undertaking any fact finding in Golspie.<sup>31</sup> Sutherland has been presented simply as one of Davitt's aides on this tour. In fact, along with the Sutherlandshire Association, it seems he was the chief architect of the whole event, and that it was partly to boost his personal standing in the Highlands.<sup>32</sup>

The idea that the visit of Chamberlain and Collings was in some way a prompt for at least the timing of Michael Davitt's return to the Scottish Highlands is given more strength by the very nature of speeches made by Davitt and his supporters. Having travelled from Glasgow on the 5 a.m. train he arrived at Wick on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> April, and began to speak almost immediately about Chamberlain. He regretted, he told the onlooking crowd, that 'he couldn't promise to use his influence with the Tory government on their behalf', unlike 'that other distinguished and consistent radical in the North.'<sup>33</sup> Davitt wanted to fix the images of the Tory and landlord interest along with Chamberlain in the minds of the crofters.

That the attack by Davitt and Sutherland on Chamberlain was not a part of official Parnellite or Gladstonian strategy, and more a personal idea of Angus Sutherland, was emphasised by Roderick Macdonald. Chamberlain complained that he had 'no doubt that every effort was made by the Irish Party and their allies to prejudice me with the crofters.' Macdonald countered by saying that 'you are mistaken that the Irish Party...

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<sup>30</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 14 May 1887

<sup>31</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 27 Apr. 1887

<sup>32</sup> The first area to send an invitation to Davitt was Dornoch, and the village's Land League stated that 'This meeting of the Dornoch Branch of the Sutherlandshire Association do cordially invite Mr. Michael Davitt to the Highlands. That we are strongly of the opinion that his visit would be of a greater benefit to the inhabitants than the prospective visit of Mr Chamberlain' It is also notable that Davitt's time on Skye, the only place which fell outside of Angus Sutherland's direct sphere of influence, was organised by J.G. Mackay, Sutherland's long-time radical ally, and early member of the Irish Land League in Glasgow. *Oban Times*, 16 Apr. 1887

<sup>33</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887

have in any way troubled themselves to interfere with your progress in the north. Mr. Sutherland got Michael Davitt to accompany him there, but I am not aware that the Irish Party, as a party, had anything whatever to do with Mr. Davitt's tour.'<sup>34</sup>

Continuing the anti-Chamberlain sentiment could hardly be avoided when an effigy of him was hanged from one corner of the platform at Helmsdale, along with the legend 'wet nurse to the Tory party.'<sup>35</sup> Adding to this mockery of his rival, Davitt opened his Helmsdale speech by stating that Mr. Chamberlain's recent doings could well be illustrated by 'three pins and a thimble'.<sup>36</sup> Referring to another policy to Chamberlain, that of regional councils rather than Home Rule, Davitt dismissed it as typical of 'England's perfidious policy – to divide and conquer. If Scotland and Ireland became split up into rival parts, it would be an easy matter for Brummagem statesmen, Tory landlords and London soapboilers to stamp out our natural rights as men, and stamp out the national aspirations of Scotland and Ireland...' <sup>37</sup>

This strong rhetoric against Chamberlain and Collings was repeated throughout Davitt's tour, referring to the pair as 'Sancho Panza and the Coercionist Knight of the Screwful Countenance.'<sup>38</sup> The *Glasgow Observer*, mocking Chamberlain's alleged refusal to engage Davitt in face-to-face debate, used more extreme language, stating that 'at Mr. Davitt's approach, Joseph evaporated from the Highlands as we are told his Satanic Majesty vanishes at the sprinkling of holy water.'<sup>39</sup> Indeed, even in the absence of Davitt and Sutherland, Chamberlain faced verbal assault. A young Helmsdale fisherman, Mr. Sutherland, repeatedly harangued Chamberlain when he tried to speak in Dingwall. Whether or not he was an official delegate of the

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<sup>34</sup> *Highland News*, 28 May 1887

<sup>35</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 29 Apr. 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 30 Apr. 1887; *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887

<sup>36</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887

<sup>37</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887

<sup>38</sup> *Invergordon Times*, 28 Apr. 1887; *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887

<sup>39</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 7 May 1887; *The Freeman's Journal* was one of the newspapers which had noted an incident which took place on Davitt's way to Skye: 'Mr. Davitt and his friends had been pushing on in order to get to Skye before Mr. Chamberlain left, so that they might have an opportunity to meet their accuser face to face. There was great curiosity to see how the political Highland tour had affected Mr. Chamberlain's health, and appearance, as rumour had it that the gentleman had in his tour adopted a familiar ruse resorted to by political canvassers in this mountain part by appearing in Highland costume. But nothing could be seen but Mr. Collings, MP, wrapped in a rug, stretched at full length on the seat of a first class carriage, and trying to look happy, but with indifferent success. Mr. Chamberlain was invisible, the railway buildings apparently having swallowed him.' *Freeman's Journal*, 3 May 1887

Sutherlandshire Association, Sutherland insisted that ‘the fishermen of Helmsdale accepted only William Ewart Gladstone as their political leader.’<sup>40</sup>

Upon reaching Skye, the assault on Chamberlain continued. Whilst some reports suggested that Chamberlain had been quite well received on the island, the fact that he had kept the company of Alexander MacDonald, the ‘Uncrowned King of Skye’ and Factor of Lord MacDonald, gave radicals an opportunity to accuse him of being in league with the landed interest.<sup>41</sup> The *Oban Times* attempted to assess the mood:

This last week has seen how frigidly cold and how demonstrably warm the people of Skye can be... when the Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain landed at Portree last Monday afternoon, public feeling was somewhere below zero. When Michael Davitt stepped ashore last night, feeling raged between blood heat and boiling point.<sup>42</sup>

Those crofters with whom Chamberlain talked seem to have been genuinely pleased that such an important figure should travel so far to enquire about their circumstances, and the people of Lewis seemed to regard the visit of such an important personality, whether Liberal Unionist or Home Ruler, as reason enough for celebration. Nevertheless, radicals in the Highlands, through the medium of the consistently supportive *Highland News*, continued to bait Chamberlain for his heresy until his death in 1914.<sup>43</sup>

Angus Sutherland also attempted to undermine anything achieved by Chamberlain when he told the Portree audience that:

It was exceedingly comical to read Mr. Chamberlain’s views on matters affecting the crofters and the Highland people, especially

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<sup>40</sup> *John O’Groat Journal*, 27 Apr. 1887

<sup>41</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 29 Apr. 1887

<sup>42</sup> *Oban Times*, 7 May 1887

<sup>43</sup> *Highland News*, 10 Aug. 1889 carried a cartoon featuring several caricatures of Chamberlain in various costumes, representing his disparate political stances over the years. *Highland News*, 4 Jul. 1914 contained reminiscences of Chamberlain’s 1887 tour. With Home Rule again a big issue, *Highland News*, 22 Jan. 1910 contained a selection of Chamberlain’s assorted assertions on Home Rule from 1874-1883, highlighting his inconsistency. A poem in 1903 from ‘Worker’ ran: ‘Rally, Lib’rals take your stand, ‘Gainst this quibbler, Slippery Joe, Ere he and his ruthless hand, Lay Britannia’s prestige low./ Once in Inverness he talked, And he told you of a cow. And three acres, but he’s walked, To the other benches now./ Once he gained the workers’ vote, Said he was a Radical. Now he’s changed his “Bloomin’ Coat”, And he’s Tory – what a fall!’ *Highland News*, 11 Jul. 1903.

when taken in connection with the views of those with whom the Rt. Hon. Gentleman associated during his Highland tour.<sup>44</sup>

Whilst there are several clear personal reasons for Davitt's attacks on Chamberlain, such as the Home Rule issue and support for Gladstone or also Angus Sutherland, it is hard to claim that their economic theories were different enough to cause major ructions. As much as Davitt may have resented Chamberlain's views on emigration and the 'Three Acres and a Cow' philosophy, and even if the promises Chamberlain made to the crofters came to nothing, it must be seen that Chamberlain's insistence on the God given right of the land for the people was not very far from Davitt's own beliefs. A perfect illustration of this appears in the *Scottish Highlander*, which gleefully grasped the opportunity to ridicule one of its main opponents in Inverness.<sup>45</sup>

It may be said, therefore, that if Davitt's tour was scheduled specifically to 'checkmate' Chamberlain's, it must have been for reasons other than just their differences on the land question, certainly when the number of personal attacks are borne in mind. It is necessary to examine, therefore, how and why Davitt and Sutherland used the tour of 1887 to spread propaganda in support of Gladstone and Home Rule.

### **'On Skye, nothing grows but rent'. The Land Question and Home Rule**

Upon his return to the Highlands in 1887, the question of the 'Land for the People' was still uppermost in Davitt's mind, even though the political onus was on Home Rule. The *Scottish Highlander* reported that Davitt gave the advice to stick to the principle of the 'Land for the People' with the tenacity of 'religious conviction'. He said that there was, after all, plenty of land around them:

One man in Sutherlandshire (and he an idler) owned one million three hundred thousand acres. There were no more than about three thousand crofter families within the county... the land of the county

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<sup>44</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887

<sup>45</sup> It ran a piece entitled 'The *Chronicle* Demented' claiming that 'Mr Davitt had a lot to answer for. His visit to the Highlands has driven the poor *Chronicle* completely demented. True, this was not difficult to do. Mr. Chamberlain, when the Highland landlord wind-instrument had at first so graciously patronised and patted on the back, has already trampled severely on his most tender corn... Mr. Chamberlain, during his recent raid, without asking the *Chronicle's* permission, said that "the land was the gift of the Almighty", and "was to be treated in every case as a trust and not as the absolute property of the owner"... It is quite evident that if Mr. Chamberlain is a true political economist, then so is Mr. Davitt, and all the Land Leagues in the Kingdom.' *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887



divided among its crofter people, would give holdings of more than four hundred acres to each family, and yet Mr. Chamberlain in his new born Tory and landlord zeal could preach with unblushing effrontery their exterminating doctrine of emigration as a solution for the crofter difficulty.

The land nationalisation and anti-emigration theme remained prominent throughout the visit, sometimes presented, as above, in terms specific to the locality involved, and sometimes in more general terms.<sup>46</sup> The great detail into which Davitt went on his addresses to the Kilmuir crofters was, he explicitly stated to them, for the benefit of the general public and not to teach anything new to them. He knew that many of the details of his speech, and thus what he saw as specific instances of landlord tyranny, would find their way into the press.

Davitt brought to the minds of the Kilmuir crofters a time when Skye was a net producer of produce, and asked how much was exported now. 'Nothing', was the general reply. This did not surprise the speaker at all, as he explained what he had observed in the boat which had brought him to Skye:

I noticed that potatoes, meal and hay were the cargo on board, and upon pointing this out to Mr. Angus Sutherland he simply pointed out that on Skye, nothing grew but rent – (laughter, and cries of 'true') – and that as a necessary consequence food had to be imported from the mainland.<sup>47</sup>

Davitt again expounded Georgite principles of land nationalisation, and indeed Angus Sutherland boasted at Dingwall of the how the Highlanders kept 'the bible and

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<sup>46</sup> At Bonar Bridge, for example, he reported the findings of a 'scientific English agriculturist of great eminence', who asserted that 'if the land of England was cultivated with the same labour, skill, enterprise and capital which are expended upon the soil of the little island of Jersey in the English channel, England would not only grow enough food to feed all her population, but as much as would supply the wants of many more. Yet more than one hundred million pounds worth of food has to be brought into Great Britain every year from abroad to supply the insufficient production of the land of England, Scotland and Wales...' *Scottish Leader*, 28 Apr. 1887; *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887

<sup>47</sup> He continued: 'No matter what industrial interest or economic standpoint we view this monstrous system in its operations, we see it as leaving its offspring, poverty and misery, in its trail. The tacksmen who have replaced the crofters on the best land give no labour. The sheep which feed where happy homesteads once stood require no groceries from your merchants, nor furniture from your mechanics. Not only do dealers and artisans suffer in this way through the invasion of sheep, but the tacksmen in whose interest they are allowed to usurp the land of the people are allowed to import their luxuries from cities in the mainland. There again the merchant community suffer through the drainage of rent from the island, whereas, if the people had the land instead of the landlords and the sheep, the money got in exchange for produced would be spent on the island.'

*Progress and Poverty* in close proximity on their bookshelf.<sup>48</sup> The Highland Land League's stance on the subject, like that of the Irish, was never so concrete. Davitt's personal wish for nationalisation runs throughout his speeches in 1887, even taking precedence over the vital, and intrinsically linked, Irish Home Rule issue.<sup>49</sup> His desire, as he expressed to the Invergordon crofters, was for the 'Straths and glens and mountains to re-echo to the slogan "Land for the People"'.<sup>50</sup>

Support for Gladstone was certainly in evidence at all the meetings addressed by Davitt and Angus Sutherland, in April and May 1887. In the introduction to Davitt's first speech in Wick, John Dunnet, President of the Workman's Union, moved a resolution both condemning the Tory Coercion Bill as unjust, and also declaring it 'to be the duty of every citizen to rally round Mr. Gladstone's efforts to secure justice for Ireland.'<sup>51</sup> Inevitably, the resolution was carried amidst great cheers.

Similarly in Helmsdale, Angus Sutherland presided over resolutions of confidence in Gladstone and in favour of Home Rule for Ireland, condemnatory of the Coercion Bill, and that copies be forwarded to Parnell, Gladstone and the Marquis of Salisbury, the Tory Prime Minister. Again, this was 'unanimously and heartily agreed to.' These meetings set the tone for the rest of Davitt's time in the Highlands, because thereafter every speech he gave: in Dornoch, Bonar Bridge, Invergordon, Dingwall, Strome, Uig and Portree, was prefaced by a resolution in support of Gladstone, hoping that he would return to power and 'give justice to Ireland' in the shape of Home Rule. Furthermore, the meetings were often ended with three cheers for the Liberal leader, and three moans for Chamberlain. As Home Rule was one of the main planks in his politicisation of the Sutherlandshire Association, Angus Sutherland could feel satisfied at the progress he and Gartimore had made.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887; The *Chronicle* also mocked the lack of a united strategy on the land issue among Highland reformers, revealing that Sutherland still held to the policies of the SLRL. It wrote that 'Michael Davitt and his showman advocate nationalisation of the land. They give themselves wide speculative scope, like wise professionals whose profitable vocation consists in keeping up perpetual discontent and always being Adullamite leaders. But do the applauding crofters and fisher lads know what nationalisation of the land means? Mr. George does not understand all it means himself.' *Northern Chronicle*, 4 May 1887

<sup>49</sup> D.W. Crowley, 'The "Crofters' Party", 1885-1892', *Scottish Historical Review*, xxxv (1956), 113

<sup>50</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887

<sup>51</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887

<sup>52</sup> That they were already preaching to a largely converted population can be seen again by examining some of the resolutions proposed by HLLRA branches. In Dornoch, for example, the draper W.S. Fraser, and merchant J. Sutherland, proposed that the people 'are of the opinion that the Irish people

The crofting community as represented at the meetings with Davitt showed a great deal of political sophistication and knowledge on the Irish question. Angus Sutherland was well received in Helmsdale when he quoted statistics showing the great diminution of agrarian crime in Ireland under the Gladstone administration.<sup>53</sup> Crofter opinion had come a long way since Davitt had last visited, in 1882, as is shown by the way Sutherland was able to present the Irish issue in the confident knowledge he would be cheered.

Davitt extolled the benefits of conciliation over coercion in Irish affairs. At Invergordon, for example, he received great cheers for declaring that the 'Irish people would meet the eighty-seventh Coercionist Bill with redoubled courage and determination, knowing as they did that it would be the last before Home Rule was won.'<sup>54</sup> At this meeting he also touched upon the various reasons which had been brought up against the concession of Home Rule, asking rhetorically if landlords had made Ireland more prosperous than it had been, and the Irish more loyal to law and order. He also found insulting the suggestion that Irish Home Rule would lead to the persecution of the Protestant minority in Ireland.

Upon his arrival in Portree on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April, Davitt's hotel was besieged by a large crowd, which refused to disperse until he had addressed them. Although not scheduled to speak in Portree until the following Tuesday, he gave an impromptu speech in which he straight away thanked the crowd for its enthusiastic welcome, and attacking Chamberlain he stated that he was 'glad to know that recent distinguished visitors to your island have not succeeded in convincing you that the people of Ireland are wrong in their struggle for Home Rule'.<sup>55</sup>

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will never have justice until they possess the right of settling their own local matters under a much needed Home Rule constitution.' The Bonar Bridge resolution, read by Robert Calder of Creich Sutherlandshire Association, was even more emphatic. It stated that 'we take this opportunity of declaring before the world our intention of standing by our Irish brethren despite all efforts of interested parties to the contrary and we resent as an insult to our intelligence all attempts to show that our interests are not identical to theirs. We also resent as an insult to the high morality of our race the attempts that are being made to bribe the people of the Highlands to desert their kith and kin in Ireland...'

<sup>53</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887

<sup>54</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887; *Inverness Courier*, 29 Apr. 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 7 May 1887

<sup>55</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887

The main meeting Davitt was to attend in Portree was supposed to have held in the public school, but the crowd was too large and it was decided to give an open-air address. He reiterated his concerns that the Liberal Unionists were attempting to break down the perceived solidarity between Highland and Irish Gael by spreading rumours and innuendoes.<sup>56</sup> In asking the Highlanders that Home Rule be ‘granted’, Davitt showed that it was very important to him that the crofters support Irish Home Rule, which was consistent with his desire to unite the working classes. What is also clear from the entire tour, again given its most clear expression in Portree, is that there was a great affinity with the Irish among many of the crofters.

### **‘A bright day for the sea-divided Gael...’ Irish and Scottish Unity in 1887**

Although it generally stressed the Home Rule aspect of Davitt’s tour, the *Dublin Freeman’s Journal* acknowledged that the presence of the Irish agitator in Scotland could be mutually beneficial. Quoting from the *North British Daily Mail*, it wrote that:

His visit would in some degree tend to bring more closely together the Celts of Scotland and Ireland, and by this means enable them to take common action in the work of throwing off the yoke of landlordism... Whatever may be the result of Mr. Davitt’s speeches in the Highlands, we can be sure they will quicken the land agitation amongst the crofters, and will place before them a calm and straightforward statement of Home Rule.<sup>57</sup>

It is also apparent in the resolutions passed at the meetings that the local Highland Land League branches were in favour of uniting the Irish land and national question with their own concerns. Robert Calder’s address on behalf of the Creich Highland Land League gave a strong statement in favour of the Irish and Highlanders working together: ‘We know full well that the Highlanders and Irishmen, as well as the

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<sup>56</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887

<sup>57</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 25 Apr. 1887. Many symbolic manifestations of fraternity between the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland are apparent when examining Michael Davitt’s 1887 visit. Indeed, the patterns tend to be so similar as to suggest that his welcomes were orchestrated. Banners expressing pan-Celtic sentiments were very much in evidence, such as ‘Home Rule for Ireland and Scotland’ (Helmsdale), ‘United We Stand, Divided We Fall’ (Bonar Bridge) and ‘The Union of Irish and Scottish Gaels in the Cause of Humanity’ (Invergordon). Upon Davitt’s arrival in a given township, he was usually serenaded by a piper playing nationalist airs. At Dornoch, for example, a piper played ‘The Heather and the Shamrock’ outside Davitt’s hotel window. Along with other banners expressing Highland support for the Irish, and against coercive government measures, were gestures such as G. Macleod of Kincardine presenting Davitt with a Strathnaver plaid on his visit to Bonar Bridge, on behalf of the men of Ross and Sutherland. Sutherland had been a similar plaid when he visited the town as part of his 1885 election campaign. See *John O’Groat Journal*, 27 May 1885

democracies everywhere, have one common foe, and whoever is the friend and ally of that common foe in Ireland cannot be its enemy in Scotland.’<sup>58</sup> The same speaker immediately preceded Davitt’s speech with another resolution expressing ‘most cordial sympathy with our abused and insulted brethren in Ireland’. Similarly, the crofter’s representatives at Skye welcomed Davitt, the ‘martyr patriot of Ireland’ as a ‘harbinger of a bright day for the sea divided Gael’, before resolving that ‘we deeply sympathise with our long suffering and much enduring brethren in Ireland.’ Davitt’s address to the crofters of Kilmuir at Uig was prefaced by John Murdoch, who unsurprisingly announced that they were glad to be in the presence of a man ‘whose services to Ireland and All Celts will never be forgotten.’<sup>59</sup>

The most emphatic statement of Celtic unity was given by Rev. Donald MacCallum of Waternish, the chairman of the large meeting at Portree on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Four resolutions relating to the agitation in Ireland and Scotland were passed by popular acclamation.<sup>60</sup> In Davitt’s Strome address he admitted that in considering ‘how all these blessings of nature are denied to the people through an inhuman landlordism, I have felt more strongly than ever the link of sympathy which binds me to the Celtic race of these Highlands.’<sup>61</sup>

His gratitude for the ‘warm Highland welcome’ Davitt expressed at every meeting, usually on behalf of the whole Irish nation. He told his audience at Wick that the hearty support received from the North of Scotland would drive on the land reformers and Home Rulers back in Ireland, as well as promising the ‘generous and unstinting support of eighty-six Irish representatives for any measure that might be introduced in parliament for their [the crofters’] condition.’<sup>62</sup> At Bonar Bridge he backed this up, by hoping that the ‘Celts of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales would soon succeed in completing the overthrow of landlordism.’ He also asked the same audience to

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<sup>58</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 7 May 1887

<sup>59</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887

<sup>60</sup> The first and third resolutions read as follows: ‘That this meeting of Skyemen accords its hearty welcome to Michael Davitt, the Irish patriot, and taken his visit to Skye as a happy augury of the Union and co-operation of the Gael of Ireland and Scotland in working those reforms so needful for the social welfare of both...That it has become quite apparent that no satisfactory settlement of the land question can be obtained either in Ireland, Scotland or Wales so long as governed by English ideas in an English parliament; that this meeting declares that the time had now arrived when these nations should be duly constituted Parliaments sitting in Dublin, Edinburgh and Wales...’

<sup>61</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887

<sup>62</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887



consider 'who had been their staunch friends in the House of Commons in the past, the Irish leaders or the landlord party to which Messrs. Chamberlain and Collings were now attached.'<sup>63</sup>

Davitt's ad lib speech upon his arrival in Portree demonstrated the propaganda value of stressing bonds between the two communities. From his balcony he thanked the people for their welcome and added that:

I have never believed for a moment that the people of this island, or any part of the Highlands of Scotland, could be convinced by any amount of sophistry that the Irish cause was not a cause deserving of the sympathy of the Scottish people. (Cheers) In many respects we are not only identical in race, but in political and social aspirations as well...<sup>64</sup>

Although historians have noted the celebratory and pro-Irish tone of some of the Highland press, it has not been appreciated that there was also satisfaction on the part of the Irish newspapers.<sup>65</sup> The importance which the Irish placed on winning Scottish support for Home Rule has been noted above, and the reception Davitt received in the Highlands was a great encouragement to them. Although it suggested that Davitt was not, perhaps, a great success as an Irish nationalist, the *Glasgow Observer* admitted that 'as a land reformer', he is among the best in the world. He has, furthermore, been made captive to the idea that the democracy of Great Britain can do wonderful things for his own country.'<sup>66</sup> A more positive report, in the same issue, hailed Davitt's aim of 'blending the Celt of Ireland with the Celt of Scotland' as a complete success.<sup>67</sup> Both the *Glasgow Observer* and the *Scottish Leader* ran an interview in which Davitt expressed both satisfaction with his tour and affection for Scotland and its people.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The sporadic references to the crofters made by Irish members in the House of Commons thus had a propaganda value greater than any real influence they possessed. *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887

<sup>64</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May, 1887

<sup>65</sup> J. Hunter, 'The Gaelic connection: the Highlands, Ireland and nationalism, 1873-1922', *Scottish Historical Review*, liv (1975), 187

<sup>66</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 7 May 1887

<sup>67</sup> It wrote that 'they will send a thrill of joy through the hearts of the scattered children of the Celt. One in blood and tradition, in music, customs and language, the Irish Celt and the Highland Celt are also one in suffering. Indeed, to read of Mr. Davitt's journey through the north, one would imagine he was travelling through some portion of Ireland, through some part of Connemara, let us say, or somewhere in the neighbourhood of Killarney, with its beautiful lakes and majestic scenery, in the County of Kerry. Only change the names and the descriptions are the same... Indeed, in many instances, evictions in the Highlands have been, if possible, even more ruthless than in Ireland.'

<sup>68</sup> *Scottish Leader*, 9 May 1887; *Glasgow Observer*, 14 May 1887

Contradicting Alexander Mackenzie's claims of 1884, Davitt believed that whilst conditions between the Hebrides and the west of Ireland were very similar, the mainland crofters were better off than the Irish. Stressing the urgency of land reform and the ineffectual nature of Joseph Chamberlain's visit, Davitt concluded that 'the Highlanders and the Hibernians are pretty nearly in the same hole in more ways than one.' The interviewer employed a similar turn of phrase, suggesting that 'closely responsive the shamrock and the heather have always been and Mr. Davitt's visit will tighten the bond of union.'

Similarly, Irish-America, through the pages of the *Irish World*, celebrated the fact that Davitt's 'recent tour of the Scottish Highlands was everywhere received with an enthusiasm that could not be excelled even in his own county of Mayo.'<sup>69</sup> In Dublin, the *Freeman's Journal* also trumpeted the success of Davitt's trip, and told of how the crofters 'were aglow with an ardent desire to aid their friends in Ireland in their agrarian and political movement.'<sup>70</sup> Even in Mayo, members of the Irish National League were watching his progress around Scotland with interest. An address to Davitt from the county thanked him for awakening Ireland and Irish America to the agitation, but also remarked on:

the great accession of democratic sympathy which the Irish cause has gained in England and Wales is also largely traceable to your indefatigable exertions in these countries. We also allude with pleasure to your recent triumphant march through Scotland bearing aloft the 'fiery cross' of truth and justice, dispelling the clouds of prejudice, scaring and banishing the wolf of calumny and winning for Ireland the sterling support of the Highland crofters and of all foes of oppression...<sup>71</sup>

### **'Remember Gruinard, Glencalvie and Culrain'. Themes from Highland history**

Michael Davitt had the ability to draw in an audience through articulating their specific local concerns. Another manifestation of this was in his frequently looking back at the history of the area and appealing to the innate sense of injustice nurtured by perceived past wrongs. Helmsdale was a town largely created to house the tenants

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<sup>69</sup> *Irish World*, 14 May 1887

<sup>70</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 2 May 1887

<sup>71</sup> Straide, Co. Mayo, Michael Davitt Memorial Museum. F. Hannon to M. Davitt, 22 May 1887. (Facsimile).

displaced from Strath Kildonan by the Sutherland family and their estate managers such as James Loch and Patrick Sellar at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. Davitt's closest colleagues on the tour, Angus Sutherland and John Macleod of Gartimore, of course, had strong connections with the area. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Davitt should not only be well acquainted with this episode from Highland history, but also incorporate it into his speech. The *Freeman's Journal* in Ireland explained in some detail the history of the Sutherlandshire clearances, linking them to the contemporary agitation.<sup>72</sup>

Davitt evoked the Clearances at the very outset of the tour both to neutralise the influence of his main opponent, who he strongly identified as an ally of the landlords, and to let the audience know that he was familiar with their plight. In a passionate address he claimed that Joseph Chamberlain 'came to the North of Scotland as the chief supporter of the class which set fire to the cabins of [your] ancestors in the Strath of Kildonan.' This attack was met with loud cheers. At the close of this meeting, in Wick, Angus Sutherland strengthened the historical resonance by calling Caithness 'an asylum to many of the Sutherland evicted people.'<sup>73</sup>

The brief Lochinver visit showed that Davitt was familiar with more recent Highland history. The *Scottish Highlander* correspondent praised him on this occasion because of his sound acquaintance with 'local evictions and grievances... [having] studied the

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<sup>72</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9612 f.14v.; *Freeman's Journal* 26 Apr. 1887. Neither are religious aspects in Davitt's speeches difficult to find. In Dingwall he evoked the 'Saviour of Mankind', who 'shielded a sinner by asking those who had not sinned to cast the first stone at the penitent Magdalene.' It is on Skye, however, that the most obvious religious imagery appears. He argued at the Uig meeting that 'God helps those who help themselves'. Emerging at his window in Skye during his first few hours in Portree, and noticing banners which included 'The Earth He Created for the Children of Men', he thanked the crowd for their warm welcome before going on to extol the virtues of land nationalisation – 'the doctrine of the Creator' – over modern economic theories. *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May, 12 May 1887; *Oban Times*, 14 May 1887

<sup>73</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887. Some of the banners seen during the tour confirmed to Davitt that the Clearances still rested at the forefront of the Highland psyche – 'Men of Kincardine, Remember Gruinard, Glencalvie, and Culrain', read one such banner at Bonar Bridge. He was applauded and cheered during his brief visit to Lochinver, where he praised the women of Knockan and Elphin for defending their children against eviction, and said that if he had been a poet he would have commemorated them in verse. Other local issues dealt with in Caithness and Sutherland included the statistic that the Sutherland estate charged a crofter twice as much per acre of land than a sheep farmer, and the provision of a harbour at Helmsdale. The latter, Davitt stated, could be provided without recourse to Government grants if the town's land was taxed to its proper value. *Glasgow Observer*, 30 Apr. 1887; *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887

evidence given in Assynt before the Royal Commission'.<sup>74</sup> The same newspaper had also reported how Angus Sutherland had kept Davitt informed on local issues as they travelled between their various stopping points by train.<sup>75</sup>

Upon reaching Skye, Davitt showed detailed knowledge of the various townships and rents of the Kilmuir estate of William Fraser, much of which was based on the Royal Commission report. Sheriff William Ivory of Inverness, who was quite possibly the most notorious and reviled figure among the Skye crofters, was also well known to Davitt. It was Ivory who received the most severe verbal assaults in the speeches Davitt made on the island. In his main speech in Portree, Davitt continued to mock Ivory and his military expedition to Skye mercilessly, reducing much of the crowd to uproarious laughter, and he was clearly up to date with events surrounding the Sheriff.<sup>76</sup>

#### **'A Lot of D--- Sneaks'. The final days of Davitt's tour**

Following Davitt's triumphant appearance in Portree, the final few days of this Highland tour seem to be shrouded in confusion, not to say chaos and controversy. He left Portree on the morning of Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May, sailing north on board the 'Clansman' up the Sound of Raasay, and then north-east past Loch Ewe and the Summer Isles as far as Lochinver. Here the steamer paused for a while, to unload its cargo, and Davitt, accompanied by Sutherland, Gartimore and John Murdoch, gave

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<sup>74</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887. This referred to the Napier Commission.

<sup>75</sup> In addition to the close company of Sutherland and Macleod of Gartimore, Davitt met with several other local leaders not only at the places he visited, but also en route. At Alness, for example, he was met by Mr. J. McG. Ross of Teanich, ex-President of the Ross and Cromarty HLLRA; Mr. Alexander Ross, secretary of the Alness branch, and many others. They all dined together that evening at Coul Cottage, discussing the local issues. Between Dingwall and Strome, Davitt and Sutherland were joined on the train by Bailie Macrae, secretary of the Ross and Cromarty HLLRA, and Roderick Mackenzie, a local branch secretary. The *Scottish Highlander* pointed out that 'Bailie Macrae's local knowledge proved a great advantage in pointing out the various points of interest along the railway route. The deer forests of Wyvis, Luichart, Achanalt, Strathconon, Achnasheen, Achnashellach and Attadale were all passed. The deer forest of Strathconon, the property of Mr. Arthur Balfour, Chief Secretary for Ireland, was ruthlessly cleared to make way for the antlered monarch of the glen.' *Scottish Highlander*, 5 May 1887; *Freeman's Journal*, 3 May 1887. The company of so many men with intimate knowledge of the Highland land issue gave Davitt a real insight into the details of the area, and following the above portion of the trip, he admitted to his audience at Strome that 'In travelling down the lovely glens from here to Dingwall, I could not help feeling the blood boil within me when hearing of how people have been cleared away to make room for sheep, or hunting ground for sportsmen.' *Scottish Leader*, 2 May 1887

<sup>76</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887; MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 198.

an address on the land issue to the assembled crofters.<sup>77</sup> At this stage, Davitt was still expected to be in Oban on Friday afternoon (6<sup>th</sup> May), before heading to Greenock and then to Dublin on Saturday to fulfil important engagements in Ireland.<sup>78</sup>

The Oban meeting, however, did not take place – at least not on this trip. The *Oban Times* had something of a premature celebration of Davitt's achievements, and the general mood of the Highlands and Islands, in anticipation of his address to the people of the town.<sup>79</sup> As it was, the 'Clansman' sailed from Lochinchard to Stornoway, where it halted for a while, and arrived in Oban too late on Friday night for a meeting to take place.

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<sup>77</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887; *Oban Times*, 14 May 1887: The crofters of the district had been notified of this visit only on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, when Davitt was in Portree, and with such short notice and the fact that many were busy with Spring work it seems that the turnout for the meeting was somewhat less impressive than those which had gone before. Nevertheless, the men were enthusiastically received by the crofters' representatives, with Angus Sutherland speaking about Ireland, Davitt speaking about the land, and John Murdoch about to give an address in Gaelic until the ship's bell rang to gather up its passengers. As the boat sailed away, they were loudly cheered.

<sup>78</sup> For a map of Davitt's route, see Appendix F. *Freeman's Journal*, 6 May 1887; TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9612, f.24: From Lochinver, Davitt's voyage becomes somewhat confusing, and the next we hear of him in the *Inverness Courier* and the *Scottish Highlander* comes from Stornoway, where the ship made a short stop. It would appear, however, that the 'Clansman' continued north up the coast from Lochinver, before cutting across the Minch and sailing down to Oban the next day. In the *Freeman's Journal* the next report was not from Stornoway, but Lochinchard, by Kinlochbervie. 'Mr. Davitt arrived here at 8 a.m. this morning en route for Oban, accompanied by Angus Sutherland, John Murdoch and Gartimore. On leaving Lochinver yesterday the steamer proceeded to Kyle Sku, the arms of the sea dividing Assynt from the Mackay Country.' The steamer dropped anchor four miles into Glencoul, where it stayed for the night, unloading a large quantity of building material for the Duke of Sutherland's latest deer forest. The *Freeman's Journal* was not reticent in publicising the crofters' battle against the landlords, stating that this deer forest would, within the next month, necessitate the eviction of eighteen families. It continued, 'early this morning the steamer left for Badcall; at this place Mr. Davitt had pointed out to him the various townships bordering on the sea coast and the island of Handa, from which twelve families were evicted by the Duke of Sutherland to enlarge his factor's sheep farm, The only visible produce of the district seems to be whelks... and a few dozen eggs.'

<sup>79</sup> *Oban Times*, 14 May 1887. The report ran enthusiastically: 'MR. DAVITT AMONG THE GAELS. Irishman and Scotchmen may at last congratulate themselves on having overcome the fierce and brutal prejudices of the past. Mr. Davitt, one of ablest and most persistent of Erin's patriots, has received a welcome in the Highlands which augurs well for the future of the people's cause. The day of social freedom in the north west has at last dawned; and instead of only a few unprejudiced men a few years ago who would receive the Irish patriot in a worthy spirit there is now a whole people ready to accord him the most enthusiastic welcome as a fellow sufferer and pioneer in the cause of democracy. We are moving fast in these times; and it is pleasant to mark that the progress among the people is towards freedom, large heartedness and mutual toleration... [Davitt] is one of those enduring children of Eirinn in all ages who have sought out that "sacred shrine where rested in sunshine and in gloom the secret voice of freedom of suffering and the tomb"; and Albin's Gaels rejoice in his advent among them.'



The *Scottish Highlander* was indignant that no meetings were to be held in Inverness, Oban or Beaulay, and there is no doubt that Alexander MacKenzie blamed the ‘Helmsdale Gentlemen’ – Sutherland and Gartimore – for the shambolic end to Davitt’s tour.<sup>80</sup> This accusation was given strength by an unsavoury incident involving the party at Stornoway, where Davitt paused briefly but did not give any address. A Stornoway resident who had been travelling on the ‘Clansman’ claimed that the reason for Davitt’s silence was that Angus Sutherland had warned him ‘on no account, not even in a weak moment, consent to speak at Stornoway’, the reason being that ‘the Stornoway people are a lot of d--- sneaks’.<sup>81</sup> Although Sutherland denied these allegations, the furore created a lot of tension in the final days of the tour, and it is somewhat unusual that Davitt didn’t speak at all, when during the rest of his visit he would give an address at the slightest opportunity, such as when his boat put in at Lochinver or his train paused at Alness.

The other ‘Helmsdale Gentleman’, Gartimore, was also under fire at this time, mainly from a meeting of the crofters of Shawbost, Arnol (Point) and Uig on Lewis, on 11<sup>th</sup> May. Alexander Morison stated that he had received a telegram on 27<sup>th</sup> April, asking him to make arrangements for Davitt’s reception in Stornoway.<sup>82</sup> Morison replied to Gartimore that he was tired after his week with Joseph Chamberlain, and that it would be better to contact Malcolm Macleod, President of the local HLLRA. No reply ever came back, apart from when a Neil Macauley wired Davitt to tell him a triumphant reception was assured for him. Davitt’s simple reply was ‘Cannot visit Stornoway this tour.’ In spite of apparent attempts to induce him to make a speech, Davitt flatly refused, leading to the party being booed and hissed when it left the quay.<sup>83</sup>

This is, therefore, an unusual episode in Davitt’s relationship with the crofters of the Highlands and Islands. The difficulties arise in trying to explain not only why he would not give an impromptu speech when arriving in Stornoway, but also in

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<sup>80</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887. This is another sign of tension between the ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ axes. It is curious that Davitt should avoid Lewis, and that Chamberlain should avoid speaking anywhere where the Sutherlandshire Association was strong. Outside of Skye, Dingwall was the only place to witness speeches by both. The *Scottish Leader* had also indicated that there were plans for Davitt to speak in Beaulay and Inverness. *Scottish Leader*, 25 Apr. 1887.

<sup>81</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 10 May 1887

<sup>82</sup> Morison was secretary of the Lewis Land League.

<sup>83</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 10 May 1887

explaining why it was originally planned to go to Lewis, rather than speaking in Inverness or Oban, if there was never any intention of speaking in Stornoway. Even as late as April 30<sup>th</sup>, it had been announced that Davitt would, in fact, speak in the largest town in the Outer Hebrides.<sup>84</sup>

It was alleged at the time that there was a strong anti-Catholic and anti-Irish movement on Lewis. It is not in keeping with the rest of his career, however, that Davitt would shun speaking to a potentially volatile audience, and even the presence of Primrose Leaguers would not have deterred him, experienced as he was in delivering speeches in Portadown, Belfast, Coleraine, and Armagh.<sup>85</sup>

Lewis had apparently become the focus for a reaction against the increasing closeness between Ireland and the crofters. Even though there seemed to be a small minority of Lewis people, most prominently Alex Morison, who were politically Unionist, the publicity seems to have been out of proportion with their numerical strength. This did not stop a fair degree of paranoia creeping in to the minds of the most pro-Irish Crofter MPs, Sutherland and Clark, and the frequency of remarks aimed against Alexander Morison in Sutherland's newspaper – the *Highland News* – lend credence to the theory that he had said something against the inhabitants of the island. A letter from 'Lewisman' had given a Tory perspective on the reaction against Irish ideas on Lewis. Piqued at what he saw as an attack on himself and the whole land agitation, this was repudiated by John Murdoch, who had been 'organising' in the area for

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<sup>84</sup> *Highland News*, 30 Apr. 1887

<sup>85</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 May 1887; A letter on May 9<sup>th</sup> from 'Leodhasach' described how 'this island has been deluged of late with pamphlets on "Parnellism and Crime" and "Who Is Michael Davitt?" The Gaelic language has even been used by the Primrose League as a help... we have the Irish race painted black as the ace of spades, denounced as assassins, murderers, and dynamitards... who ought to be shunned by all classes of respectable people.' The Primrose League was a Tory organisation which had been founded in 1883-4, a body which had consciously imitated the structure of the Orange Order, and it appears that it had been appealing to Unionist sentiment among the Islanders in an attempt to subdue any threat to the Union. The Working Class Movement Library, Salford, contains a full run of these Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union pamphlets for 1887 and 1888. The point should also be borne in mind that in spite of some anti-Davitt activity taking place in Lewis, Neil Macauley's assertion that the Irishman would receive a 'triumphant reception' in Stornoway was not some hollow promise. The Lewis crofters, as stated by Alexander Morison, had given resolutions in favour of Irish Home Rule 'years ago... they were far in advance of those who howled the loudest at present.' Less than a year previously, during the 1886 General Election, the London Stornoway HLLRA stated that crofter should upon 'no account support any party opposed to the just demand of the Irish race for Home Rule.' Indeed, the letter from 'Leodhasach' ended with the forceful assertion that 'No human force can stem the torrent, and Home Rule will soon be won.'

several months.<sup>86</sup> It was also John Murdoch who gave the only defence against Angus Sutherland after the collapse of Davitt's tour.<sup>87</sup>

Murdoch laid the blame for the failure of Davitt to speak in Stornoway on Morison, who claimed that he was not only unwell, but that it would be inconsistent for him to arrange the visits of both Davitt and Chamberlain. Acerbically, Murdoch suggested that both Morison and Malcolm MacLeod, President of the Land League on Lewis, had 'passed under the mesmeric hand of the Birmingham manipulator', and that Davitt had, in reply to the reluctance to arrange a meeting, simply said, 'why, we are not wanted here', and refused to speak.

Although Davitt was sometimes oversensitive, for him sulkily to refuse to address a meeting which he might have thought would benefit from his teaching does not fit the image of the man. It is more likely that another character trait, what Henry George noted as impressionability, had come to the fore.<sup>88</sup> As with the affair over the 'Michael Davitt Branch' meeting in Glasgow in 1882, when he was duped into giving a speech in order to pay off the debts of the branch, he was manipulated by people – Sutherland and Gartimore in this case – eager to further their own position in a local situation.<sup>89</sup> Lewis was, of course, in the Ross-shire constituency, and the rumoured tension between the Ross-shire and Sutherlandshire Association may have further heightened Angus Sutherland's suspicion of the island.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Northern Chronicle*, 26 Jan. 1887; *Highland News*, 5 Mar. 1887

<sup>87</sup> J. Murdoch, 'Lewis in relation to Michael Davitt', *Highland News*, 21 May 1887. In reply to the allegations against Sutherland and Gartimore, Murdoch wrote that 'I was of the Davitt party from the time it sailed Northward from Strome to Skye, and Lochinchard, and back to Stornoway. I never heard a whisper which could afford the shadow of a foundation for the malignant libel on Messrs. Sutherland and MacLeod, and I have no hesitation in denouncing it as a miserable fabrication, to be accepted in no way as regards Lewis, but as the exception which proves the rule – one of the products the dragon's teeth strewn in the country during the Chamberlain tour. If anyone heard an injurious reflection on his town, surely the time to resent it was the moment of utterance.'

<sup>88</sup> T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), 552. James Connolly described Davitt as being somewhat naïve: 'Honest himself, he believed implicitly in the honesty of others, and became the tool of political crooks and social reactionaries.' Connolly, 'Michael Davitt: A Text for a Revolutionary Lecture', 211

<sup>89</sup> The MP for Ross-shire, Roderick Macdonald, informed Joseph Chamberlain that he was 'the only crofter member who did not throw cold water on your visit, nor publicly advise my constituents, like Dr. Clark and Mr Sutherland, to have nothing to do with you... If I had taken such steps in reference to your mission as were taken by Messrs. Clark and Sutherland, your reception in Ross-shire would have been very different...' *Highland News*, 25 May 1887; TCD Davitt Papers, TCD MS 9353, Sun. 29 Oct. 1882

<sup>90</sup> *Highland News*, 12 Feb. 1887. In spite of the closeness of G.B. Clark and Angus Sutherland in their radicalism at this stage there even seems to have been tension between these neighbouring MPs. G.B.

Sutherland saw Morison and the Primrose League on Lewis as a threat to his work in Sutherlandshire, and wanted to undermine him. Murdoch's explanation of the events suggests that he was, in some way, assisting Sutherland.<sup>91</sup> That some of the islanders were also concerned about the image others were getting of them, especially the Central Belt-based radicals and Irishmen, is indicated by the fact that a 'Native Correspondent' wrote about the situation to the *Scottish Leader*.<sup>92</sup> This correspondent claimed that, even though papers on the mainland had suggested that Lewis had endorsed Chamberlain's 'political heresy', nothing could have been further from the truth.

It seems, therefore, that it was Davitt's aides who prevented any speech in Stornoway, but the exact reasons for this remain unclear. The most likely scenario was that the Helmsdale men, aided by John Murdoch, sought to discredit Alexander Morison and other leading Lewis Land Leaguers by blaming them for denying the Stornoway people the chance to hear Davitt. What can be said is that despite the complaints of Alexander MacKenzie, Davitt did not consider the 'sailing expedition around the Western Isles' to be a total waste of time.<sup>93</sup> The fact that so much time was spent sailing up the west coast of Sutherlandshire, to Lochinver and Badcall, at the expense of more populous areas, also indicates that Angus Sutherland and Gartimore, the architects of the tour, believed that political capital could be made.

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Clark sent a note to be read out at Davitt's meeting in Wick but was not read out. *John O'Groat Journal*, 27 Apr. 1887

<sup>91</sup> 'After all this, with the subsequent delay added, Mr. Davitt would have had such a meeting in Lewis as he could not have had in any other country part outside an Irish circle; and I would have wired to Stornoway that he was coming, but for the perplexity caused by the "back hand" of the person who was in charge of the reception, as I thought, when I left Stornoway... I held from the fact that it was worse than a mistake to have anything to do with a recreant Radical and discredited politician like Mr. Chamberlain, no matter what his promises might have been... I have no doubt that Mr. Morison is convinced now that it was a mistake to have anything to do with Mr. Chamberlain.' *Highland News*, 21 May 1887

<sup>92</sup> *Scottish Leader*, 2 May 1887

<sup>93</sup> Although missing out on addressing large audiences in Inverness, Beaulieu and Oban, he did get to learn at first hand about some of the most remote communities in the West, virtually all the way up to Cape Wrath. For a man who seldom took time off from agitating, the beautiful weather made Davitt's time on board the 'Clansman' a most relaxing time. The *Freeman's Journal* reported that 'Mr. Davitt has enjoyed his sea trip immensely.' TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS6214 f.24; *Freeman's Journal*, 6 May 1887

### **Davitt's Return to Scotland, July 1887**

There had been a tangible sense of anti-climax in Oban after the inability of Davitt to conclude his Highland tour at the Drill Hall. Anticipation had been high, raised, for example, by 'Fionn' in the *Oban Times*.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, two weeks later, the same newspaper was pleased to announce that Michael Davitt's return to Scotland would be just as soon as he had finished his present tour of Ireland, probably in three to five weeks.<sup>95</sup>

It was just over seven weeks later that Davitt returned, on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July 1887, to address the people of Oban on 'the Irish Question'. Duncan Cameron was the chairman for the meeting.<sup>96</sup> Many of the themes touched upon by Davitt at Oban would have been familiar to any of his audience who had seen press coverage his speeches among the crofters in April and May. Those with whom he shared the platform prefaced this speech by backing both Irish Home Rule and also similar measures for Scotland, and Davitt himself stated that the main purpose of his visit was 'to do my best to convince the judgement of [Scotland's] people that Mr. Gladstone's policy is not only a just one, but from a British point of view a patriotic one to have.'

To this end, Davitt touched upon several issues involved with the 'Irish Question', such as Ireland's economic situation, the iniquity of Castle Rule and English Law in Ireland, the situation of Protestants and the ineffectual nature of Joseph Chamberlain's proposals for a measure of 'local government' in Ireland.

The major event in Davitt's life between leaving Oban in May and returning in July had been witnessing distressing scenes of eviction in Bodyke, Co. Clare, in June 1887.<sup>97</sup> Having been evicted as a boy from the family holding in Straide, seeing

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<sup>94</sup> *Oban Times*, 30 Apr. 1887. The connection between the Glasgow Home Government Branch and the crofters is exemplified in the accounts of the branch, read at a meeting in July 1887. Here, it was revealed, more money had been sent in the first half of 1887 to the crofters (£26) than to either the Bodyke Defence Fund (£5) or the executive of the Irish National League (£20). *Glasgow Observer*, 16 Jul. 1887

<sup>95</sup> *Oban Times*, 14 May 1887

<sup>96</sup> *Oban Times*, 9 Jul. 1887

<sup>97</sup> S. Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War* (Dublin, 1990), 95; Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 547; TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS9439, 9440, 9593, Bodyke Fund Papers.



families in a similar situation some four decades later increased even more his deep feelings of antipathy towards landlordism.<sup>98</sup>

In contrast to 1882, however, by 1887 there were plenty of newspapers ready to praise Davitt's actions, and condemn not only the Bodyke landlords, but landlordism in general.<sup>99</sup> Just as importantly, Davitt wanted the people of Scotland to support his stand, and to understand his words. As he stated to his Oban audience, 'some expressions of mine, on the occasion of the recent evictions at County Clare have attracted attention, and have as usual been misrepresented by my Tory and Liberal-Unionist opponents.'

After spending a few minutes giving the historical background of the 'Irish Question', including the very personal 'first recollection of my life... when I saw my father and mother and my sisters turned out of our humble cabin, and then witnessed the hand of the bailiff setting fire to the thatched roof...', Davitt tried to explain his comments:

For my part I am resolved, cost what it may in the way of misrepresentation or imprisonment, to continue telling the people of Ireland to follow the example of Bodyke... I maintain that it is better... for men and women to go to prison for having stood up for the rights of their hearthstones, than to walk into the poorhouse and become paupers by tamely submitting to eviction.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* described Davitt's feelings at this time. 'His anger became so uncontrollable that he publicly expressed shame for ever having counselled the people to refrain from violence and illegality: "would to God we had the... weapons by which freemen in America and elsewhere have struck down tyranny."' *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Jun. 1887. Davitt, if not a pacifist, generally advised people not to resort to violence, and the language he used at Bodyke had been very strong. The evictions affected him deeply, and he began a fund on behalf of the evicted tenants. In spite of his impassioned reaction being an 'aberration' from his usual cautious approach, his words did not go unnoticed in the press. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 547. *The Times*, which portrayed Davitt as a dangerous threat to the establishment even after his death, naturally emphasised the speech, and added that 'while Mr. Davitt was speaking the English ladies and gentlemen present withdrew.' *The Times*, 4 Jun. 1887, 11 Jun. 1887. See the same paper's obituary for Davitt, in which it is clear he had never been forgiven for his actions in the 1870s and early 1880s. *The Times*, 31 May 1906

<sup>99</sup> *Christian Socialist*, Jul. 1887; The *Glasgow Observer*, as might be expected, carried a lot on the affair, and praised Davitt for returning 'to the old methods of the Land League. He has advised tenants to help themselves, telling them that they need expect no quarter from the landlords, or from the Tory supporters of landlordism'. It also criticised the *Freeman's Journal* for sanitising Davitt's speech in its report. *Glasgow Observer*, 11 Jun., 18 Jun. 30 Jul., 1887

<sup>100</sup> *Oban Times*, 9 Jul. 1887

This led to loud cheers from the audience, and Davitt later admitted that he feared his call for 'rational resistance' may have alienated sections of the Scottish public. These worries, at least as far as the Oban meeting can be said to be representative, were unfounded. The other main speakers – Dugald MacLachlan and Rev J.M. Cruikshank, both of Glasgow, backed Home Rule not only for Ireland, but also for Scotland and Wales. The Chairman, Duncan Cameron, gave an enthusiastic summary:

The Highlanders owe a great deal to Ireland, and to Mr. Davitt, who was the Father of the Land League. Had it not been for the firm stand made by the Irish people, the question of land law reform in the Highlands would never have come to so successful an issue.<sup>101</sup>

In spite of being two months late, Davitt's conclusion to his Highland tour therefore hit another high note. He headed for Glasgow to address a packed St. Andrews Hall, to give the message that passive resistance must give way to 'rational resistance'.<sup>102</sup> A similar talk was given in Dumfries the next night.<sup>103</sup> The Glasgow speech, in particular, followed the pattern of earlier meetings in the city by having both Irish and Highland residents well represented. In his chairman's speech, Angus Sutherland, ostensibly referring to Bodyke but subliminally harking back to Valtos, Braes, Leckmelm, and further back to the Clearances, said he believed that:

This subject of eviction was a very important one. It was important in itself, because it was, if he might so call it, the chief cornerstone of the edifice upon which the system of landlordism in our county was built. Without the power of eviction the landlord would be impotent to extract his rackrents...

He went on to display the support Highlanders felt for the Irish Question, attacking Irish Landlords and the 'falsification' of Tory election promises, especially in relation

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<sup>101</sup> Davitt and Cruikshank would not have agreed about the 1886 Act being a 'successful conclusion' to the crofting agitation. It was, however, in Cameron's editorial column in the *Oban Times* that Davitt found a clear statement of support from the Highlands. Cameron wrote that: 'The Highlanders are now beginning fully to understand him and his fellow patriots notwithstanding the confusing prejudices of religious differences... Mr. Davitt declares once more that he will not resile from the position he recently took up, in advising the Bodyke tenants to resist to the utmost the power of a law that tears the people violently from their homes.' This proved to be a high-water mark for the radicalism of the *Oban Times*. By 1903, it was possible for radicals in Argyllshire to talk about the 'apostasy' of the paper. See also the poem, 'The deserter *Oban Times*', by 'An Argyllshire Elector'. *Highland News*, 15 Aug. 1903

<sup>102</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 9 Jul. 1887

<sup>103</sup> TCD, Davitt Papers, TCD MS9616, f.35v.; *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 9 Jul. 1887

to coercion. Sutherland also stressed the determination of Gladstone to grant Home Rule, pledging to back the Liberal leader until it was achieved. The Scottish support for Ireland was underlined by Bailie Filshill, who, representing the Liberals, joked that they 'did not want any more Irish in Glasgow' because of Irish landlord policies, and Cruikshank, who spoke of their 'oppressed brethren' in the Highlands. John Ferguson rounded off the evening by highlighting, as he had always done, the universality of the land problem and condemning Tory coercive and emigration policies.<sup>104</sup>

### **Angus Sutherland and his constituents**

The invidious position in which Davitt found himself in 1887 – a link between Parnellites who relentlessly mocked the growing labour movement, and Socialists who deprecated the 'narrow nationalism' of the Irish parliamentarians – continued for several years. Although his speech at Oban Music Hall would be Davitt's final personal trip to the Scottish Highlands, his involvement in the development of independent labour representation ensured he would maintain close links with his friends in Glasgow – Ferguson, McHugh, McGhee, Shaw Maxwell and Glasier. He made strenuous, if futile, efforts to secure official backing for J. Keir Hardie's Mid-Lanark campaign in 1888, and was also well aware of the growing Scottish Home Rule movement.<sup>105</sup> His subsequent career saw a final split with Parnell, after the O'Shea divorce, and a brief stint as a Parliamentarian.<sup>106</sup> Davitt's short-lived newspaper, the *Labour World*, also gave support to the crofters as part of a general workers' agitation, but the nation-wide demands of a labour movement meant that fewer agitators were able to focus on the Highlands as clearly as they had in the early

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<sup>104</sup> Two nights later, Sutherland, Davitt and Cruikshank accompanied John Ferguson at a miners' meeting in Kirkintilloch. Sutherland moved a resolution, seconded by Cruikshank, condemning the 'the present social arrangements by which the wages of such necessary and useful labour of miners are only 14s. per week, while a man who does no service to society, such as feudal owners of land and mines, are in receipt of £150,000.' *Glasgow Observer* 9 Jul. 1887

<sup>105</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 24 Mar. 1888, 14 Jul. 1888, 19 Jan. 1889; *Labour World*, 27 Sep. 1890, 11 Oct. 1890; Moody, 'Davitt and the British Labour Movement', 66. For the activities of the Glasgow, especially Home Government Branch, radicals at this time, see below, 298, note 144

<sup>106</sup> See C. King, *Michael Davitt* (Dublin, 2000), 59; F. Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt: Revolutionary, Agitator and Labour Leader* (London, 1908), 191-203. Davitt failed as an anti-Parnellite candidate – against John Redmond – in Waterford City in December 1891. He was unseated due to clerical interference in Meath N. (July 1892), before succeeding in Cork NE in 1893.

1880s.<sup>107</sup> One notable exception was the MP for Sutherlandshire, who, between 1887 and 1892, continued to preach radicalism in the north of Scotland.

Although Angus Sutherland's political standing had never been higher, especially after his high profile tour with Michael Davitt and his rapid rise in the Liberal Party, his health continued to present problems. Although it was claimed in June 1887 that his condition had improved, and he would soon be able to resume his parliamentary duties, these hopes were soon dashed by a relapse.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, when he presided at Davitt's Glasgow meeting, he was said to be 'still far from well'.<sup>109</sup> This sickly constitution, which he described as 'rheumatic fever', would dog him for the rest of his life.<sup>110</sup>

The Parliamentary career of Angus Sutherland after 1887 has been portrayed – at best simplistically – as a disappointing betrayal of the crofter cause to which he had devoted so much time and energy in the preceding years. Those who have mentioned him in this context have concentrated mainly on his apparent disillusionment with Radicalism and his pursuit of offices within the Liberal set-up. I.M.M. MacPhail described how Sutherland and his supporters within the Sutherlandshire Association were one of the main reasons for the split in the HLLRA (and, after Oban 1887, the Highland Land League).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> See, (e.g.), *Labour World*, 27 Sep. 1890, which claimed that it wanted to join the *Highland News* in 'awakening feeling in Inverness'. *Labour World*, 18 Oct. 1890 accused the Land Leaguers of Argyllshire of complacency in losing D.H. MacFarlane as their MP in 1886.

<sup>108</sup> *Highland News*, 11 Jun 1887, 2 Jul. 1887. That another reference to Sutherland's health appeared in the leading Irish paper in Glasgow again suggests there was interest in his career in such circles. 'Mr. Angus Sutherland, MP, arrived in Helmsdale on Saturday afternoon. He was met by a number of the more prominent members of the Land League, who congratulated him on his convalescence. He is considerably improved in health, but his medical adviser strictly enjoins rest and quiet, and states that his return to Parliament is, for a time at least, out of the question.' *Glasgow Observer*, 18 Jun. 1887

<sup>109</sup> *Highland News*, 9 Jul. 1887

<sup>110</sup> See Sutherland's letter to the Edinburgh Sutherlandshire Association, *Highland News*, 27 Dec. 1890

<sup>111</sup> His inactivity in Parliament was also criticised, MacPhail writing that 'the members of the Sutherlandshire Association in Glasgow blamed Angus Sutherland's activity in land league affairs as responsible for the lack of any proposals for harbours or railways in Sutherland in the Walpole Commission's recommendations. As a member of the Deer Forest Commission, he seemed to side with the landlord representatives rather than with those sympathetic to the crofters; and in 1894 the Glendale Branch of the Highland Land League gave vent to their wrath over what one of them called the actions of 'Judas' Sutherland. When later in the same year he resigned his seat in Parliament on his appointment as chairman of the Scottish Fishery Board (with a salary of £800 per year) his reputation sank to a low ebb'. MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 219-220. The plans for unifying the various reform bodies, first agreed to at Bonar Bridge, finally came to fruition at this point, and 'Highland Land League' was adopted as the official title. The Walpole Commission was the shorthand name for the

Similarly, James Hunter has stressed the way Angus Sutherland became a part of the Liberal establishment, attempting to make the Highland League a mere adjunct to the Liberal Party, and hinting at an overall scheme of self-aggrandisement:

As a movement with any pretensions to political independence, the Land League did not survive the events of 1895. The previous Autumn had brought Angus Sutherland his reward for loyalty to the Liberals in the chairmanship of the Scottish Fishery Board.<sup>112</sup>

However, whilst Angus Sutherland clearly did, in time, become rather an ‘establishment’ figure, it was not as simple a process as might be inferred from these comments. Although his involvement with the SLRL undoubtedly lapsed, for example, even as late as winter 1888 he was being mooted as the likely chairman for Henry George’s forthcoming Glasgow speech.<sup>113</sup> In the absence of any diaries or private papers from Sutherland, it is only possible to gauge his actions from parliamentary papers and newspaper reports, and so understanding his gradual disengagement from Radical politics is somewhat difficult. What is apparent, however, is that the years immediately following his Highland tour with Davitt saw not only high popularity for Sutherland amongst his constituents, but an even deeper involvement in Irish politics.<sup>114</sup>

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‘West Highlands and Islands Commission’. It was instigated by Lord Lothian, under the chairmanship of Spencer H. Walpole, Governor of the Isle of Man, in 1889. Although it raised the possibility of improving the infrastructure of the Highlands, the Government often found it politically inexpedient to release the necessary funds. Progress was seen in some areas, however, such as the development of harbours and telegraphs. E.A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c.1880-1925* (East Linton, 1996), 72-76.

<sup>112</sup> Hunter, ‘Politics of Highland land reform’, 61, 66

<sup>113</sup> *Highland News*, 24 Nov. 1888. His speech in Govan in early 1889 showed that some of his Radicalism remained, but, by that stage, this was rather an aberration. See below, 309

<sup>114</sup> After taking up his seat in Parliament in 1886, another interest also became apparent in Sutherland’s political life – the sea. Whether or not this had always been a concern for him, springing as he did from crofter-fisherman stock in Helmsdale, or whether it developed only after going to Westminster, is not clear. Eventually, however, his expertise in maritime matters led him to the Chairmanship of the Fishery Board for Scotland – a position he would hold for over twenty years. Many of the questions he asked in Parliament related directly to the crofting aspect of fishing, for example the issue of loans to crofter-fishermen to enable them to buy and improve boats, or destitution caused in the Highlands by the failure of the herring fishery. On other occasions, however, his inquiries had a more general application, such as safety on the deck of fishing vessels, and he was even appointed a member of a special committee dealing with shipping on the Clyde. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccviii, 1479 (7 Sep. 1886); 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccxi, 171 (21 Feb. 1887), 1568 (8 Mar. 1887) 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccxiii, 1113 (18 Apr. 1887); 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. ccxxiv, 717 (9 Apr. 1888); *Highland News*, 5 Mar. 1887, 12 Mar. 1887



Sutherland also spent a lot of time – both on the floor of the House and, with the other Crofter MPs, in committees – attempting to amend the Crofters’ Act and the workings of the newly established Crofters’ Commission.<sup>115</sup> In complaining about a lack of educational provision for Gaelic speaking children he was combining two of his previous concerns, being a former schoolteacher and also believing that a flourishing Gaelic language could assist in the politicisation of the crofters.<sup>116</sup> In spite of the support he received from some Irish members, however, on crofting issues, Sutherland did not use the House as an opportunity to talk about Irish politics. Presumably he knew that there were people equally – or better – qualified than him to speak on the subject in Parliament, and that he could better serve by attempting to build up support for Irish Home Rule in Scotland.

Sutherland’s increasing stature within the Gladstonian Liberal Party was confirmed by his involvement at several functions and on several Liberal committees. In July 1887, he was present at a dinner given to William Gladstone, and also at the inaugural meeting of the Women’s Liberal Federation at the home of Professor Bryce, MP.<sup>117</sup> The following month, Sutherland was elected one of the Honorary Vice-Presidents of the Glasgow Junior Liberal Association. His services to the Association, and the ‘excellent address’ he delivered, were specially noted in its annual report.<sup>118</sup>

The second half of 1887 was also notable for a violent episode which occurred in the westernmost part of Angus Sutherland’s constituency. Ironically, just before Sutherland, along with Michael Davitt, arrived in Lochinver, the area had witnessed the deforcement of a sheriff officer, Mr. Stewart of Golspie. Whilst distributing summonses for rent arrears, Stewart was met by a crowd of fifty or more men in

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<sup>115</sup> *Highland News*, 19 Feb. 1887, 30 Jul. 1887, 27 Aug. 1887

<sup>116</sup> *Highland News*, 10 Sep. 1887

<sup>117</sup> *Highland News*, 23 Jul. 1887; James Bryce was a ‘distinguished historian, jurist and writer on political science who from 1880 to 1893 was Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, and published *The American Commonwealth* in 1888.’ He had been born in Belfast in 1838, but was educated in Glasgow, at the High School and, like Sutherland, the University, before going on to Trinity College, Oxford. He unsuccessfully contested Northern Burghs in 1874, but became an MP in 1880, and was briefly under-secretary for Foreign Affairs in 1886. He entered the cabinet as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1892, and was made President of the Board of Trade in 1894. In later life was British Ambassador to the United States, and created a Viscount. He died in 1922. His brother, J. Annan Bryce, was MP for Inverness Burghs from 1906 to 1910, and chaired meetings involving both Edward McHugh and Richard McGhee. R.C.K. Ensor, *England, 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936), 211; *Land Values*, Oct. 1908; *Highland News*, 10 Feb. 1912

<sup>118</sup> *Highland News*, 13 Aug. 1887

Clashmore, who not only burnt the summonses but also forced the officer down onto his knees and promise never to 'come back that way again on the same errand'.<sup>119</sup>

By the time Sutherland and Davitt arrived in Assynt, on board the 'Clansman', the locals were anxiously 'debating the land question and the Clashmore deforcement', but in fact it was some time before the affair would come to a conclusion.<sup>120</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that the Clashmore dispute was a direct result of the increased confidence engendered by the increasing strength and organisation of the Sutherlandshire Association. After all, similar events had taken place in Skye and other parts of the Highlands in earlier years without any real degree of organisation.<sup>121</sup> Events across the Minch in Lewis, where the Park and Aignish crofters were attracting the headlines – and indeed pictures in *The Illustrated London News* – further deflected attention from Clashmore. Although the *Glasgow Herald* commented upon the striking 'organisation and grim determination' of the Lewis crofters, no such comments were made about Clashmore.<sup>122</sup>

The troubles in Assynt did, however, give Angus Sutherland an excellent opportunity to renew both his attack on what he saw as a deficient Crofters' Act and his attack on the House of Sutherland – and landlords in general. This was in spite of the fact that the Duke seemed to take a conciliatory attitude in the affair.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887. He complied eventually, in spite of initially saying that 'he would become worms there' before getting down on his knees.

<sup>120</sup> For a general account of the saga, see MacPhail, *Crofters' War* 144-145.

<sup>121</sup> E.A. Cameron, "'They Will Listen to no Remonstrance'", Land Raids and Land Raiders in the Scottish Highlands, 1886 to 1914', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, xvii (1997), 44; C.W.J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* (London, 1988), 373-6 for comprehensive details of other disturbances.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in *Scottish Highlander*, 24 Nov. 1887; It is notable that the severe disturbances occurred at Park after John Murdoch had spent almost a year educating and organising the crofters on the Island of Lewis, although research has not yet been undertaken on the precise links. See *Highland News*, 26 Jan. 1887, 5 Mar. 1887, 21 May 1887; See also his bilingual warning of an imminent arrival of commissioners on the island in 1889: *Highland News*, 13 Apr. 1889

<sup>123</sup> The *Scottish Highlander* claimed that the summons may have been served without the Duke's knowledge. MacPhail also describes how the Duke's plea for leniency at MacKenzie's trial limited the sentence to fourteen days. *Scottish Highlander*, 28 Apr. 1887; MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 144. Attempting to move an amendment to the Crofters' Act when Parliament resumed in 1888, Sutherland informed the House that 'advantage was taken in Sutherlandshire immediately when the defect was found in the Act, and processes were taken out against the people who were in arrears in the parish of Assynt at Clashmore. Writs were sent down and served upon the people, who believed that they were fully sheltered by the Crofters' Commission, and were of the opinion that if they accepted services of processes issued against them, they would be denied the rights which it was the wish of the House to bestow on them. After a long debate with the Lord Advocate, J.H.A. MacDonald, about the case, which

Angus Sutherland had already shown who he blamed for the trouble in a letter to the Sutherlandshire Association's executive council, at a meeting in Bettyhill in which he complained that:

The fact is being wholly lost sight of that in the troubles in Assynt the original aggressor, and consequently author of the disturbance, is the landlord...<sup>124</sup>

In subsequent months, Sutherland continued to refer to the case in Parliament and in public, and was therefore able to make a great deal of political capital from this minor skirmish in his constituency. He was able to underline the oppressive nature of Tory rule, criticise the Crofters' Act, and further strengthen his standing in Sutherlandshire. Conversely, he and Gartimore continued to rile local opponents, and stories of discord continued to appear in the Highland press. The letter of September 1888 assuring people that Angus Sutherland was universally popular in Assynt except for 'two or three estate satellites' perhaps hints at the source of the problem.<sup>125</sup>

Sutherland's loyalty to the Gladstonian Liberals continued, and he travelled extensively – especially in Scotland – in support of party policy. He was closely involved in the establishment of new Liberal Associations in Speyside – at Nethy Bridge, Kingussie, and Newtonmore – and indeed he was later elected President of the Newtonmore Branch.<sup>126</sup> Large meetings in Inverness alongside Liberal stalwarts G.J. Shaw Lefevre and Henry Labouchere further increased Sutherland's standing.<sup>127</sup>

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MacDonald concluded by stating the Sutherlandshire people should be grateful to the Duke of Sutherland for ploughing money into the estate, Sutherland retorted by exclaiming that the Duke simply herded people onto the worst available land. See *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccxxii, 1030 (21 Feb. 1888). He subsequently gave a full account of the trial in Edinburgh. The 'defect' referred to was the decision by a judge to allow landlords to sue crofters for recovery of rent arrears. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccxxii, 1054 (21 Feb. 1888)

<sup>124</sup> *Highland News*, 7 Jan., 31 Mar. 1888. During the spell in Inverness Prison spent by two of the deforcers, Hugh Matheson and Donald MacKenzie, Sutherland and Gartimore went to visit them, although they were prevented from speaking to them. *Highland News*, 19 Nov. 1887

<sup>125</sup> *Highland News*, 1 Sep. 1888

<sup>126</sup> *Highland News*, 13 Oct. 1888, 12 Jan. 1889

<sup>127</sup> *Highland News*, 5 Oct. 1889, 19 Oct. 1889. G.J. Shaw-Lefevre was to be the First Commissioner of Works in Gladstone's Fourth Cabinet (August 1892), and President of the Local Government Board under Lord Rosebery in March 1894, following Gladstone's retirement. He had written *The English and Irish Land Questions* in 1881, in which he – like John Ferguson and many others at that time – wrote of the successful systems of Peasant Proprietary operating in Sweden, Switzerland, Bavaria, Norway, Belgium, etc. Henry Labouchere, a leading Radical, had been an MP from 1865 and would

A further sign that he felt a part of the Liberal organisation was in his statement to a large gathering of his constituents in Golspie in 1889, that with the exception of Royal grants he 'had no difficulty in voting steadily with the Liberal Party.'<sup>128</sup> Some time later he joked with an audience in Bonar Bridge's Drill Hall that:

As regards voting, he had frequently seen members in the House of Commons in great tribulation as to how they should vote. As a last resort, he generally tried to find out how the Tories voted, and he thought it was perfectly safe if he voted against them and he never found the test to fail.<sup>129</sup>

Furthermore, in spite of his tongue-in-cheek assertion about methodically voting anti-Tory, the government policies of the day – not only in Ireland but also in the Highlands – gave Sutherland plenty of opportunities to speak out against them. Allied with his conscientious Parliamentary attendance and championing of his constituents, Sutherland remained a busy man in Parliament until his retirement in 1894.<sup>130</sup>

### **Sutherland and Irish Home Rule**

Although ill for much of 1887, Sutherland's physical state was sufficiently recovered by August of that year to make a journey to Dublin as part of a delegation of 'English' Radical MPs. Sutherland had naturally gravitated towards the Radicals since entering Parliament, and appears to have struck up a particularly good friendship with

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remain in Parliament until 1906. His editorship and proprietorship of the magazine *Truth* led Queen Victoria to insist to Gladstone that she should never be put in a position where she would come into contact with Labouchere, effectively barring him from a cabinet position. Because of his support for the 1886-87 'Plan of Campaign', he has also been referred to as 'a staunch friend of Ireland'. Indeed, it was to Labouchere that Richard Pigott confessed to forgery during the *Times* / Parnell trials. L. Curtis, *The Cause of Ireland: From the United Irishmen to the Partition* (Belfast, 1994), 148; Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, 210

<sup>128</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 12 Dec. 1889

<sup>129</sup> *Highland News*, 16 Jan. 1892. This contrasts with Charles Fraser Mackintosh, who became more associated with the Liberal Unionists after 1886.

<sup>130</sup> *Highland News*, 15 Aug. 1891. Sutherland voted in 314 of the 416 divisions of Parliament in the session which ended in August 1891, the second highest of any Scottish MP. The *Highland News* proudly added that 'he has the further record of not being absent one single day'. It is again possible to draw a contrast with Charles Fraser Mackintosh, who was criticised repeatedly by the *Highland News* for his poor record on voting and attendance. *Highland News*, 23 Jan., 30 Jan., 20 Feb., 12 Mar. 1892; E.A. Cameron, *The Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh Crofter MP* (Aberdeen, 2000), 196



members of the United Kingdom Alliance.<sup>131</sup> One who would become a particularly close friend of Sutherland was the radical William Saunders.<sup>132</sup>

Remarkably, given his close association with the Glasgow Irish community, this was apparently Sutherland's first trip to Ireland. The deputation's arrival coincided with the proclamation of the Irish National League by the Government, and as a result:

A large and important meeting was convened in Dublin, under the presidency of the Lord Mayor, to protest against the Proclamation. Several English MPs were present, and the Archbishop sent a letter expressing sympathy with the object. Among the strangers addressing the meeting were Mr. Jacob Bright, MP; Mr. Haldane, MP; and Mr. Angus Sutherland, MP.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> A correspondent from Manchester that 'we had Mr. Angus Sutherland here with us last week at the annual meeting of the UK Alliance. He only spoke for about ten minutes but he brought down the house.' *Highland News*, 22 Oct. 1887. His membership of the UK Alliance suggests that, like Davitt, McHugh, Murdoch and many other Radicals, Sutherland was an advocate of temperance. Confirmation of this is seen in a letter he wrote to the secretary of Golspie Free Church Temperance Society in 1890, which stated: 'Holding strongly, as I do, and as I have consistently done all my lifetime, the conviction that strong drink is not only pernicious in excess but useless in any degree... you can easily imagine the strength of my feelings on the matter. The sobriety of the people is a matter of the first and most fundamental importance, and, as a Christian Church, I can scarcely conceive of a higher and more sacred duty than the promotion of it. *Highland News*, 21 Jun. 1890.

<sup>132</sup> William Saunders was born in Market Lavington in the West Country in 1823, and was educated at Devizes Grammar School. He was a journalist by profession, and retired from this in 1887. He was also a Vice President of the United Kingdom Alliance. A member of London County Council, he wrote *A History of the First London County Council, The Land Struggle in London, Through the Light Continent* and other books. His study of the urban land question appears to have led him into more rural concerns, but as a follower of Henry George he believed that land was the basis of all social inequality. He established the *Western Morning News* and the *Eastern Morning News*, as well as setting up the Central News Agency. He was, of course, a Radical, in favour of Federal Home Rule, the Taxation of Land Values, Local Option, the legal eight hours day, improvement by betterment and other Victorian Radical ideals. He had visited Ireland as a member of the Democratic Federation – alongside G.B. Clark – in 1881, to inquire into the grievances of the smallholders. In Parliament, he sat for Hull E. in 1885 until defeated in 1886 standing as a Gladstonian Liberal. Indeed, *The Crofter* noted Saunders as one of the 'land reform' candidates of the 1885 election. Later, he sat for the Walworth Division of Newington from July 1892 until his death in 1895. He had been present at the large land reform meeting at Portree, where he spoke as a prominent member of the English Land Restoration League, and he retained an interest in the Highland situation, and developed a close friendship with Angus Sutherland, with Sutherland staying as a guest at Saunders' home in Wiltshire during one his recuperation from illness in 1887. He was also noted in the presence of Michael Davitt at one of Henry George's speeches in London, and was a fellow delegate, alongside George and G.B. Clark, at an international congress of land reformers in Paris in 1890. Shortly before his death he was still an active speaker on Georgite principles, addressing the Glasgow Branch of the Highland Land League alongside John Murdoch, John Ferguson, J.M. Cruikshank and David McLardy, and he donated money, through John Murdoch, to the Highland Land League. See M. Stenton & J. Lees (eds.), *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament* (4 Vols. Sussex, 1976-81), ii, 319; *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Jul. 1881; *The Crofter*, 1 Sep. 1885; *Oban Times*, 12 Sep. 1885; *Highland News*, 1 Oct. 1887; *Highland News*, 8 Dec. 1888; *Scottish Highlander*, 20 Jun. 1889; *Single Tax*, Sep. 1894

<sup>133</sup> *Highland News*, 27 Aug. 1887



Although this was only a brief visit, Sutherland returned to Ireland just a month later, having in the interim spoken in parliament on the status of Gaelic in Highland schools, and addressed the National Liberal Federation in Nottingham.<sup>134</sup> He also spent a few days in Cheshire ‘recovering his strength’, and had a long interview with Francis Schnadhorst regarding Liberal organisation in the Highlands, before heading back across the Irish Sea as part of a Scottish Liberal Party deputation.<sup>135</sup>

Sutherland and his colleagues arrived in Dublin on the night of Saturday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>. They were met at Amiens St. Station by high powered reception committee consisting not only of the Lord Mayor of Dublin in his state carriage, but also about ten Irish MPs, including John Dillon and William O’Brien. After proceeding to their hotel, the Imperial, on Sackville Street, several speeches were given from the balcony. Angus Sutherland followed Gilbert Beith, and was introduced as a representative of the ‘Scottish crofters’.<sup>136</sup>

Given such an opportunity, Sutherland attacked Joseph Chamberlain and stressed the support of the Scottish people and MPs would give to the Irish people in their quest for Home Rule.<sup>137</sup> Sutherland’s standing within the Glasgow Irish community had been high for many years, he had forged links with Irish Nationalist MPs, and – through John Ferguson and the *Irish World* – even Irish America was aware of him and the crofters’ struggle. Amongst the Irish in Ireland itself, who even as early as

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<sup>134</sup> *Highland News*, 1 Oct. 1887

<sup>135</sup> *Highland News*, 15 Oct. 1887. Schnadhorst had been secretary of the Birmingham Liberal Association, and subsequently of the National Liberal Federation, thus enjoying a close relationship with Joseph Chamberlain and many of the other radicals. This relationship turned sour after 1886, when he supported Gladstone over Irish Home Rule. He continued to be seen as one of the chief organising hands behind the Gladstonian Liberal Party. R. Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister, 1865-1898* (London, 1999), 435, refers to Schnadhorst as ‘an arch wire puller’.

<sup>136</sup> *Highland News*, 29 Oct. 1887

<sup>137</sup> Sutherland thanked them on behalf of Scotland for the reception they accorded him. He said that ‘they had come to Ireland in an open, straightforward manner. They were not ashamed, nor were they afraid to come to Dublin; and that was the difference between them and certain other political acrobats whom he knew. The Scotch crofters and the Irish had a greater community than that of race, or blood; and that was the community of misfortune. He was not proud of his countryman, Mr. Balfour. He was a Scotsman, but he had been unable to find a constituency in Scotland. But if Scotland was supplying the poison, Scotland was also providing the antidote in the person of Mr. Gladstone. They intended to see for themselves the state of Ireland, and the branches of the National League would afford them facilities for getting that information. He hoped that this was not the last occasion on which they would meet.’ *Highland News*, 29 Oct. 1887

1882 had caused Davitt to despair over the future of the land issue, it might be assumed that Sutherland was something of an unknown quantity. However, the tour of Davitt throughout the Highlands, covered in the *Freeman's Journal*, must have helped to raise Sutherland's profile. The reception given to Sutherland by the Nationalists of Dundalk further underlines the fact that he was known, by this time, as a Home Ruler first and a land reformer second.<sup>138</sup>

### **Glasgow Radicals, Crofters and the Labour Question**

Whilst remaining dedicated to his constituents, as shown by his exhaustive winter tour of Sutherlandshire, Angus Sutherland was certainly, by this stage, a national figure, with supporters amongst the ranks of Radicals, Nationalists and Land Reformers throughout Scotland, Ireland and England. A major offensive was under way on the part of Liberals and Irish nationalists to convince Scots of the justice of Home Rule, and the injustice of coercion. Sutherland was a central figure in these operations.<sup>139</sup>

Just as Davitt had found it necessary to concentrate on much broader social questions, so the chief supporters of the crofters in Glasgow became embroiled in what is now considered the starting point of organised parliamentary labour representation in Britain. Again, the actions of the Home Government Branch of the Irish National League underlines how the early involvement of its members in the Highland land agitation was a social quest, not an attempt to further Irish nationalism. Indeed, the

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<sup>138</sup> *Highland News*, 5 Nov. 1887. Presenting him with a scroll decorated in an ornate Celtic style, Messrs. O'Connell, McCarton and Comerford of the Dundalk National League told Sutherland that: 'We avail ourselves of this opportunity, which your passing through our town affords us, to offer you and your countrymen our heartfelt thanks for the services you have rendered and are rendering to the cause of Ireland. The support afforded by you and your colleagues to Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill, and your persistent opposition to the brutal policy of coercion, place the Irish people under obligations that they can never hope to adequately discharge. At the present time, at all events, they can only tender you the expression of gratitude with which their hearts are filled. We confidently look forward to the not distant day when the representatives and justice loving people of Scotland and England will hurl the present government from office, overthrow the infamous, iniquitous system under which our country is now ruled, and restore to Irishmen the right to make and administer their laws in their own country. When that blessed day arrives a real union will be established between the people of the three kingdoms, a union not brought about by fraud and corruption like that of 1800, but one based on justice and calculated to bring peace and happiness for the Scottish, English and Irish people.'

<sup>139</sup> This agitation took in all corners of Scotland. P.J. Power, MP for Waterford East, gave a Home Rule address to a crowd of 1,000 people in Arbroath, and he was joined later by former Land League activist William Abraham. The *Glasgow Observer* explained that the Irish tour 'would be conducted under the auspices of the Scottish Liberal Association, and will embrace every centre where education on the crisis is needed, from Montrose to Dalbeattie.' *Glasgow Observer*, 16 Apr. 1887

members became increasingly viewed as pariahs amongst the Glasgow-Irish for their advocacy of labour, either through the single tax, or through socialism.

A contretemps reminiscent of McHugh's interruption of Redmond in 1885 occurred during the Mid-Lanark by-election in May 1888. With John Ferguson, McGhee, Shaw-Maxwell, McHugh and Davitt firmly behind J. Keir Hardie, the 'Irish establishment' in Glasgow, represented by their newspaper, the *Observer*, advocated voting for the – eventually victorious – Liberal candidate, John Wynford Philips, a Welsh 'carpet-bagger'. At a meeting of the Home Government Branch soon after the election, Keir Hardie's letter thanking the branch was read out, and McHugh moved a resolution condemning the *United Ireland* newspaper and thanking those electors who voted for Hardie in Mid-Lanark.<sup>140</sup> Even the members of the Home Government Branch were not receptive to this proposal, however, and a direct negative to McHugh's resolution, proposed by a Mr. Leyden, was moved and won by four votes.

Hardie's words in the letter which the branch heard that night expressed something of how McHugh viewed the Irish aspect of his work as a labour agitator:

They [members of the Home Government Branch who voted Labour] have proved themselves genuine friends of Ireland by endeavouring to make friends between the democracies of the two countries, as only thus is Home Rule possible. They have also shown that with them, Home Rule means more than a bit of sentiment, that it is after all only a means to an end – the end being the amelioration of the lot of the common people...<sup>141</sup>

No doubt, therefore, McHugh's exertions among the crofters could be justified as assisting Home Rule through uniting the working classes of Britain and Ireland. McHugh's subsequent career as a thoroughly internationalist labour and single tax advocate cast doubt as to whether he himself saw his mission in this way. The activities of the Home Government Branch, likewise, continued to focus much more on labour than nationalism, but there is no doubt that they saw the continuing struggle

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<sup>140</sup> Like the *Glasgow Observer*, the *United Ireland* had advocated a strong vote in favour of the Liberals.

<sup>141</sup> National Library of Scotland, NLS MSS.1809ff. / 75. Letter of J. Keir Hardie to Secretary of Home Government Branch, Glasgow.

in the Highlands as part of the working class agitation.<sup>142</sup> John Ferguson chaired the St. Patrick's Day speech in 1888, and was accompanied in Glasgow City Hall by Davitt and R.B. Cunninghame Graham.<sup>143</sup> The chairman's speech illustrated how far these men were away from mainstream nationalism, when he stated that 'St. Patrick was a social reformer. He came to Ireland not to establish a nationality – there was a nation there when he came'.<sup>144</sup>

The irony of this from a Highland perspective is that, in contrast to his friends in Glasgow, Angus Sutherland's attention during 1888 and 1889 was taken up increasingly by the Home Rule issue. Whilst land reform remained on the agenda, it was temporarily replaced by the devolution issue not only in Sutherland's mind, but also apparently amongst many of his constituents.

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<sup>142</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 11 Feb. 1888 reports the branch unanimously passing a resolution supporting the Clashmore crofters. For Clashmore, see above, 291

<sup>143</sup> Robert Gallnigad Bontine Cunninghame Graham became one of the most colourful figures both in left-wing politics and Scottish nationalism. Before succeeding to the family estate in Gallnigad, Gartmore and Ardoch, he had been a cattle rancher in South and Central America, earning the name 'Don Roberto'. He was an unsuccessful candidate in NW Lanarkshire in 1885, before being returned for the same constituency a year later, as a Liberal / Labour member. He described himself as 'a socialist, in favour of legislative independence for Ireland', and before retiring from parliament in 1892, he was involved in several disturbances both in and outside the House of Commons. On 13 Nov. 1887, he was involved in the 'Bloody Sunday' disturbances, which resulted in a spell in Pentonville prison. He also became the Honorary President of the SPLP when it was formed in 1888. Moody refers to him, erroneously, as a 'Land League MP', possibly because of his friendship with John Murdoch and James Shaw Maxwell. Although he has sometimes been perceived as one of the leaders of the crofting agitation, and had a natural sympathy for the land struggle, Cunninghame Graham's pronouncements on the subject were vague and infrequent. A further attempt to enter parliament in 1918 for W. Stirlingshire was unsuccessful, although he became the first chairman of the National Party of Scotland when it was formed in 1928. Stenton & Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, ii, 143; T.W. Moody, 'Michael Davitt and the British Labour Movement, 1882-1906', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5<sup>th</sup> ser., iii (1953), 65; C. Watts & L. Davies, *Cunninghame Graham: A Critical Biography* (London, 1979), 50-51

<sup>144</sup> *Glasgow Observer* 24 Mar. 1888. The frequent meetings which continued to be held by the Home Government Branch on social reform stress this point. During 1888 and 1889, the following related meetings are reported in the *Glasgow Observer*: 21 Jan. 1888 (speech by J. Shaw Maxwell and J. Bruce Glasier); 14 Apr. 1888 (Mr. Trelfall on 'The Labour Question'); 20 Oct., 1888 (Richard McGhee on 'Social Reform'); 10 Nov. 1888 (J. Shaw Maxwell on 'The Great Social Question'); 30 Mar. 1889 (Speech featuring R.B. Cunninghame Graham, and Prince Krapotkin, the noted anarchist); 11 May 1889 (Discussion as to the relative merits of single tax or communism); 8 Jun. 1889 (Lecture on the successful spread of socialism in Europe); 31 Aug. 1889 (Condemnation by J. Shaw Maxwell of the *Glasgow Observer*. The newspaper itself was unperturbed, claiming that 'the gist of what he said was that we (in common with all other editors) were "commonplace" and that the Home Government people should rejoice in being called "cranks".'); 23 Nov. 1889 (Resolution claiming that it is the duty of the Irish in Glasgow to support Labour candidates).

### **Irish Home Rule and the Highlands, 1887-1890**

Evidence of the way Home Rule had supplanted land, at least temporarily, as the major issue not only in Angus Sutherland's life, but also in the hearts and minds of many in Sutherlandshire and the rest of the Highlands, came in the form of two major set piece speeches in Inverness in 1887 and 1888. That two of the most prominent Irish Nationalist Parliamentarians of the 1880s – John Dillon and T.P. O'Connor – should travel to Inverness in order to advocate Home Rule indicates both that the Highlands was considered an important political battleground and, in spite of not having a pro Home Rule MP in Inverness District of Burghs or Inverness-shire – that it was thought to be an area receptive to their ideas. The absence of any references to the Highlands, or the land issue, in the speeches – in marked contrast to earlier speeches by Irishmen in Scotland – is once more suggestive of a shift in political focus. Dillon and O'Connor were both concerned with a single issue.

Sutherland and O'Connor had met at the Parnell meeting in Glasgow in April 1881 which brought Irish sympathy for the crofters to widespread public attention for the first time. O'Connor had also addressed a Scottish audience on Home Rule in the more recent past.<sup>145</sup> Dillon had not shown any great interest in the Highlands, or the crofters, prior to this visit, in spite of his strong support for the Irish Land agitation, and his rural Co. Mayo background.<sup>146</sup>

Presumably through parliamentary contacts with the Irish party, however, Angus Sutherland – at least for a time – claimed a reasonably close friendship with Dillon.<sup>147</sup> The Inverness Music Hall was packed for Dillon's speech, with hundreds unable to

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<sup>145</sup> In Glasgow. *Glasgow Observer*, 6 Aug. 1887

<sup>146</sup> There was a tantalising reference in the *Oban Times* in 1885, which suggested that 'Mr. John Dillon had an interview with Mr. Parnell on Monday, after which he left for Scotland to make a tour of the Highlands.' *Oban Times*, 8 Aug. 1885. In spite of this confident assertion, nothing came of the projected visit, and November 1887 would be the first time that Dillon spoke in the Highlands. He had, however, given an anti-coercion speech in Perth five months previously. *Glasgow Observer*, 11 Jun. 1887

<sup>147</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 7 Jul. 1888. After Dillon had been imprisoned in 1888 Sutherland wrote in the following terms to John Hughes, secretary of the Tradeston (John Dillon) Branch of the Irish National League, a branch of which Sutherland was a Vice President: 'Dear Sir – I duly received the petition [against Dillon's imprisonment] of the John Dillon Branch of the National League, and it gives me great pleasure to present it to the House, which I did this evening. I only wish I could as easily set free my friend Mr. Dillon, and bestow Home Rule upon Ireland. But the day of both is slowly, but surely and inevitably, coming.'



gain admission.<sup>148</sup> Prominent on the platform, alongside Angus Sutherland, were other members of the Sutherlandshire Association, such as Macleod of Gartimore, and G.G. Macleod, of Bonar Bridge. At the very outset of the evening, these men presented Dillon with an address which underlined the shared suffering of Ireland and the Highlands, and hoped for a ‘closer and more real union of the hearts and minds of the people of Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland.’

As Sutherland had generally attacked local landlords for their policies in the Highlands, the pointed reference to ‘English laws’ and ‘English landlordism’ contained in the address was notable in that he was using the rhetoric of Irish (or, indeed, Scottish) Nationalism over that of the land agitation.

Dillon’s speech itself was concerned entirely with Ireland, and, in the words of the *Highland News* editorial, exposed the ‘utter hollowness of the Liberal Unionist and Tory case.’ Amidst fierce criticism of Liberal Unionism, and statistics showing rural depopulation in Ireland and details of government coercion, Dillon received a rousing reception from the Inverness crowd. Nowhere, however, did he make any references to Highland support.<sup>149</sup> Speaking briefly after Dillon, Walter Bright McLaren, Liberal MP for Crewe, and erstwhile ‘crofter’ candidate for Inverness Burghs, spoke of the growing sense of unity between the ‘British and Irish democracies.’ Other than the opening address, however, the main assertions of Highland support for Irish self determination came from Highlanders: the Free Church minister, Rev. Dr. Mactavish, and Angus Sutherland himself. In moving the first resolution passed at the meeting, one of confidence in Gladstone as Liberal leader, Mactavish announced that he had long been a Home Ruler:

He wanted Home Rule for Scotland many years ago. He was not particular which country got it first, but in the meantime the Irish question blocked the way; and he thought that it was in their own interest that they should have the land question settled speedily and satisfactorily.... If there was any proposal made that would tend to the disintegration of the Empire – that it would separate Ireland from this country – he would oppose it to the utmost of his power.

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<sup>148</sup> For a full report, see *Highland News*, 19 Nov. 1887.

<sup>149</sup> Indeed, throughout the speech he generally referred to ‘English’ rather than ‘British’, showing a degree of insensitivity to those whose support he sought.

This rather reiterated the rhetoric shown by many Home Rule supporters, including Angus Sutherland prior to the 1885 election, that Irish Home Rule would be the only way of strengthening the union, rather than breaking it up. Sutherland himself, making his first appearance before an Inverness audience for some time, made what the *Highland News* described as a ‘pointed and pithy’ speech.<sup>150</sup>

Although the Sutherlandshire crofters had already developed a strong sympathy for the Irish cause, Dillon’s speech in particular made a further impression on the area. His imprisonment in April 1888 instigated a cult of Dillon not only in Ireland, and amongst Irish abroad, but also amongst Scottish Home Rulers and Radicals.<sup>151</sup> After the death of John Mandeville, a leading Co. Cork agitator, in prison under the Coercion Act, A.J. Balfour was wary of creating any more martyrs. With a notoriously weak constitution, many supporters of the Irish cause emphasised the possibility that Dillon would die in jail, hoping to precipitate his release.<sup>152</sup>

At Lord Rosebery’s keynote address in Inverness, June 1888, Sutherland – again prominent in the Highland ‘capital’ – supported a resolution calling for Dillon’s release.<sup>153</sup> Neither were his constituents slow to voice their opinions in the matter. The Kildonan Branch of the Sutherlandshire Association passed a motion protesting against ‘the criminal prosecution of John Dillon, MP’, and the *Highland News* remarked that:

It is curiously significant of the universality of the interest in the case of Mr. Dillon, that Mr. Sutherland, MP for Sutherlandshire, has

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<sup>150</sup> *Highland News* 19 Nov. 1887. The same editorial remarked upon how: ‘Nothing could be finer than his reference to the rapid march of political education. But a short time ago he was called extreme because he denounced the baneful feudal system. Now Mr. Goschen and Lord Randolph Churchill were found emphatically declaring that the “dual ownership of the land must be abolished”. “Why”, said he, “I said the same thing twelve years ago – the dual ownership must cease – that is, *the landlord goes; the tenant remains.*”’

<sup>151</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 21 Apr. 1888 for arrest of Dillon and O’Brien. See especially the remarkable speech made by Rev. David Macrae, *Glasgow Observer*, 18 Aug. 1888, where he sang a song to Dillon to the tune of ‘John Brown’s Body’.

<sup>152</sup> See, (e.g.) J. Ferguson, ‘Shall the life of John Dillon be risked?’, *Glasgow Observer*, 11 Aug. 1888. For Mandeville, see J.S. Donnelly Jr., *The Land and People of Nineteenth Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London, 1975), 343-347; Warwick-Haller, *William O’Brien and the Irish Land War*, 108-110

<sup>153</sup> *Highland News*, 16 Jun. 1888. For Lord Rosebery’s relationship with Irish Nationalism see R.J. Akroyd, ‘Lord Rosebery and Scottish Nationalism, 1868-1896’, unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1996, Ch. 6

received a petition from Cape Wrath, the most northern point in all Scotland, protesting against the imprisonment of the Irish patriot.<sup>154</sup>

The crofters of Clyne echoed this sentiment the following week, and the case of Dillon illustrates the high degree of politicisation which had by this time been achieved in Sutherlandshire.<sup>155</sup> The organisation which grew up to form a strong body to agitate on the land issue was now confident enough to give opinions on broader issues.

When T.P. O'Connor travelled north a year after Dillon, Sutherland and Gartimore were again well to the fore. Meeting O'Connor from the station, Sutherland took him to St. Ann's – the residence of G.J. Campbell, secretary of the Inverness Burghs Liberal Association – where both men were staying whilst in the town.

The meeting itself, in the Assembly Hall, was chaired by Sutherland, who took the opportunity to give a very long opening speech. Met by a 'tremendous outburst of cheering', Sutherland expressed a wish to expose the 'Irish policy of the present Government.'<sup>156</sup> Although not referring to landlordism, some of Sutherland's early rhetoric managed to come through, referring to the legal issues surrounding constitutional rearrangement, and exhorting the Government to listen to the 'people of England, Scotland and Wales', who were 'decidedly of the opinion that the present relations of Great Britain and Ireland should be altered.'

He was also able to satisfy his interest in history, by combating:

The assertion that Scotland had never desired Home Rule, by pointing to the Covenanters' struggle in the seventeenth century. What the Covenanters then fought for was freedom from London rule which was being forced upon them. They took up such weapons as they

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<sup>154</sup> *Highland News*, 21 Jul. 1888

<sup>155</sup> *Highland News*, 28 Jul. 1888

<sup>156</sup> *Highland News*, 6 Oct. 1888 Inverness once more became a battle ground for the Irish Home Rule issue just before the Great War. In November 1913, T.P. O'Connor returned to the city in order to counter a speech in the same week by Edward Carson, the Ulster Unionist leader. *Highland News*, 8 Nov. 1913

could lay their hands on, and placed their backs against the eternal mountains of their native land, and they conquered.<sup>157</sup>

O'Connor himself, like Dillon before him, contented himself with attacking the Tory and Liberal Unionist policy in Ireland. He did point out that 'one of the grossest scandals was the unequal burden upon the property of landlords and the property of other persons in the community', but didn't apply this to the Highlands of Scotland. Indeed, his only concession to the audience was a reference to the 'Scotch brethren' of the Irish people, who contributed more than their fair proportion in building up the British Empire. The land question was, at this point, truly subservient to considerations of Home Rule.

The third major set piece occasion promoting Home Rule in which the Sutherlandshire Association was involved, in July 1889, took place in Edinburgh, and featured none other than the leader of the Irish Nationalists, Charles Stewart Parnell.<sup>158</sup> Whilst there were over 150 addresses presented to Parnell on this occasion, the one presented by Angus Sutherland and John Macleod of Gartimore was notable for its powerful assertion of Gaelic co-operation. It insisted that:

It is highly appropriate that the GAEL OF SCOTLAND should sympathise with the GAEL OF IRELAND, two tribes which sprung from the same stock, and which are still in great measure one in language and in those native and national aspirations so long suppressed by the oppressive treatment of their rulers...

Parnell's commitment to Scottish Home Rule has been questioned, Hunter's influential article, for example, pointing to Parnell's statement that 'Scotland has ceased to be a nation'.<sup>159</sup> It was still important, though, for the Sutherlandshire Association that they should be seen in the presence of such a powerful politician. Indeed, the address specifically thanked Parnell for assistance given to the Highland cause in Parliament, although this clearly refers more to his Irish colleagues than to Parnell himself. Another interesting aspect of the report is the apparent warmth with

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<sup>157</sup> Richard Finlay points out that, in 1888, the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Covenant, 'the whole of Scotland was awash with celebrations'. R. Finlay, 'Heroes, Myths and Anniversaries in Modern Scotland', in *Scottish Affairs*, xviii (1997), 108

<sup>158</sup> For a full account of the address presented to Parnell, see App. G, 'Charles Stewart Parnell and the Freedom of Edinburgh'; *Highland News*, 17 Jul. 1889

<sup>159</sup> Hunter, 'Gaelic Connection', 187. Hunter's quotation is from *Scots Magazine*, Vol. Viii (1891), 37

which Parnell greeted John Murdoch in front of an audience which clearly had great affection for the latter.<sup>160</sup> Again, Parnell was using his political skills to ensure he had a receptive audience. Importantly, as with the speeches by Dillon and O'Connor, no mention was made of the Highlands, and yet these events were reported in the Highlands in terms of the greatest importance. The fact that the Highlands were not given a name check by these prominent Irishmen was somehow irrelevant, as many of those crofters in Sutherlandshire, by this stage, felt intimately involved and united with the Irish smallholders not only over land reform, but also over Home Rule.

Although British support for Irish Home Rule (or, indeed, 'Home Rule All Round') was divided, the majority of meetings held by Sutherlandshire crofters were showing solid support for the measure. Davitt's tour had further reinforced this support. Whether this was connected with Sutherland's repeated exhortations, or whether Sutherland's popularity was because the crofters had made their own minds up on the subject, is hard to discern. Skye, for example, also supported Home Rule to a great extent, without Angus Sutherland's advice. Nevertheless, Skye had had direct Irish Land League influence in the form of Edward McHugh, and had a long association with John Murdoch, so it is not unreasonable to assign a similar role to Angus Sutherland in his native county. He had closely associated Home Rule as part of an overall package of social reform, and as he had been proved right – and achieved some measure of reform – in his ideas on the iniquity of the land laws, the majority accepted his stance on Home Rule.

June 1887, with Davitt's visit still a talking point, saw several demonstrations in Sutherlandshire demanding Irish Home Rule.<sup>161</sup> At a meeting of Loth and Kildonan crofters, for example, held in Helmsdale on 8<sup>th</sup> June, one of the resolutions called upon the people of Bodyke to stand by their homes. It congratulated Michael Davitt on his stance there, and sent him a copy of the resolutions. Replying, in a letter addressed to John Macleod of Gartiemore, Davitt wrote that 'we are in for a terrible struggle here. The people are full of the courage of desperation... I hope the cause is holding its own in the Highlands.'<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> In spite of what had appeared a frosty relationship previously.

<sup>161</sup> *John O'Groat Journal*, 15 Jun. 1887, 29 Jun. 1887; *Highland News*, 11 Jun. 1887

<sup>162</sup> *Highland News*, 2 Jul. 1887



The increasing political awareness – and confidence – of the Sutherlandshire crofters was clearly manifested here. Less than a year had passed since the *Glasgow Observer* had effectively described the crofters as well-meaning, worthy of sympathy, but basically lacking the courage of their convictions, the Helmsdale men were praising and encouraging the ‘Father of the Land League’, believing their endorsement could make a difference. It is also interesting to note that, as the Highlands bucked the trend of many areas of Britain by supporting Irish Home Rule, they were also taking a strongly independent line in supporting Davitt’s stance. Support for the ‘Plan of Campaign’ in Ireland was also expressed, and again the crofters were given a lead by their MP. In a letter to the Kildonan branch, he complained that ‘the present Tory Government coerce and oppress Ireland simply because the Irish people dare refuse to pay the Irish landlords whatever price they choose to exact for the right to live and toil on their native land...’<sup>163</sup> Such emphasis on the suffering the Irish smallholders were going through, for standing up for their principles, was intended by Sutherland to force the crofters to consider their own position, and show the same strength of character as the Irish were doing.

Similarly, the Strathnaver Crofters’ Association passed a resolution at a meeting stating that ‘In the past it was “Highlanders, shoulder to shoulder”, but the future motto should be “Highlanders and Irishmen, shoulder to shoulder”.’<sup>164</sup> Given that Sutherland and Gartimore had spent several years stressing the former motto, the fact that the crofters should so quickly take the initiative in proposing the latter is in itself a testament to their organisational efforts.

In considering the organisation of the crofters in Sutherlandshire and the rest of the Highlands, there were several differences. Referring to the HLLRA, James Hunter referred to its effectiveness in returning all crofter candidates barring Sutherland to Parliament in 1885:

The majority of the mainland crofters were members of the association; in the islands it was even greater. In parts of Skye, for example, it is likely that ‘probably every man of the crofter and cottar population... [was] an enrolled member’.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Highland News*, 15 Sep. 1888

<sup>164</sup> *Highland News*, 14 May 1887

<sup>165</sup> Hunter, ‘Politics of Highland land reform’, 54. Quoting MacNeill *Confidential Report*, 1

The Skye crofters had been receptive to politicisation by John Murdoch and, subsequently, Edward McHugh and various other visitors to the island, such as Henry George and James Shaw Maxwell. A variety of land reform options were offered to them, but there was little – other than general commitment to reform – that amounted to a ‘policy’. It is clear that Sutherland and Gartiemore wanted a more Radical body, and one they could organise – or, in the opinion of their enemies, manipulate – more easily. In spite of the nominal unification of the reform bodies under the banner of the Highland Land League, the Sutherlandshire branches retained much of their independence, and little structural change took place.

Although Skye was seen to be pro-Irish Home Rule, as were other districts in the Highlands, the crofters there did not have quite the focus and leadership of the Sutherlandshire crofters. Furthermore, whilst the Skyemen had gained an increasingly sophisticated knowledge of the land issue, ever since Edward McHugh had come to the island, the main political organisation was undertaken by Duncan Cameron and other part-time campaigners. In Sutherland and Gartiemore, the Sutherlandshire people had highly motivated and professional instructors on not just the land question, but other political issues and, vitally, political organisation. Sutherland was able to concentrate on a combination of his politics and local concerns. The Highland Land League was responsible for such a large area that it would be virtually impossible to find a policy which would be acceptable to everyone – even on the land issue alone, as is shown by the fact that the Highland Land League had split into two bodies once more within seven years of its inauguration. Within Sutherlandshire, it was much easier for Sutherland to carry the majority of his constituents, although even here support for the MP was not universal.

Sutherland remained a popular figure in his constituency, in spite of often long absences in the course of his work for the Liberal Party. Macleod of Gartiemore remained an extremely active figure in Sutherlandshire, giving speeches, education, and honing organisation.<sup>166</sup> Sutherland returned to the county as often as possible during his tenure, especially during the Christmas recess.

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<sup>166</sup> See, for example, *Highland News*, 22 Oct. 1887, 29 Oct. 1887, for an illustration of Gartiemore’s fevered activity.

A brief examination of the themes covered by Sutherland during his tour of the constituency after Dillon's Inverness speech suggest that little had changed either in his political convictions or his reception amongst the crofters. At a large meeting of the Creich Branch at Bonar Bridge, he 'showed clearly the connection between the Irish question and the Highland question', as well as giving a 'most graphic and interesting account of his recent tour in Ireland'.<sup>167</sup> At Bonar Bridge, he dismissed 'Tory claptrap' and reiterated the value of organisation.<sup>168</sup>

After visiting the Inverness prison to inquire about the Assynt crofters held there, Sutherland and Gartimore embarked on a thorough speaking tour of Sutherlandshire, addressing large audiences on familiar subjects such as the state of Ireland (Halladale), Home Rule for Scotland and Ireland and loans for crofter-fishermen (Strathy), the iniquity of coercive laws in Ireland and the uselessness of the Crofters' Act (Bettyhill), the history of the land question (Skerray), and the evils of deer forests and the decisions of the Crofters' Commission (Melness).<sup>169</sup>

Therefore, to detect any change in Sutherland's political stance by the end of 1887 would be to read history backwards. To contemporaries, there were few surprises in his range of interests or in the way he expressed them. Indeed, if soon after this he appeared to spend a lot of the time defending the Liberals' official policies, he still described himself as an 'agitator'. Spending a week in the Lowlands in mid January, 1888, speaking in Edinburgh, Hawick, Galashiels, Dunfermline and Leith, Sutherland advocated the Liberal cause – which, after all, included Irish Home Rule and the crofter issue. Nevertheless, he left his Edinburgh audience in no doubt that:

There were agitators in the Highlands. He was one of them and proud of that fact. Aye, and he would continue to be an agitator until the cruel and wicked oppression under which the people he belonged to was brought to an end...<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> *Highland News*, 24 Dec. 1887

<sup>168</sup> *Highland News*, 17 Dec. 1887

<sup>169</sup> *Highland News*, 3 Dec. 1887. For a full itinerary, see *Highland News*, 19 Nov. 1887 to 31 Dec. 1887. Between his appearance with John Dillon in Inverness, and the Edinburgh Sutherlandshire Association's New Year meeting, Sutherland spoke in Beaulay, Lochinver, Stoer, Portgower, Halladale, Strathy, Bettyhill, Skerray, Melness, Brora, Golspie, Rosehall, Rogart and Bonar Bridge (twice).

<sup>170</sup> *Highland News*, 21 Jan. 1887. This remark would be thrown back at him in Parliament by A.J. Balfour a month later, who used the 'agitator' epithet in an attempt to belittle Sutherland. When

With the *Highland News* now acting, to all intents and purposes, as an Inverness-based propaganda sheet for Sutherland – edited by his chief ‘spin-doctor’ – his constituents were kept well up to date with his actions. Whether speaking in Parliament, Ireland, around Scotland or in other parts of Sutherlandshire, the glowing reports of Sutherland’s hectic schedule, and the hard work he was putting in on the crofters’ behalf played a large part in maintaining his popularity. Furthermore, the *Highland News*’ virulently pro-Home Rule editorial line not only confirmed this as official Sutherlandshire Association policy, but reinforced the majority of the crofters’ commitment to the principle of Home Rule.<sup>171</sup>

The pro-Sutherland, pro-Home Rule stance of the *Highland News*, brought it into a certain amount of conflict with the other Inverness based crofters’ paper, the *Scottish Highlander*. The *Scottish Highlander*, edited by Alexander MacKenzie, was as much in favour of Charles Fraser Mackintosh, MP for Inverness-shire, as the *Highland News* was for Sutherland.<sup>172</sup> With Fraser Mackintosh taking a Unionist stance over Ireland – even though MacKenzie did not agree with him – tension between the papers ran high, with the *Scottish Highlander* even taking to calling its rival the ‘Highland Nuisance’.<sup>173</sup> Again, this is symptomatic of the divisions throughout the Highlands over the Home Rule issue.

Home Rule continued to be the dominant political theme until the general election of 1892. As part of his duties to the Liberals, Sutherland spent a lot more time assisting Home Rule candidates and speaking throughout Scotland on behalf of Gladstone and his policies. A good example of such activity was Sutherland’s advocacy – assisted by T.P. O’Connor – of the Home Rule / Gladstonian candidate John Wilson in the Govan

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Sutherland qualified this by exclaiming ‘A constitutional agitator!’, Balfour continued, ‘Yes, exactly; Constitutional; he had no objection to agitating. He had rather a weakness for it. But he certainly preferred that agitators, when they agitated, should show some slight appreciation of the problem with which they had to deal.’ *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. ccxxxii, 1100 (21 Feb. 1888)

<sup>171</sup> G.G. Macleod, of Ardgay, speaking at Rosehall some time later, praised his audience, and all the members of the Sutherlandshire Association, for their interest in Home Rule, and disestablishment: ‘He knew well that the Rosehall people were thorough land leaguers. But they were more. They were general politicians as well. Like the other districts of the county they took a keen interest in all the political questions of the hour. They were ardent Home Rulers. They desired and earnestly worked for the abolition of all class privileges, whether they be territorial or ecclesiastical’. *Highland News*, 26 Jan. 1889

<sup>172</sup> Cameron, *Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh*, 156

<sup>173</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 22 May 1892

by-election of early 1889.<sup>174</sup> At a meeting in Govan itself, Sutherland spent much of his speech discussing Highland organisation and the progress that had been made in recent years. The best way to progress further, he argued, was to oust the 'idiotic' Tories. In discussing the land issue at length, Sutherland also reverted to one of his earlier pet themes – the Georgite idea that the land problem also had a grave influence on the economy of towns and cities. Claiming that Wilson was 'in favour of sweeping changes in the land laws', Sutherland reminded his audience that:

They, the working men of that vast community, had also a vital interest in the land question... Why were wages continually driven to the minimum that could keep body and soul together? Was it not because the rural population was being driven in by the land laws to compete in fierce and deadly competition for work for which there was already too much competition?<sup>175</sup>

Many of these themes were repeated at another meeting in Wilson's support in the days leading up to the poll. Addressing the Highlanders of Govan entirely in Gaelic, Sutherland also reiterated his faith in the support of the Irish Parliamentarians in the fight against Highland landlordism.<sup>176</sup> Branches of the Sutherlandshire Association, just as much as their MP, referred frequently to the ongoing application of coercive laws in Ireland.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Before becoming an MP, Paisley-born Wilson had been a commercial traveller and businessman. He built an 'iron tube manufactory' in Helen St., Govan, and had been an investor in the City of Glasgow Bank, losing £30,000 when it was liquidated in 1878. He was also the 'chairman of several public companies, and one of the foremost commercial men in Glasgow'. Politically, he was an advanced Liberal, in favour of Home Rule and with strong temperance sympathies. *Highland News*, 19 Jan. 1889

<sup>175</sup> *Highland News*, 12 Jan. 1889. See also H. George, *Progress and Poverty: An inquiry into the cause of industrial depression and of increase of want with increase of wealth* (1943 edition (London, 1943)), 319. Although Govan was not technically to become a part of Glasgow until 1912, this speech shows Sutherland rather returning to his political roots.

<sup>176</sup> *Highland News*, 19 Jan. 1889. As if to underline the Sutherlandshire Association's position, the *Highland News* ran editorials trumpeting Wilson's electoral success two weeks running – the latter piece telling the Liberal Unionist member for Inverness Burghs, R.B. Finlay, that the Gladstonian / Home Rule success in Govan marked the beginning of the end for his position as MP. *Highland News*, 26 Jan. 1889

<sup>177</sup> With William O'Brien again in prison, the Clyne crofters passed a resolution which strongly condemned 'the action of the Government for the brutal and inhuman manner in which the Coercion Act is administered in Ireland, and in their treatment of political opponents, and sympathises with William O'Brien and the Irish people in their dire distress'. The following week, the meeting of the Sutherlandshire Association County Executive was concerned primarily, not with land, but with condemning the Tories over the O'Brien case, and claiming that the government policy in Ireland was 'destructive of law and order'. *Highland News*, 16 Feb., 23 Feb. 1889. O'Brien had been incarcerated in Clonmel Jail, and then Galway, for four months, for inflammatory speeches. After outwitting the



Along with allegations of Government coercion, a second cause célèbre of the Irish movement at this time was the attack on ‘Parnellism’ by the *Times* newspaper. The *Times* had published a forged letter purporting to link Parnell with the Phoenix Park murders of 1882, leading to the appointment of a Special Investigative Commission being appointed on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1888.<sup>178</sup> In February 1889, under cross examination, Richard Pigott confessed that the incriminating letters were forgeries, and Parnell was vindicated.<sup>179</sup>

Bizarrely, Sutherlandshire – specifically the Helmsdale / Gartiemore area, also became implicated in the *Times* sponsored ‘Parnellism and Crime’ trial. An article appeared in the *Highland News* revealing that a certain detective named Kirby, in pursuit of definite documentary evidence against the Irish leader, was sent by the *Times* on ‘a wild goose chase’ to America, with a sum of several hundred pounds:

The whole affair was a hoax by some man giving the initials J.C.S. and claiming to hail from Gartiemore. Kirby, in writing to him, said ‘you refer that you are “late of Gartiemore, Helmsdale, Sutherland, Scotland”, and to assure you that I am in possession of your letter to those you sent it to, I quote your postscript:- “There are two Irishmen here that were indirectly in the combine to murder Cavendish and Burke, where I can get all the proof you want for very little – J.C.S.”’<sup>180</sup>

There is little logic to this statement – although it could conceivably simply be a vague reference to Michael Davitt’s presence in the area in 1887. More likely is that it was a complete hoax, although why it should emanate from Gartiemore, a village with strong Home Rule sympathies, is a matter for debate. It may have been a Home Ruler simply joking or trying to waste the time and money of the *Times*, or it may have been an enemy of the ‘Glasgow-Helmsdale Heroes’ hoping to blacken the Sutherlandshire

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police several times, he had finally been arrested in Manchester in January. Warwick-Haller, *William O’Brien and the Irish Land War*, 113-114

<sup>178</sup> Curtis, *Cause of Ireland*, 155

<sup>179</sup> Richard Pigott had been the owner of the *Irishman* and *Flag of Ireland* newspapers, which Parnell had bought out in 1881 in order to launch *United Ireland*. A once trusted ally of the Irish Nationalists, he took money from *The Times* and the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union in order to implicate Parnell. Humiliated after confessing to the forgeries, Pigott escaped to Madrid, where he shot himself dead. R. Kee, *The Laurel and the Ivy: The story of Charles Stewart Parnell and Irish Nationalism* (Harmondsworth, 1993), 528, 531

<sup>180</sup> *Highland News*, 23 Mar. 1889

Association's name by linking it with the 'Parnellism and Crime' trials. Nothing more, however, was written about this letter.

Angus Sutherland himself not only continued to champion the Irish cause, but his high profile in Glasgow increased still further. At a large indignation meeting to protest against the imprisonment of David Sheehy, MP under the Criminal Law Amendment (Ireland) Act of 1887, accompanied by James Shaw Maxwell and David Macrae, Sutherland spoke strongly against the Government.<sup>181</sup> His continued loyalty was recognised by the Irish National League in the city. In addition to his Honorary Presidency of the Tradeston (John Dillon) Branch of the League, Sutherland was nominated to a similar position in the Anderston Branch.<sup>182</sup> Although William O'Brien was elected, the fact that Sutherland was even considered – alongside fellow nominees O'Brien, Sheehy, and Rev. James MacFadden of Gweedore, Co. Donegal, who were all in prison at the time under the terms of the Coercion Act – shows the regard in which he was held. Only a man with a reputation as an advanced Nationalist could have been considered for such a post.

### **County Council Elections**

Even before the 1885 election, Sutherland and Gartimore had been well aware that keeping the agitation alive required more than just Sutherland's continuing presence in Parliament.<sup>183</sup> If Irish organisation was to be followed, Land League supporters would need to be represented on Parochial Boards, School Boards and other public bodies. A perfect opportunity for this, seen by Angus Sutherland as a second stage in the 'democratisation' of the Highlands, following the election to Westminster of sympathetic MPs, came in early 1890 with the County Council elections.<sup>184</sup>

Although not yet covered by Highland historians of this period, County Council elections marked a further unmistakable assertion of an independent political spirit in

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<sup>181</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 2 Feb. 1889. The Act is often known as the 'Coercion Act'.

<sup>182</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 2 Mar. 1889

<sup>183</sup> See above, 226, for Gartimore's interest on 'infiltrating' other public bodies.

<sup>184</sup> The new County Councils were established in Scotland in 1889, a year later than, but along the same lines as, England. For the first time local government would be, theoretically, democratic, with all the ratepayers eligible to vote for their representatives. These representatives would take over from justices of the peace, commissioners of supply and the various other institutions, and the Sutherlandshire Association was able to flex its organisational muscles. See W. Ferguson, *Scotland 1689 to Present* (Edinburgh, 1968), 328. Ensor called the arrival of the County Councils 'one of the last fruitful results of deriving from the social idealism of the eighties.' Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, 295

Sutherlandshire, and other parts of the region.<sup>185</sup> In Parliament, debating the Local Government (Scotland) Bill, Sutherland made strong attempts, alongside Roderick MacDonald and Charles Fraser Mackintosh, to ensure the new councillors would be paid. If unpaid, owing to the large distances needed to be covered, crofters or other working people would not be able to attend meetings. He also attempted to ensure that the councils were representative as possible.<sup>186</sup> For the last ten weeks of 1889 he undertook yet another comprehensive tour of his constituency, organising the voters and stressing the importance of turning out for the ballot.<sup>187</sup>

The *Highland News*, in its new offices, continued its advocacy, in Michael Davitt's words, of 'land and labour'.<sup>188</sup> Emboldened, no doubt, by their experience in 1885 and 1886, as well as the exhortations of Sutherland, Gartimore and the *Highland News*, the 'democracy' of Sutherlandshire returned more councillors amenable to the Land League than any of the other crofting counties.<sup>189</sup>

Sutherland wasted no time in using this extra mandate for the Land League – presenting the Government with a demand from Sutherlandshire County Council that the Crofters' Act be amended.<sup>190</sup> Lack of pay, or even travel expenses, remained a concern, however. Perhaps mindful of the suggestions in 1885 that he would struggle to support himself if elected to Westminster, Sutherland called upon the urban Gaels

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<sup>185</sup> See, however, Cameron, *Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh*, 183-5, for a preliminary discussion.

<sup>186</sup> *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. xxxcccviii, 171 (11 Jul. 1889), 299, 337 (12 Jul. 1889), 431ff. (15 Jul. 1889), 575 (16 Jul. 1889)

<sup>187</sup> *Highland News*, 26 Oct. 1889 (Rogart), 16 Nov. 1889 (Various meetings), 7 Dec. 1889 (Various meetings), 14 Dec. 1889 (Golspie), 21 Dec. 1889 (Lairg).

<sup>188</sup> *Highland News*, 4 Jan. 1890. Angus Sutherland presided at a 'sumptuous feast' to celebrate the new *Highland News* office's official opening. Michael Davitt wrote that 'I am sorry that I cannot make it convenient to accept your invitation to supper at the new premises of the *Highland News*. If Inverness was within convenient distance I would willingly be present. I am glad to learn that the *News* is progressing, and that it is now about to enter upon a self reliant career in a city where Toryism in its new phase as "Liberal Unionism" is still able to misrepresent the capital of the highlands. Wishing the *Highland News* every success in its advocacy of land and labour, I remain, yours truly, Michael Davitt.' The *Highland News* ran biographies and portraits of Land League candidates, such as J.G. Mackay and Myles MacInnes. It praised G.G. Macleod, the Land League President, as being inspired by reading the *Highlander*, and being a loyal ally in supplying information to Angus Sutherland in the early days of the land agitation. *Highland News*, 11 Jan. 1890, 18 Jan. 1890

<sup>189</sup> Delighted, the *Highland News* gave a glowing assessment: 'Sutherland county is altogether democratic; Inverness-shire contains a substantial majority of Radicals and Land Reformers; Caithness and Ross have a small Liberal majority. Argyll – due to want of organisation and Tory representation in Parliament – is a landlord majority.' *Highland News*, 15 Feb. 1890

<sup>190</sup> *Highland News*, 14 Jun. 1890

to continue supporting their relatives and friends at home. It also gives an insight into how Sutherland did, indeed, manage to support himself as an unpaid representative.<sup>191</sup>

Although Sutherland's advocacy of Irish Home Rule became rather more muted than it had been in the previous decade, there was nonetheless much to keep him occupied in Parliament, mainly concerned with his constituency. The years 1890-92, however, saw a revived interest in the Highland land issue, especially in relation to assisted emigration, and Sutherland was naturally a prominent figure in the House of Commons during such debates. As might be expected, he was presented as a hero in the *Highland News*, which praised him as doing 'Yeoman work for the Highlands'.<sup>192</sup> After complaining to the Government that too much land was being devoted to raising wild animals, and that land redistribution should precede any emigration schemes, the *Highland News* proclaimed that 'coercion for the Highlands' had been defeated.

### **Tensions, rumours and splits in the land reform movement**

Ever since 1881-2, when he was the prime mover in the politicisation of the FCS, Sutherland courted controversy, and was a relatively easy target for those who accused him of self promotion and attempting to foist his Radicalism on less advanced crofters. This provided the stimulus for the intervention of John Mackay on behalf of the Marquis of Stafford in 1885, as well as the basis for Mackay himself standing against Sutherland in 1892. Between these dates, however, Sutherland faced opposition from various quarters. As would be expected, he continued to be criticised by Unionist and Tory newspapers and politicians, but he also became the victim of a whispering campaign within the Sutherlandshire Association itself, emanating, ironically, from Glasgow. Furthermore, in spite of the amalgamation of the disparate reform bodies into the Highland Land League, Sutherland and Gartimore attempted to keep the Sutherlandshire Association as independent as possible. This is not to be wondered at in that they had spent a lot of time and effort organising the

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<sup>191</sup> He asked if he could 'respectfully bring under the notice of your Association, as I have done on a former occasion, the pressing necessity of doing something to relieve the County Councillors of the burden – in addition to loss of time – of travelling expenses when sent from home, frequently for days at a time, on the business of the public. It is on the expectation of the representatives of the people, being poor men, and ultimately finding it impossible to bear the heavy burden, the old party of dominance base their hopes for the future. But they ought to be shown that it is not alone with the people at home that they have to deal in this most important matter, but with the Sutherlanders in towns as well'. *Highland News*, 27 Dec. 1890

<sup>192</sup> *Highland News*, 2 Aug. 1890

Sutherlandshire crofters, and had made remarkable progress getting them to support land reform and Gladstone's Home Rule scheme. They would not want this position to be undermined, or their power to be diluted. An even more basic reason could have been financial – the Sutherlandshire Association provided Sutherland with his income and travel expenses while in Parliament, and allowed him to be flexible in how funds should be put to best use. Merger with the other groups would inevitably lead to a wider redistribution of all the money coming in to the Land League.

A letter to the *Scottish Leader* early in 1887 indicated that the divisions seen during the 1885 and 1886 election campaigns had not been healed, with 'Democratic Radical' praising Sutherland for awakening the people of Sutherlandshire to their rights. He denied a recent press report that Sutherland and Gartiemore were attempting to have the Highlands represented entirely by 'Home Rulers', by moving Sutherland to the Inverness Burghs seat and fixing the other constituencies accordingly.<sup>193</sup>

At the same time, the Portskerra and Melvich crofters passed a motion condemning spurious letters to the press writing about discord between themselves and their MP.<sup>194</sup> Although there were periods of calm, the accusation that his constituents were not happy with Sutherland would recur frequently.<sup>195</sup> The main opposition to Sutherland, however, seems to have come from a clique of around sixty people within the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association, led by a Mr. M. Macleod, of Crosshill, Glasgow, who addressed a meeting in the city on the subject of 'The Death-Knell of the Helmsdale Caucus'.<sup>196</sup> No clear motives are given for the attack on Sutherland and Gartiemore, but regional jealousies within the county, a fear of Home Rule and / or Radicalism, or simply a fear of Sutherland's personal ambition, are all likely factors. A later attack, from 'Freelance', attacked Sutherland's pro-disestablishment ideology, but the letter also questioned why the member for Sutherlandshire should presume to speak for the whole of Scotland.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Quoted in *John O'Groat Journal*, 16 Mar. 1887. 'Democratic Radical' also stressed the independent nature of the Sutherlandshire agitation, and distinctiveness from other reform bodies.

<sup>194</sup> *Highland News*, 19 Mar. 1887

<sup>195</sup> *Highland News*, 31 Mar. 1888, 7 Apr. 1888.

<sup>196</sup> *Highland News*, 20 Jul. 1887, 27 Jul. 1887

<sup>197</sup> *Highland News*, 26 Nov. 1887



As irritating as this dissent was for Sutherland and Gartiemore, it does not seem to have dented his popularity within the constituency. Indeed, the self-confidence and self-reliance which the Sutherlandshire Association had built up, leading them to resent this outside interference, may even have reinforced Sutherland's popularity. This gives further proof of the success Sutherland achieved, in awakening the politically dormant Sutherlandshire crofters from his base in Glasgow, and within the space of five years having them so confident that they would resent attempts from the same city to influence them as 'outside interference'.

More damaging for Sutherland – if not for his Parliamentary position then for his subsequent reputation – was the ongoing tension between the Sutherlandshire Association and the rest of the Highland Land League. Indeed, any sympathy felt for Sutherland and Gartiemore about being the victims of rumour mongers should be mitigated by the fact that they, too, were adept at this political art. The apparent problems between Angus Sutherland and the Isle of Lewis (in fact one person, the Unionist Land Leaguer Alex Morison) continued, as did the strained relationship with the veteran Alexander Mackenzie. Add to this the refusal of Angus Sutherland to reconcile with the Duke of Sutherland, in spite of apparent overtures on the part of the latter, and severe attacks from both Unionists – who saw Sutherland as an arch Home-Ruler – and Highlanders who felt betrayed by Sutherland's role on the 'Deer Forest Commission', and the volume of antagonism towards him becomes clear.

Although Charles Fraser Mackintosh had voted against Irish Home Rule in 1886, leading to criticism from various quarters, he was still able to forge a common cause in Parliament with other Northern MPs, on some issues.<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, the sustained heavy criticism of the MP for Inverness-shire in the *Highland News* from 1886 to 1892 was hardly calculated to ensure good relations between him and Sutherland. Although Alexander Mackenzie thought that the vital importance of the land issue should take precedence, and therefore continued his support for Fraser Mackintosh, he too was tarred with the Unionist brush by Gartiemore and Sutherland. At the Highland Land League's Annual Convention in Stornoway in September 1889, for example,

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<sup>198</sup> The *Highland News* was, of course, Charles Fraser Mackintosh's most vociferous critic. Unease and anger was also expressed by his constituents in Skye. Cameron, *Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh*, 186, 194; *Scottish Highlander*, 29 Jul. 1886.

Mackenzie was accused by John Murdoch and Macleod of Gartiemore of running 'a Land League organ with Unionist money.'<sup>199</sup>

As late as November 1887, Sutherland and Mackenzie had been able to put what the latter referred to as 'trifling differences' to one side, in order to work together.<sup>200</sup> The trifling differences, however, became much more pronounced, tension continued to run high between the *Highland News* and the *Scottish Highlander*, and their political factions. This was exacerbated in 1892 when, expecting an unopposed election in Sutherlandshire, Gartiemore acted as election agent for Dr. Donald Macgregor – Fraser Mackintosh's opponent for the Inverness-shire seat.<sup>201</sup> The result was a demonisation of Sutherland's 'political factotum' in the pages of the *Scottish Highlander*.<sup>202</sup> After Macgregor had ousted Fraser Mackintosh from Parliament, there was unbounded gloating from the *Highland News*.<sup>203</sup>

At the meeting of the Highland Land League in Stornoway, Angus Sutherland had been notable by his absence. He had sent a letter of apology, but no reason was given for his not being there.<sup>204</sup> Although he had been in Parliament as late as August 28<sup>th</sup>, this does not explain his absence from Lewis, especially as he was appearing at meetings alongside Roderick MacDonald in Ross-shire later in September.<sup>205</sup> As such a prominent member, Sutherland must have been expected to attend the League's

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<sup>199</sup> *Highland News*, 14 Sep. 1889. This was a rather disingenuous suggestion, as noted by Mackenzie himself, who denied the accusation, and added that the *Scottish Highlander* was no more supported by Unionist money than Murdoch's *Highlander* had been. It was rescued, for example, by John Mackay in 1877. See above, 206, note 42

<sup>200</sup> Acting as chairman for Sutherland's speech to the Beauly's crofters, under the auspices of the local Liberals, Mackenzie praised Sutherland's loyalty to the land question, and stated that 'Mr. Angus Sutherland, who, like himself, was a poor crofters' son – aye, and who was proud of the fact – (cheers). Some of the Hon. Gentleman's forebears were evicted and burnt out of house and home by the Sutherland family during the first quarter of the present century, and now in its last quarter the Marquis of Stafford, the heir to the great dukedom, had been evicted by this poor crofters' son from the representation of the county of which his father was the owner – (loud cheers). Mr Sutherland had, not only since he went to Parliament, but, many years before, rendered splendid service to the cause, not alone of the people of Sutherland but the whole Highland race.' *Highland News*, 26 Nov. 1887

<sup>201</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 11 Feb. 1892 (Gartiemore in Long Island); *Highland News*, 5 Mar. 1892; In Barra, Gartiemore advocated an alliance of crofters, South of Scotland agricultural labourers, East coast fishermen and Irish smallholders. *Scottish Highlander*, 3 Mar. 1892

<sup>202</sup> See *Scottish Highlander*, 24 Mar. 1892 for a very anti-Gartiemore editorial.

<sup>203</sup> Cameron, *Fraser Mackintosh*, 8, 194-195; *Highland News*, 16 Jul. 1892

<sup>204</sup> *Highland News*, 14 Sep. 1889

<sup>205</sup> *Highland News*, 28 Sep. 1889; *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccxl, 739 (28 Aug. 1889, Sutherland asking about the Crofters' Holdings Act.); *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. cccxl, 1522 (28 Aug. 1889, Sutherland discussing the treatment of unconvicted prisoners in Scotland.)

annual convention, and his failure to do so may be interpreted as part of the ongoing feud he was having with Alex Morison.

Just as in 1887, Sutherland appears to have had a somewhat irrational fear as to the hold one man had over the general population of the Island of Lewis. Having committed heresy – in the eyes of the Sutherlandshire Association and many other crofting organisations – in welcoming Joseph Chamberlain to Lewis, Morison was subjected to frequent attacks in the *Highland News*. Indeed, the whole Island of Lewis was sometimes presented as being riddled with Unionists and Primrose Leaguers, often to the bemusement, or amusement, of the Islanders themselves.<sup>206</sup>

That one man – with a handful of adherents – could provoke such opprobrium is once more indicative of the Sutherlandshire Association's intolerance of alternative political views. With a siege mentality often bordering on paranoia, making enemies was no concern of theirs as long as they maintained a monolithic unity within their own organisation. If, as was asserted in 1890, Morison was the 'sole exponent' of Unionism in Lewis, why was the fear so strong?<sup>207</sup>

The same was true of Angus Sutherland's relationship with Dunrobin Castle. Perhaps the longest standing of Sutherland's enemies, the Duke of Sutherland appeared to take a conciliatory manner towards the county MP after Sutherland assumed the mantle from the Marquis of Stafford.<sup>208</sup> This in itself is notable – from his earliest days as an agitator Sutherland had used history against the Ducal House to stir up the crofters. He had forced the resignation of the Master of Blantyre in 1882, taking over himself as President of the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association. He had, before the Napier Commission, accused the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of reneging on promises, and he had battled with his son in a general election.

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<sup>206</sup> See, (e.g.) *Highland News*, 5 Mar. 1887, 7 Sep. 1889, 26 Mar. 1892

<sup>207</sup> An interview with Morison was carried in *Highland News*, 16 Nov. 1889. Kellas, following Crowley, alludes to tension between Morison and Roderick MacDonald in the aftermath of Chamberlain's visit in 1887. The feud with the Sutherlandshire Association, however, was far deeper and longer lasting. J.G. Kellas, 'The Liberal Party in Scotland, 1885-1895.' (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of London, 1961), 259

<sup>208</sup> The Marquis of Stafford became the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Sutherland in 1893.

For all that has been said about Sutherland becoming an establishment figure, however, he was not able to betray his instincts, and a deep distrust – even hatred – which had built up since his childhood, by accepting the Duke’s offer of friendship. In renouncing his right to the harbour at Helmsdale in 1889, the Duke requested that Sutherland call on him.<sup>209</sup> This offer led to at least one veteran land reformer saying that the Duke’s actions ‘could not be sufficiently commended’, but Sutherland was unmoved.<sup>210</sup> Although they eventually buried their differences sufficiently to form a joint deputation to Lord Lothian in order to seek funding for the proposed Lochinver Railway, Sutherland remained critical of the way the landowners had procrastinated over development in the county.<sup>211</sup>

Given the strength of opinion in the Sutherlandshire Association – at this time the one body Sutherland could rely on for support – any reconciliation with the House of Sutherland would have been most impolitic.<sup>212</sup> Angus Sutherland had built up the organisation on a platform centred on opposition to the Duke, and any dilution of this – even if he was inclined – would have led to bewilderment among the members. Proof that he was not inclined to do so, regardless of political considerations, was that even after twelve years as an administrator rather than an agitator, Sutherland was still to be found criticising the policy of the Sutherland estate.<sup>213</sup>

As an enthusiastic Home Ruler, of course, this was one area in which Sutherland was sure to make enemies was amongst Unionists. His popularity within Liberal circles ensured that this particular enmity transcended the Highlands, and indeed Scotland. His activity in Parliament, the *Highland News* noted proudly in 1892, caused him to be ‘cordially hated’ by the Unionists.<sup>214</sup> In 1888, the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union had published a pamphlet entitled *What Scotchmen Think of Socialistic Home Rulers*.<sup>215</sup> Its first section, mentioning Sutherland by name, attempted to show links

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<sup>209</sup> *Highland News*, 21 Sep. 1889

<sup>210</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 3 Oct. 1889. The comment was made by the Liverpool based ‘Lochbroom’.

<sup>211</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 26 May 1892; *Highland News*, 21 May 1892

<sup>212</sup> A meeting of the Halladale branch in 1893, congratulated themselves on their radicalism, and recalled how the branch was formed, ‘for the purpose of throwing off the yoke of landlordism and teaching the people some higher doctrine than ‘God Bless the Duke of Sutherland.’ *Highland News*, 18 Mar. 1893

<sup>213</sup> *Land Values*, Mar. 1906; *Glasgow Herald*, 24 Feb. 1906

<sup>214</sup> *Highland News*, 2 Apr. 1892

<sup>215</sup> Working Class Movement Library, Salford. ILPU Leaflets. ‘Radical Unionist’, *What Scotchmen Think of Socialistic Home Rulers* (Dublin, 1888)

between socialists, nationalists and crofters, saying that the Highland crofters were being deluded by the same ‘pernicious school’ that had long influenced Irish smallholders.<sup>216</sup> Although his SLRL activity had lapsed by this stage, and he had no part in the agitation which led to the birth of the Scottish Labour Party in 1888, his identification with Home Rule politics still allowed Sutherland to be vilified as an extremist.<sup>217</sup>

Again, however, these attacks simply strengthened his hand further amongst his constituents, and indeed the *Highland News* knew it was on safe ground by playing up Unionist opposition for all it was worth. Even when the Tories were involved in Highland, rather than the Irish, policies in Parliament, they were presented as Unionists indulging in the same sort of coercion as they had done in Ireland. In moving an amendment to the Crofters’ Act aimed at enlarging crofters’ holdings, for example, Sutherland was ‘talked out’ by the Tories.<sup>218</sup> Indignantly, the *Highland News* reported that the ‘Unionists... keep the land for the deer.’<sup>219</sup>

It was Unionism, and the belief that there should be some voice for the effectively disenfranchised Unionists of Sutherlandshire, that led to the 1892 election being contested in the county. Gartimore, as has been noted, had committed himself already to supporting Donald Macgregor’s candidacy when rumours began to circulate that John Mackay of Hereford would take a more direct role against Sutherland than he had done seven years earlier.<sup>220</sup> The reaction to this rumour was

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<sup>216</sup> Railing against the break-up of successful large farms to distribute among unproductive small farmers, ‘Radical Unionist’ argued that: ‘It is clear as daylight. The land must be taken from these prosperous farmers and parcelled out amongst the small tenants, who will thus be enabled to stay a few years longer in the district, instead of going away to other countries, where plenty of unoccupied land is to be had for very little. This is not an exaggerated picture; it is simply a description of what would happen every day if the O’Briens, Tanners, Dr. Camerons, Sutherlands, Healys and Cunninghame Grahams were allowed to have their own way.’

<sup>217</sup> Furthermore, the Scottish Land Restoration Union, as it was now known, continued its close interest in the Highlands, and its attempt to influence the Highland Land League. Although Sutherland was trying to unite the cause of the crofters with that of the Liberal Party, he was nevertheless ‘guilty by association’ with the more left wing elements, many of his long standing friends being involved. Having been present at the Highland Land League’s annual conference in Portree in 1892, John Ferguson arranged for the 1893 event to take place in Glasgow. Alongside many Restoration League veterans and ‘Single Taxers’, such as Macrae, McLardy, Murdoch and Cruikshank, Ferguson told the organising committee that he had been ‘surprised and delighted’ at how advanced the 1892 conference had been. *Highland News*, 27 May 1893, 12 Aug. 1893, 16 Sep. 1893

<sup>218</sup> *Highland News*, 19 Mar. 1892

<sup>219</sup> *Highland News*, 26 Mar. 1892

<sup>220</sup> *Highland News*, 13 Feb. 1892 described ‘kite-flying in Sutherlandshire’.



both threatening and derisive. ‘Radical Boy’ suggested that Mackay need not visit Helmsdale as a petition there in favour of finding a Unionist candidate had yielded only five names, and ‘as for Mr. Mackay he is a turncoat and if he wants to live in peace and prosperity he had better stay away from Sutherlandshire...’<sup>221</sup> After a Unionist denial that the petition had received only five signatures, the *Highland News* replied, ‘did Mr. Mackay’s petition get more or less than the number stated, or indeed any at all!’<sup>222</sup>

Mackay was initially adopted as an ‘Independent Radical’ at a meeting in Lairg, but as time progressed he was universally seen as a Unionist candidate.<sup>223</sup> His address, which spoke of the integrity of the Empire, the extension of Local Government, and safety for Ulster Protestants, served to reinforce the Unionist tag.<sup>224</sup> Sutherland, on the other hand, showed signs of his increasing reliance on his constituents as his main source of political support by concentrating entirely on local issues, in his manifesto.<sup>225</sup> His confidence – both in his own popularity and the effectiveness of the political machinery in Sutherlandshire – is also shown by the fact that he waited until the last moment before heading north to canvass,

However, apart from the poor reception generally afforded to Mackay, there was little outright bitterness in this campaign.<sup>226</sup> Although Mackay was supported by the *Scottish Highlander*, which suggested that the Marquis of Stafford’s support for the Unionist could swing the election his way, the campaign was a rather lacklustre affair.<sup>227</sup> Sutherland’s position amongst his own constituents was so strong that there was little chance of a change in representation.<sup>228</sup> Indeed the most bitter comments

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<sup>221</sup> *Highland News*, 27 Feb. 1892

<sup>222</sup> *Highland News*, 12 Mar. 1892

<sup>223</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 2 Jun. 1892, 30 Jun. 1892

<sup>224</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 7 Jul. 1892

<sup>225</sup> *Highland News*, 11 Jun. 1892

<sup>226</sup> *Highland News*, 18 Jun. 1892, 2 Jul. 1892. It was reported that Mackay was hissed wherever he went, and that he received a ‘saddening’ reception in Golspie. A few months later, the Rogart branch of the Sutherlandshire Association gathered to present prizes to successful scholars. ‘The teacher called for three cheers for John Mackay, Hereford, which was responded to in what was called a “half hearted” manner. One of the senior pupils then called for three cheers for Angus Sutherland, MP, and Mr. Gladstone, which were heartily responded to.’ *Highland News*, 1 Apr. 1893

<sup>227</sup> *Scottish Highlander*, 11 Feb. 1892

<sup>228</sup> Sutherland received 1453 votes to Mackay’s 697: *Highland News*, 16 Jul. 1892; *Scottish Highlander*, 14 Jul. 1892

from the Sutherland camp were to blame Mackay for creating the expense of an unnecessary contest.<sup>229</sup>

If Sutherlandshire was secure, however, Sutherland still faced severe attacks from elsewhere in the Highlands. At the end of 1892, both he and Gartimore were appointed to sit on the *Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands)*, which became known as the Deer Forest Commission.<sup>230</sup> The Liberals claimed that they had already decided to give more land to the crofters – the point of the Commission was to decide which land it should be. The reaction to the members of the Commission was a neat reversal of that which greeted the Napier Commission in the previous decade, and a ‘wholesale attack on the property rights of landowners’ was predicted.<sup>231</sup> Conversely, however, this negative reaction probably also meant that the expectations of the crofters became unattainably high, given the limited scope of the Commissioners’ remit. The fame Sutherland and Gartimore enjoyed as Radicals, added to their new position as Commissioners, further heightened these expectations.<sup>232</sup>

While Sutherland’s line in questioning was not by any means, pro-landlord, frustration at the lack of tangible progress seems to have burst into the public domain in 1894, mainly from Skye. It is mainly from resolutions passed in two meetings in Skye, however, that this reputation sprang. A group of crofters from Staffin passed a censure motion on Sutherland, rather vaguely citing his ‘recent actions with the Deer Forest Commission’.<sup>233</sup> More detail was provided by the Glendale crofters, who reported that:

They were aware that for some time past they had been patiently waiting for the report of the Deer Forest Commission... the result of

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<sup>229</sup> A letter from ‘HCG’, possibly H.C. Gillies, demanded that Mackay should repay Sutherland’s election expenses. *Highland News*, 30 Jul. 1892.

<sup>230</sup> The Commission was the first manifestation of the new Government’s Highland policy. Gladstone and the Liberals had returned to power in 1892, and the Royal commission was set up to ‘Inquire whether any, and if any what, land... now occupied for the purpose of a deer forest, grouse moor, or other sporting purposes, or for grazing not in the occupation of crofters or other small tenants, is capable of being cultivated to profit or otherwise advantageously occupied by crofters or other small tenants’. See Cameron, *Land for the People?*, 77; *Highland News*, 4 Feb. 1892; *Report of the Royal Commission on the Highlands and Islands*, PP 1895, xxxviii, v.

<sup>231</sup> Cameron, *Land for the People?*, 78; The reaction of the *Scotsman* was carried in *Highland News*, 10 Dec. 1892

<sup>232</sup> Sutherland even chaired the Royal Commission on a number of occasions.

<sup>233</sup> *Highland News*, 24 Mar. 1894

which was very disappointing... Through the fault of Angus Sutherland, MP, who for a number of years, pretended to be a friend of the Highland people, and at the same time betrayed the confidence reposed in him. When that report, which was most desirable to be published, was on the verge of being so it was suppressed by the single casting vote of Mr. Sutherland, he being chairman on that occasion. An ill omen for the Highlands! He seemed proud of his position that day, when he voted with the Tory and landlord party and against his own Highland friends and his own colleagues.<sup>234</sup>

This was followed up by the remarkable statement that they should not be surprised by Angus Sutherland's actions, for if they had followed him since joining the House of Commons they would not have heard of him doing any good for the Highlands. The main decision made by this meeting, however, was over whether to ally with 'their tried friends in the HLLRA', or with the Land League 'of which Mr. Sutherland was a leading light.' The reform movement had 'irrevocably split' the previous Autumn, and the decision of the Glendale men to ally with Donald MacFarlane's reconstituted HLLRA was not simply a result of Sutherland's role on the Deer Forest Commission.<sup>235</sup> A whole range of regional and political tensions – many of them exacerbated by the Sutherlandshire Association – had come into play. Sutherland did not believe that simply turning all the deer forests over to the crofters would be to their benefit. Much of the land in question was unsuitable for cultivation by crofters, either because of infertile soil or altitude. What the Commission did do was recommend that large amounts of grazing, and some arable, be given over to the crofters. Through no fault of their own, these recommendations were not taken up by the Government.<sup>236</sup>

In spite of the positive spin put on Sutherland's time as an MP by the *Highland News*, which claimed that 'even among those who were opposed to his opinions and policy on public questions, he was personally held in the highest respect', there is no doubt that this was a man whose unwillingness to compromise or allow for diverse opinions made many enemies.<sup>237</sup> And yet, the reason for his subsequent poor reputation, that he

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<sup>234</sup> *Highland News*, 10 Mar. 1894

<sup>235</sup> Hunter, 'Politics of Highland land reform', 63; *Scotsman*, 21 Sep. 1893; As if to mirror the accusation against Angus Sutherland in Glendale, Donald MacFarlane was referred to as a 'Tory' in the *Highland News*. See *Highland News*, 18 Nov. 1893

<sup>236</sup> E.A. Cameron, 'The Influence of Highland Landowners: A Reassessment', *Northern Scotland* xiv (1994), 33

<sup>237</sup> *Highland News*, 6 Oct. 1894

‘sold out’ the crofters, is somewhat unfair. His actions on behalf of his Sutherlandshire constituents, and his unbending popularity in the area, bear witness to this.

### **Sutherland’s relations with the Sutherlandshire crofters**

Tensions with other groups of reformers, and unionists, notwithstanding, Sutherland appears to have enjoyed extremely good relations with his constituents right down to his retirement from Parliament in 1894. The gushing reports of the *Highland News* naturally lead to a suspicion of their veracity, but the overwhelming victory Sutherland secured in 1892 – against a man who seems to have been the original favourite for the candidature in 1885 – tends to suggest the popular image of the man was fairly accurate.<sup>238</sup>

The most notable example from the Sutherland crofters of the esteem felt for their MP, had been the presentation of a ‘beautifully illuminated Gaelic address’, and a purse containing a hundred sovereigns, at a large meeting in Bonar Bridge in 1889.<sup>239</sup> The speeches made at this gathering charted the progress made in political organisation, and the ‘work yet to be done’. This idea of a common cause, and of MP and crofters making progress together, characterised Sutherland’s speeches from a very early stage.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> The following gleeful comment of the *Highland News* after the declaration of the poll in 1892 marks a vindication both of Sutherland personally, and his policies: ‘The Tories in the constituency have received a heavy and final fall; and they are objects of pity, as well as contempt, to their opponents. With their heaven sent candidate – a Gaelic speaking Highlander, a native of the county, who trudged through the whole constituency, hat in hand, begging for votes from door to door, with every device that perverted ingenuity could invent, they have actually polled 24 more votes than were given in 1886 to a man who drove in at one end of the county and out at the other, and was never seen there before or since...’ *Highland News*, 16 Jul. 1892

<sup>239</sup> *Highland News*, 15 Sep. 1889

<sup>240</sup> The clearest manifestations of support came, perhaps expectedly, when there were rumours of discord or public attacks on Sutherland. Resolutions passed in Stoer in response to anti-Sutherland jibes stated that Sutherland’s actions in the House of Commons had been ‘many and heroic’, and expressed confidence in him. In September of that year, a joint meeting of Dornoch and Rogart Sutherlandshire Associations passed a motion of ‘unabated confidence’ in their MP. *Highland News*, 31 Mar. 1888; *Highland News*, 22 Sep. 1889; *Scottish Highlander*, 12 Sep. 1889, 19 Sep. 1889; *Highland News*, 29 Jun. 1889 *Highland News*, 20 Jul. 1889. A resolution was passed subsequently that ‘this meeting, while not interfering with the unpleasant controversy existing in the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association, views with indignation the attack made by so-called friends in Glasgow on Mr. Angus Sutherland, MP, and desire to record their unabated confidence in him for his disinterested exertions on behalf of his fellow countrymen.’ The Glasgow men, especially M. Macleod, were further condemned for ‘poisoning the air’ by the Stoer crofters. *Highland News*, 20 Jul. 1889, 27 Jul. 1889

Although Sutherlandshire Association branches – which by the end of 1890 numbered twenty five, claiming three thousand individual members – tended to be in favour of Home Rule, following Sutherland's strong lead, it is for his constituency work that he was most praised.<sup>241</sup> In the controversial months after the split between the Highland Land League and the HLLRA, Sutherland spoke out against those in Glasgow who had 'misrepresented and abused them', while John Wilson, the MP for Govan, repaid Sutherland's assistance during the 1889 by-election campaign by assuring onlookers that 'so long as their native county was represented by Mr. Sutherland, they might rely on the Highlanders and their cause being ably represented.'<sup>242</sup>

Even in the face of barbed criticism from Skye, the rank and file of the Sutherlandshire Association rallied around its leader. The Lairg branch condemned a Tory paper which 'came down with its mighty sledgehammer on the devoted head of Mr. Sutherland'.<sup>243</sup> The Edinburgh branch called for the hearty support of all members for their MP, and even Myles MacInnes, the Secretary of the Skye Land League, who had received support from Sutherland and Gartimore during the County Council election campaign in 1890, regretted that 'their friends in Glendale forgot what Mr. Sutherland did for them when in prison at the first stages of our movement.'<sup>244</sup>

Although the split in the land reform movement became more serious, there were fewer personal attacks on Sutherland in his final few months as an MP. Indeed, when

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<sup>241</sup> Figures given in *Highland News*, 1 Nov. 1890. When giving evidence to the Committee on Colonisation and Emigration, he was said to be doing 'yeoman work'. In spite of external criticism later for his lukewarm advocacy of the crofters during the course of the Deer Forest Commission, he repeatedly lobbied Lord Lothian, who had succeeded Balfour as Scottish Secretary in March 1887, for development in Sutherlandshire, touching on areas such as railways, harbours, sanitation and the usefulness of the Crofters' Commission to the county. From being a 'yeoman', Sutherland was now described as 'working like a Trojan for his constituents'. His profile was also assisted by spending every winter of his tenure of the seat making extensive tours of the constituency. Even after Sutherland's appointment to the Deer Forest Commission, he remained in close contact with his constituents, either in person or through Gartimore or the *Highland News*. *Highland News*, 2 Aug. 1890, 28 Feb., 27 Jul., 28 Mar. 1891. The *Highland News* also carried two separate articles in one edition in March 1893, one describing how Sutherland had attended a dinner at the house of Sir George Trevelyan, another telling readers that Trevelyan had granted £1,000 to Sutherlandshire County Council for roads and bridges. A subtle indication of Sutherland lobbying on behalf of the county. *Highland News*, 4 Mar. 1893

<sup>242</sup> *Highland News*, 27 Jan. 1894

<sup>243</sup> *Highland News*, 10 Mar. 1894

<sup>244</sup> *Highland News*, 7 Apr. 1894, 14 Apr. 1894



Sutherland was elevated to the Chairmanship of the Fishery Board for Scotland in 1894, the ultimate test of loyalty and faith the crofters of Sutherlandshire had for him, and the political machinery he had put in place – would be in the subsequent by-election. Upon Sutherland's appointment, John Macleod of Gartimore, writing in the *Highland News*, noted that it would be premature to discuss the vacancy, adding that the people of Sutherland 'may be fully trusted to act with the same courage and far-reaching sagacity which have hitherto been the outstanding feature of all their past political action'. As it was, once John Macleod of Gartimore had been selected as a candidate there was not even a contest, such was the strength of the Association's organisation, and the belief in its principles.<sup>245</sup>

### **Angus Sutherland – From agitator to administrator**

It has been suggested that his performance on the Royal Commission had persuaded the Government that Sutherland would be a 'safe pair of hands' for the Fishery Board. The amount of time that Sutherland spent with the Royal Commission did, indeed, demonstrate a degree of conscientiousness, as well as an ability to detach himself from his past – much to the chagrin of the Skye crofters. Moreover, it demonstrated a continuing concern for the situation of the Highlands and its people, but it also forced a change in his political commitments. To state that 'as time went on', he tended 'to agree with the landlords' is to be unfair on Sutherland, as is witnessed by his questioning of MacLeod of MacLeod, but he seems to have emerged with a more mature – perhaps realistic – attitude towards public policy in the Highlands.<sup>246</sup>

Certainly, Sutherland disengaged from radical politics at this time. Reports show that Macleod of Gartimore gradually took over many of Sutherland's responsibilities relating to the Sutherlandshire Association, or 'Sutherlandshire Land League' as its political wing was known by this time, even though Angus Sutherland remained Honorary President.<sup>247</sup> It is also apparent that although veteran Single Taxers such as John Ferguson, David McLardy and, inevitably, John Murdoch, retained a high profile in the Highland Land League, Sutherland's importance owed as much to his reputation as to his actions during 1893 and 1894. His final major event as MP for

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<sup>245</sup> *Highland News*, 27 Oct. 1894

<sup>246</sup> MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 221; *Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands, 1892), Report and Evidence, 1895*, q. 5643ff.

<sup>247</sup> *Highland News*, 4 Nov. 1893, 5 Feb. 1894

Sutherlandshire is a case in point. The Eleventh Annual Convention of the Highland Land League took place in his own constituency, at Bonar Bridge, on September, Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 13<sup>th</sup>, 1894.<sup>248</sup> Apparently absent throughout Wednesday's session, Sutherland chaired an outdoor demonstration on Thursday, but gave a very brief and bland speech, relating to the general state of the land question. The lack of conviction was only emphasised by John Ferguson, who followed Sutherland with a demand that 'what the Highland people wanted was not merely reductions of rent, not allotments with a heavy purchase price to the landlords, but that the land should be restored to the people to whom it had belonged, and from whom it had either been stolen or usurped.' This is the kind of rhetoric Sutherland had been using throughout his career and yet now, possibly knowing he was ending his time as MP for the county, he left the fiery speeches for others.

It is likely that, by the time of the 1894 Bonar Bridge Conference, Sutherland at least had an inkling of his imminent change in position. Even so, external factors played a part in reshaping his political outlook. The accession of a new Duke of Sutherland and the retirement of the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, both occurred in the space of a few months in 1893-94. The new Duke, formerly the Marquis of Stafford – Sutherland's opponent in the 1885 election – seemed keen to further the conciliatory overtures his father had been making to the crofters, and indeed offered them a land purchase scheme.<sup>249</sup> Although the reputation for oppression gained over the previous century haunted the House of Sutherland for some time, emphasised especially by the *Highland News*, it seemed that real concessions might finally be gained from Dunrobin. Strong speeches were still being made against the Duke, but it was left to John Murdoch, Sutherland's 'political father', to make them.<sup>250</sup>

In the wider political arena, Gladstone's retirement was far from unexpected, being by then 85 years of age, his sight and hearing failing, and his Second Irish Home Rule Bill having been thwarted by the House of Lords.<sup>251</sup> Sutherland had continued to

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<sup>248</sup> *Highland News*, 15 Sep. 1894

<sup>249</sup> MacPhail, *Crofters' War*, 160

<sup>250</sup> See *Highland News*, 4 Nov. 1893 (Murdoch accused one of the Duke's factors of lying before the Royal Commission), 11 Nov. 1893 (attack on the House of Sutherland at Loth.). The *Highland News* also carried on the vendetta, culminating in the paper assisting a large memorial meeting on the centenary of the Kildonan Clearances. *Highland News*, 20 Apr. 1912, 18 Oct. 1913, 8 Aug. 1914

<sup>251</sup> *Highland News*, 10 Mar. 1894; Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, 214; Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister* 555-561; R. Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London, 1995), 615

support the Liberals loyally throughout 1892 and 1893, and in spite of his indifferent health, Sutherland was also committed enough to the Liberal cause that he forewent holidays in order to support candidates elsewhere in Scotland. In Spring 1892, for example, he supported Alexander Young in the Stewartry of Kirkudbright by speaking on consecutive nights in Kirkpatrick-Durham, Kirkbean, Southwick, Colvend and Newabbey.<sup>252</sup> A fortnight later he was performing the same service for Thomas McKee, standing for Dumfriesshire, speaking in Ecclefechan.<sup>253</sup> 1893 saw a similar concentrated operation in Banffshire.<sup>254</sup> Inside the House of Commons, however, he had become less prominent, maintaining virtual silence on the Home Rule Bill, even in extra-Parliamentary speeches, in a total contrast to 1886. When the vote came for the Scottish Home Rule Bill, Sutherland was not even in Parliament.<sup>255</sup>

As a loyal Gladstonian, it seems likely that Angus Sutherland was one of those who felt rather suspicious of Rosebery, the new Prime Minister. Ensor has argued of Rosebery that:

The fighters in his own camp never liked him, and least of all the dominant nonconformists, in whom as a Whig aristocrat and an owner of race horses he inspired an instinctive distrust. Besides he was nothing if not an Imperialist. And already dislike of the aggressive note, which Imperialism came to strike in the nineties, was driving the majority of Liberal stalwarts in the opposite direction.<sup>256</sup>

With Irish Nationalism in rather a moribund state after the O'Shea scandal, and Parnell's death, Sutherland had become somewhat disillusioned with life as a Parliamentarian.

Until the news broke about his promotion to the Scottish Fishery Board, there were no clear signs – other than this previously uncharacteristic lack of zeal – that Sutherland was seeking a way out of politics, and it would be unwise to suggest he was doing so.

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<sup>252</sup> *Highland News*, 16 Apr. 1892

<sup>253</sup> *Highland News*, 7 May 1892

<sup>254</sup> *Highland News*, 18 Mar. 1893 reported how Angus Sutherland had addressed meetings in Keith, Dufftown, Aberlour, Craigellachie, 'rousing the Liberal voters.' It added that 'Mr. Sutherland's health stood the strain of three meetings a day, with intermediate travelling, wonderfully well, considering his recent severe illness.'

<sup>255</sup> *Highland News*, 1 Jul. 1893. It was reported, however, that Sutherland had at least 'paired' for the vote.

<sup>256</sup> Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, 215-6

It is likely, however, that the above factors played a part in making up his mind to quit once the opportunity arose, but more concrete considerations also came into play. He was a man, as has been seen, of frequently poor health. The Liberals with whom he had thrown in his lot looked likely to be defeated at the next general election, which was imminent, even though his own position in Sutherlandshire was as secure as ever. He could not, of course, foresee that the Liberals would be out of power until 1905, but when a permanent, powerful position, related to something in which he had shown great interest – the sea – and with a good salary became available, it was hardly something he could turn down.

### **Edward McHugh and Angus Sutherland after the Highland agitation**

A new chapter commenced in McHugh's life in 1889, as he became become involved, again with Richard McGhee, with the Glasgow dock labourers. Gallagher states that progress only began to be made in the Glasgow dockers' movement when 'two Ulstermen, Edward McHugh and Richard McGhee, began to build up the non-sectarian National Union of Dock Labourers'.<sup>257</sup> Moody makes a brief mention of an 'Ulsterman, McHugh', and another recent author misnames him as 'John McHugh', but thanks to the work of Eric Taplin, this is the best documented period of McHugh's life.<sup>258</sup> In writing to Richard McGhee after he and McHugh had extended their organisation of dockers from Glasgow to Liverpool, Michael Davitt stated that he was sure 'the poor capitalists of Liverpool were in for a hard time.'<sup>259</sup> The involvement of McHugh and McGhee in the Dockers' dispute was, indeed, so intense that George

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<sup>257</sup> T. Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace* (Manchester, 1987), 31

<sup>258</sup> T.W. Moody, 'Michael Davitt and the British labour movement', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, iii, (1953), 67; W. Kenefick, 'A struggle for control: The importance of the great unrest at Glasgow harbour, 1911 to 1912', in W. Kenefick & A. MacIvor (eds.), *Roots of Red Clydeside, 1910-1914?* (Edinburgh, 1996), 131; E.L. Taplin, *Liverpool Dockers and Seamen, 1870-1890* (Hull, 1974); E.L. Taplin, *The Dockers' Union* (Leicester, 1985); E.L. Taplin, 'Irish Leaders and the Liverpool Dockers: Richard McGhee and Edward McHugh', in *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, ix (1983-4), 36-44; A. Shallice, 'Liverpool Labourism and Irish Nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s', in *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, viii (1982-3), 21; W.H. Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism, 1700-1998* (Basingstoke, 1999), 75; Most recently, see W. Kenefick, 'Rebellious and Contrary', *the Glasgow Dockers c.1853-1932* (East Linton, 2000), 183-209

<sup>259</sup> Moody, 'Davitt and the British labour movement', 67. (Davitt to McGhee, 28 Nov. 1889); W.H. Fraser, 'Trades Councils in the Labour Movement in Nineteenth Century Scotland', in I. MacDougall (ed.), *Essays in Scottish Labour History* (Edinburgh, 1978), 8; G. Brown, *Sabotage* (Nottingham, 1977), 3

began to worry that they had been lost to the Single Tax movement and had instead embraced Socialism.<sup>260</sup>

Even in this industrial context, however, far removed from the bucolic scenes McHugh had encountered in Skye, the land and its inequitable distribution were blamed for the poor condition of the union members. The first *Rules* produced for the NUDL stated that it was a basic tenet of the Union that 'All Men are Brothers.'<sup>261</sup> In their executive report for the second half of 1892, moreover, McHugh and McGhee gave a clear statement of their beliefs.<sup>262</sup>

As he was commencing the dockers' agitation in Glasgow in 1889, McHugh also undertook his one and only dalliance with organised politics.<sup>263</sup> In spite of some of his close colleagues entering local politics – most notably John Ferguson, who entered Glasgow Town Council in 1893, going on to achieve high office, McHugh did not see that as the best channel for his energies. When, some years later, he was invited to

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<sup>260</sup> In a letter to his son, Henry George Jr., on 22 May 1891, George complained that 'Socialism had taken away most of his London adherents, and he was not sure what effect the dock strike had had on McHugh and McGhee.' Quoted in J.R. Frame, 'America and the Scottish Left: the impact of American ideas on the Scottish Labour Movement', (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Aberdeen University, 1998), 115

<sup>261</sup> Rules of the National Union of Dock Labourers, 1889, Rule XVII (Quoted in E.L. Taplin, 'Irish Leaders and Liverpool Dockers', 43).

<sup>262</sup> After an account of how wealth was unequally distributed between the workers and the 'idlers', and a brief history of the labour movement, the members were told that 'nature provides us with every element necessary to supply in abundance our social and material wants. The only thing required is to give to the labour force access to the land – the store house of all wealth... At present, the land of both town and country is monopolised by a small class who only permit its use on terms fixed by themselves... How this monopoly on land presses upon every form of industry may be seen by the statement of a few facts. Our iron industry is burdened by an annual royalty charge of about four million pounds sterling, the coal industry by about seven millions, copper ore, zinc, tin, lead, salt, shale, clay, slate, and stones, about another two millions, giving a total of about thirteen millions to be paid to land monopolists as royalties.' *National Union of Dock Labourers in Great Britain and Ireland, Report of the Executive for half-year ending 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1892* (Glasgow, 1893), 14-15

<sup>263</sup> In addition to showing his tireless agitating style, the following – almost hagiographical – extract from an account of his life in *Land Values*, sheds some light on his sense of priorities. 'In 1889 he stood as a candidate for the Town Council of Glasgow on pure single tax lines. He left no-one in any doubt as to the platform upon which he stood. He wanted the value of the land – every penny of it – for public purposes and thereby make the workers' industry and earnings free from the annual visit of the rate collector. In the idle acres in and around the city he boldly declared was to be found the one and only solution to the housing question. During the contest we have known him to speak at half a dozen meetings from early morning till midnight, take a supply of paste and electioneering posters and all through the silent night place them up in prominent positions throughout the ward. At the beginning of the campaign he continued to work for fifty hours on end and then in his best form addressed a meeting of the dock labourers convened to consider some particularly annoying grievance. He did not win the election; he did not care to win. What he was out for he achieved, namely to impress as many as he could reach the urgent need for local rating of land values'. *Land Values*, May 1915. See also Kenefick, *Rebellious and Contrary*, 190



stand in the Liberal interest in the Kirkdale division of Liverpool, he refused, stating that he was not a politician. When asked what on earth, then, he was, he simply said, 'I'm an agitator'.<sup>264</sup>

McHugh was despatched to New York by the Sailors' and Firemen's Union in 1896, and in October, with Henry George's help, he helped to found the American Longshoremen's Union.<sup>265</sup> He was, indeed, with George when the American died suddenly of a stroke on the eve of the 1897 Mayoralty election in New York.<sup>266</sup> With the Longshoremen's Union eventually growing into branches based at New York, Brooklyn, Hoboka, Jersey City, Baltimore and Philadelphia, their slogan bore the hallmark of their President: 'Free Land and Free Men - the Single Tax.'<sup>267</sup>

Returning from America, McHugh settled once more with his family in Birkenhead, and continued to spread the Single Tax message throughout the north of England, whilst John Ferguson led a similar campaign as a part of Glasgow City council.<sup>268</sup> Some twenty six years after he had first set foot on Skye, McHugh was to return to the Hebrides and Highlands in 1908 on behalf of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values.<sup>269</sup> Interestingly, the terms used in *Land Values* prior to this visit could have been used in 1882:

The land agitation in the Highlands is rapidly spreading. The cottars want the use of enough land upon which to live in decency and comfort, and they intend to have it.<sup>270</sup>

It referred to McHugh as 'an old time Single Taxer on the war path', but this time there was no talk of 'Fenian conspiracies' or violent insurrections, in spite of the prevalence of land raids in the Hebrides.<sup>271</sup> Indeed, he was accompanied at many

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<sup>264</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 Apr. 1915

<sup>265</sup> *Land Values*, May 1915; *Land Values*, Jun. 1915; *Single Tax*, Mar. 1897

<sup>266</sup> For McHugh and George's death, see *Single Tax*, Dec. 1897; *Single Tax*, Nov. 1900; *Land Values*, May 1915; *Times*, 30 Oct. 1897

<sup>267</sup> *Single Tax*, Mar. 1898

<sup>268</sup> *Land Values*, May 1906

<sup>269</sup> The dates of McHugh's 1908 Highland tour were as follows: 1 Sep. 1908, Northbay (Barra); 19 Sep. 1908, Inverness; 28 Sep. 1908, Oban; 2 Oct. 1908, Castlebay (Barra); 16 Oct. 1908, Glendale (Skye).

<sup>270</sup> *Land Values*, Oct. 1908

<sup>271</sup> E.A. Cameron, "'They will listen to no remonstrance": Land raiders and land raids in the Scottish Highlands, 1886-1914', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, xvii (1997), 50-55

meetings in the north – and throughout Britain – by Alexander Ure, MP, the Solicitor General for Scotland.<sup>272</sup>

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1908, at Northbay, McHugh's 'stirring address' led to familiar resolutions being passed – a firm and unalterable belief that the land of Scotland was made by God for the use of all, that the land should be put to common benefit, and that:

While we shall thankfully welcome any measure of reform that will lessen or abolish the despotic power which landlords, factors and ground officers have exercised over the Highland people, we will not consider any measure as a settlement of the land question which imposes rates or taxes on industry.

As if to emphasise how the optimism engendered in the 1880s had not been fulfilled, the final resolution read:

That as in union there is tenfold strength, we heartily resolve and now proceed to establish among ourselves a Land League to promote the objects embodied in the forgoing resolutions, so that the combined strength of all crofters, cottars, fishermen, and other labouring men of all kinds, by being utilised for the defence and benefit of tax oppressed persons, may speedily abolish the legalised injustice of felonious landlordism.

The conference which McHugh attended in Inverness and Oban, where he was able to give the benefit of his experience during the previous few weeks on Barra, echoed many of these themes, and on returning to the island he condemned the policy of the Congested Districts Board at 'one of the most representative and enthusiastic meetings ever', in Castlebay.<sup>273</sup> His reference to the CDB policy of compulsory purchase as 'a fraudulent service for continuing the wholesale plundering of the existing system' not only underlines McHugh's utterly implacable opposition to any

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<sup>272</sup> Ure spoke alongside McHugh in Leeds, Birkenhead and Chesterfield, to very large and enthusiastic crowds. *Land Values*, Jul. 1907, Nov. 1907, Jan. 1908, Oct. 1908. Indeed, the Birkenhead meeting seems to have been something of a personal triumph for McHugh, who had spent very long hours publicising the event. His wife (Ellen) and daughter (Ethel) were also present, as was his son (Henry George McHugh), who had become something of an assistant to his father by this point.

<sup>273</sup> *Land Values*, Nov. 1908; The Congested District Board scheme was first used in Ireland, set up by the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act of 1891. The Scottish equivalent was established in 1897, in order to tackle the issue of landlessness.

mere tinkering with the land laws, it also brought the irony of setting him in direct opposition to Angus Sutherland, who, as Chairman of the Fishery Board, was automatically a member of CDB for Scotland.<sup>274</sup>

Travelling from Barra to Glendale in Skye, the scene of some of the best received speeches on his initial visit, he was able to meet once more John MacPherson, 'The Glendale Martyr', who apparently took such inspiration from the Irishman's lectures on land reform in the 1880s. Glendale had been purchased for £15,000 by the CDB in December 1903, and yet MacPherson stressed at a meeting in Borrodale Public School that the position of the crofters and the cottars had once more deteriorated to a position 'indistinguishable from that of 1882.'<sup>275</sup>

As well as his 'field work', McHugh also demonstrated his continuing ability to address large open air conferences with clarity, speaking at the Clachnacuddin Stone in Inverness. The event was remembered nine years later by Joseph MacLeod, who marvelled that 'never before did such a large audience listen to such a clear exposition of the land question.'<sup>276</sup> In spite of the speech lasting for over three hours, the *Highland News* praised McHugh as a 'born orator. His stentorian voice put the noise of the traffic to shame, while the luminosity of his arguments penetrated the dullest intellect.'<sup>277</sup>

From Scotland, McHugh travelled south to Wales to teach similar principles in Cardiff, Swansea, Abergavenny and Newport.<sup>278</sup> Later that year, he returned to Glasgow for the last time, speaking – alongside G.B. Clark and many others, in front of an estimated 100,000 people.<sup>279</sup> Apart from the year 1912, which was spent promoting Henry George and the Single Tax in Australia and New Zealand, he devoted the rest of his life to lecturing – to the public and also political economy

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<sup>274</sup> Indeed, Angus Sutherland wanted to 'use all the arguments we think necessary to induce [the Kilmuir crofters] to accept' land purchase in 1908. Davitt and McHugh recoiled at the idea of dual ownership, as had Sutherland earlier in his life. E.A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1880-1925* (East Linton, 1996), 108

<sup>275</sup> Cameron, *Land for the People*, 97; *Land Values*, Nov. 1908

<sup>276</sup> J. MacLeod, *Highland Heroes of the Land Reform Movement* (Inverness, 1917), 154

<sup>277</sup> *Highland News*, 19 Sep. 1908; For a full report of the meetings, see *Inverness Courier*, 22 Sep. 1909

<sup>278</sup> *Land Values*, Jan. 1909

<sup>279</sup> *Land Values*, Oct. 1909

classes – in Birkenhead and Liverpool. Wherever he went, the reaction tended to be the same. A correspondent in Melbourne wrote that:

We all like Mr. McHugh immensely, and are deriving great benefit from his inexhaustible fund of knowledge and mastery of our question. He is a fine fellow, and I am sure his visit will do lasting good to the cause.<sup>280</sup>

The same combination of public speaking and pamphleteering continued when he returned to his house, 'Single Tax Cottage', at 324 Park Road North, Birkenhead, until his health broke down at the end of 1914. After a temporary return to strength in February, he remained confined to his room and McHugh died two months later. His funeral in April 1915 brought together land reformers and trades unionists from all over Great Britain and Ireland, and similarly telegrams from those unable to attend.

Glasgow, meanwhile, had become the world-wide capital of the Single Tax movement, something which Henry George acknowledged in his own lifetime, and which his son, Henry George Jr., repeated in 1899 in his statement that 'Scotland is leading the world right now the place that Ireland might have had, indeed did have, and might have kept'.<sup>281</sup> Although important in the establishment of the Labour Party, John Ferguson remained close to Georgite principles, and was elected to Glasgow City Council on this platform in 1893. Subsequently, 'during the next two years he was incessant in bringing the question of the rating of Land Values before the council in all kinds of ways'.<sup>282</sup> As has been noted, the *Highland News*, under Gartimore, kept up the Single Tax in the Highlands, and although Single Taxers were better represented than ever at the Land League convention of 1893, held in Glasgow, the movement in the Highlands at this time was split in two. More than ever before, however, the Highland Single Taxers could feel a part of an increasingly important world-side movement. After Sutherland's elevation to the Chairmanship of the Fishery Board, it was the *Highland News*, with its editor now doubling as MP for Sutherlandshire, which maintained its radical stance on almost all issues. It was an advocate of the Highland Land League, and of the Georgite body known as the Highland Society for the Taxation of Land Values. More than before it became

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<sup>280</sup> *Land Values*, May 1912

<sup>281</sup> *Single Tax*, Sep. 1899

<sup>282</sup> *Land Values*, Jun. 1915

closely linked with the Glasgow agitators, many of whom had been involved with Sutherland in the 1880s.<sup>283</sup> With a new round of land agitation beginning in the Highlands in 1906, the *Highland News* used the occasion of Michael Davitt's death to renew its cry of 'organisation':

The Highlands, too, have reaped, and will yet reap, what Michael Davitt has sown. His Land League was imitated in the crofting counties of Scotland, an institution which agitated and won the Crofters' Act with its attendant benefits. The Land Question is only beginning to be touched upon. Organisation is again required in the Highland counties, and the value of concentrating attention on one main issue may be learned from the successes and failures of Davitt's career. First get the people back to the land – give the land back to the people – then the other points may be taken up. There is great work before the newly formed Crofters' Association.<sup>284</sup>

Mainly through the efforts of Ferguson, David Macrae, David McLardy and others, Glasgow became the 'Mecca' of the movement, and land restoration became accepted amongst mainstream politicians.<sup>285</sup> Amongst the prominent supporters, perhaps the most influential was Henry Campbell Bannerman, who served as Prime Minister from 1905 to 1908.<sup>286</sup> The most vociferous parliamentary spokesman for the Single Tax

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<sup>283</sup> These men now formed the core of the 'Scottish Society for the Taxation of Land Values', and, through its journals *Single Tax* and *Land Values* frequently praised the *Highland News* for keeping George's philosophy alive in the north of Scotland. See also *Highland News*, 6 Nov. 1897 for a tribute to Henry George and his influence. The *Highland News* also helped set up study groups, like Edward McHugh had done in Liverpool and Birkenhead, for the detailed study of Henry George's works. See, e.g., *Highland News*, 11 Jan. 1913

<sup>284</sup> *Highland News*, 2 Jun. 1906

<sup>285</sup> See, e.g., J. Ferguson, 'Glasgow Town Council and the Taxation of Land Values', in *Single Tax*, May 1902. Ferguson was unceasing in his efforts. 1899 saw him urging Glasgow City Council to support a bill 'to obtain for burghs in Scotland the power to tax land values'. *Single Tax*, Nov 1899. Soon afterwards, Edward McHugh was present at a dinner held in honour of the Mayor of Bootle, G. Lamb, 'the first Single Tax mayor'. Richard McGhee sent apologies to the dinner. *Single Tax*, Jan. 1900, Feb. 1900. In 1905, Ferguson claimed that 'over 200 rating bodies in the country were now demanding the taxation of land values'. *Land Values*, Jan. 1905 Charles Trevelyan was also a supporter of the movement. *Land Values*, Dec. 1902; *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 10 Nov. 1902. At the meeting addressed by Alex Ure and Edward McHugh in Leeds in 1907, Trevelyan claimed, in a manner reminiscent of the 1880s, that they had the firm support of all Liberal, Labour and Irish members. *Land Values*, Nov. 1907

<sup>286</sup> Glasgow born, and having served as Liberal chief secretary for Ireland in 1884-1885, Campbell Bannerman was an important symbol amongst Single Taxers of the progress their movement had made. See *Land Values*, May 1903, Mar. 1904, May 1908. British Library Add MS 41252 f. 237, Henry Campbell Bannerman Papers. Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman's Leadership, Notes from Scotland, by W.W. Received June 1922. Sir Edward Grey's meeting in Glasgow was remarkable in one way because the official resolution 'thanked Sir Edward Grey for his Address, affirmed its adherence to the principles of Liberalism, and expressed its confidence in Sir HCB as Leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons'. This resolution was moved by Mr Alex Ure, M.P., and seconded by Dr A



was, Dr. T.J. Macnamara, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade during Campbell Bannerman's Premiership.<sup>287</sup> At a meeting in Manchester in 1907, Macnamara claimed that:

If you examine the problems of rural depopulation, of town overcrowding, of unemployment, of want of healthy and cheap housing, or of the physical deterioration which through all these things, at the earliest stage of your investigations you get back to the land question.<sup>288</sup>

Although Davitt and Ferguson had both died by this point, the movement they had helped nurture was showing a confidence and maturity which paved the way for McHugh's renewed agitation in the Highlands and Hebrides. The language used by Macnamara was no different from that of any of the 'advanced' wing of the Irish Land League in Glasgow during 1881 or 1882.

Angus Sutherland did not see himself in any way as having gone back on his principles. Whilst not attacked by name as he had been by the Glendale men in 1894, he was in a similar position. The CDB did not have the right to compulsorily purchase estates, and had to wait until they became available on the market, and in this respect its hands were tied. Sutherland was still capable of radical soundbites to support his actions. At a meeting of the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association in 1906, he had

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Rolland Rainy. An amendment was moved by Bailie John Ferguson, and seconded by Mr David McLardy, to add the words 'and in the country' and the Chairman declared the amendment carried. [The HCB papers were collected by Sir John Sinclair, Lord Pentland, with a view to an official biography and WW sent in his notes for that purpose in 1922]. This incident is also described in BL Add MS 45995 Herbert Gladstone Papers, ff. 27-8, in a letter from John Sinclair to Herbert Gladstone, 12 Dec 1901, but he does not say that it was John Ferguson who moved the amendment. I am very grateful to Dr. Ewen A. Cameron for the above reference.

<sup>287</sup> *Land Values*, May 1903 described Glasgow Town Council's support for Macnamara's attempt to move a Land Values Bill through the Commons. The fact that the Bill was only rejected by 13 votes was the biggest boost for the Single Taxers since the inception of the movement.

<sup>288</sup> *Land Values* Jul. 1907. By the time of McHugh's death, the leaders of the 'Land Values Group in the House of Commons' were P. Wilson Raffan, MP (Hon. Secretary), and C.E. Price, MP (Chairman). As late as 1930, Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden, proposed a tax on land values in his budget. As Taylor pointed out, however, 'no money was ever raised from this tax. Snowden had first to create the machinery for valuing the land. The National government suspended this valuation and, when Snowden resigned, abolished it.' A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965), 286. The Single Tax is applied, at least partly, in some countries around the world today, such as Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Russia, Canada and some US states. For more information, see <http://www.henrygeorge.org/rem4.htm>.

condemned emigration and rural depopulation, arguing that, as a member of the CDB, he was doing his utmost to prevent both.<sup>289</sup>

His prominence as a civil servant gained Sutherland a CB (Order of the Bath) in 1907, and his work for the CDB in Scotland had been recognised in his appointment to the Irish Commission on Congestion in 1906.<sup>290</sup> It was in Scotland, however, that Sutherland retained the most interest. In spite of showing some cynicism at times, in private notes to his colleagues, over crofters applying for CDB grants, he was also keen to ensure that they received what they were entitled to.<sup>291</sup>

From 1909 to 1920, Sutherland was almost totally devoted to the Scottish Fishery Board, although he still gave occasional speeches on matters of interest to the Highlands. In December 1912, in the familiar setting of the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association, he gave an address which, although lacking in radical solutions, still stressed that the people of Sutherlandshire had control over their own destiny. His speech hinted that he knew he had retained a good deal of respect and affection for his past endeavours.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 24 Feb. 1906; *Land Values*, Mar. 1906. He stated that 'he had been associated with this question of the depopulation of the Highlands for a good many years, first in the humble capacity of agitator, particularly when he was a member of the Glasgow Sutherland Association, later as a legislator and still later as an administrator... He proceeded to urge that the direction in which the greatest advantage to the population in Sutherland was to be found was in the schemes which would be set free from their latent powers and energies to work out their own salvation out of the material Providence had given them'.

<sup>290</sup> *Times*, 16 Jul. 1906, 28 Jun. 1907; *Highland News*, 21 Jul. 1907

<sup>291</sup> NAS, Congested Districts Board Files, AF42 / 3603, *Minute by Angus Sutherland*, 10 Dec. 1906; AF42/5849, Minute from James Morrisson, Shetland, To Angus Sutherland; AF42/5871, Narrative of the proceedings leading up to the purchase of Vatersay, entry by Angus Sutherland (1 Mar. 1909). In these notes, Sutherland reminds his colleagues that the conversion of roofs in Aignish from thatch to slate are not to be paid for by the crofters, but are to be given as a free grant. However, he also finds the fact that Shetland crofters claimed their fisheries had been ruined twice, once by whales and once by trawlers, amusing, and that he supposed 'they think they are throwing money away if they don't apply for more'.

<sup>292</sup> *Highland News*, 21 Dec. 1912. It was reported that 'after referring in some detail to his own long connection with the Association, [Sutherland] went on to speak of the causes of their success as an Association, and said he had no hesitation in ascribing it to the interest they took in the welfare of their native county... The country was made for the people, not the people for the country. That was the foundation of his patriotism, and he hoped of theirs too... There was much talk of Highland problems by people who knew nothing about the inner life of the Highland people. But given the fair opportunity such Highland problems as there were could be solved only by the people themselves. The foundation difficulty seemed to him to be the lack of faith. The soil was favourable, and the people of their native county had the saving quality of self-respect, and self-respect was the parent of all the virtues, and as long as they retained that quality there was hope'.

Less than two years after his retirement from the Fisheries Board, on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1922, Sutherland died in a nursing home in Edinburgh. His death was noted by several newspapers, although, perhaps not surprisingly after 25 years in the position, it was for his role with the Fishery Board that he was best remembered.<sup>293</sup> Interestingly, it is was the London *Times* which gave the most rounded tribute:

Although in England, perhaps little is known of his political work, Mr. Sutherland will long be remembered in the Highlands as an ardent champion of the crofters and all that affected their interests.<sup>294</sup>

### **Land and Irish Home Rule Politics in the Scottish Highlands, 1887-1894**

The principal figures of this thesis: Edward McHugh, Angus Sutherland, and Michael Davitt, were involved in increasingly diverse activity during the time span of this final chapter. The year 1887 saw Davitt involved in the labour agitation in Glasgow, alongside Edward McHugh, and touring Sutherlandshire and Skye in the company of Angus Sutherland. All the men, at this point, were still intimately involved in radical politics, although, surprisingly, it was Angus Sutherland who seemed keen to make as much political capital as possible out of the Home Rule agitation.

By 1894, the year Sutherland completed his transformation from agitator to administrator – via the stage of legislator – McHugh had just completed four years in the service of the dockers of Glasgow and Liverpool, and Davitt himself had spent one of three unhappy years in the House of Commons. Not a natural parliamentarian, Davitt had seen much of his time taken up with the Second Home Rule Bill, and came to regret his stay in the ‘parliamentary penitentiary’.<sup>295</sup>

Nevertheless, that the diversity in the lives and interests of these men became more explicit in the 1890s, helps to illustrate one of the main themes of this thesis. Ever since 1878, the men who had been concerned to assist the crofters in raising their social situation had been moved by a variety of motives. Davitt is perhaps the most

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<sup>293</sup> For his retirement, see *John O’Groat Journal*, 26 Mar. 1920; *Inverness Courier*, 23 Mar. 1920; *Times*, 22 Mar. 1920; *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Mar. 1920; *Scotsman*, 22 Mar. 1920. For his death, see *Northern Chronicle*, 18 Jan. 1922; *Highland News*, 21 Jan. 1922; *Inverness Courier*, 20 Jan. 1922; *Scotsman*, 17 Jan. 1922; *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Jan. 1922; *The Times*, 18 Jan. 1922; *Northern Times*, 19 Jan. 1922

<sup>294</sup> *The Times*, 18 Jan. 1922

<sup>295</sup> King, *Michael Davitt*, 58-67 for Davitt’s spell in the House of Commons.

complex: because of his involvement with the Irish Land League, and the Welsh tithe agitation, his activity in relation to the crofters has been seen as part of an extension of his desire to ameliorate the position of the rural populations in the British Isles' 'Celtic fringe'. As had been demonstrated, however, Davitt's land nationalisation policies did not differentiate between the Highlands and the rest of Scotland, or indeed the rest of the Britain or Ireland.

The reasons for Davitt's tour of the crofting regions in 1887 are equally complex. His message to the crofters was little different from his message to other Scottish audiences at the time. He wanted to negate any progress made by the Unionist Joseph Chamberlain, and also to keep up an agitation for advanced land reform. It is true that the latter concern was more acute in the Highlands, with the 1886 Crofters' Act falling far short of the measures hoped for by radicals. What is clear, however, is that it was Angus Sutherland who was responsible for the tour. This, in turn, has highlighted once more some of the antagonism present between various parties in the Highlands.

Nowhere was this tension illustrated more clearly than in controversy surrounding the Isle of Lewis in 1887, which seemed to indicate a continuing unwillingness on the part of Angus Sutherland to compromise with anyone whose opinions disagreed with his own. The tension, which had initially been mainly over degrees of land reform with some, such as John Mackay (Hereford) also expressing unease about Irish links, gradually became focussed more on this Irish dimension. With the *Highland News* making vitriolic attacks on Charles Fraser Mackintosh after his siding with the Liberal Unionists, and the veteran John Mackay actually standing against Sutherland in 1892 as a Unionist, the lines of division which had been drawn in the earliest days of the Highland agitation finally split the reform movement.

Ironically, however, this was also the period which saw final success for the careful policy, carried out by Davitt, Sutherland and John Ferguson over the previous decade, of breaking down Scottish prejudice against Ireland and the Irish people. The influence of James Hunter's work has meant that Skye has been perceived as the most 'pro-Irish' part of the Highlands. This chapter has shown, however, that Sutherlandshire was just as strident in its support of Irish Home Rule, and indeed that,

thanks to Sutherland and Gartimore, the county reached a level of organisation never seen in Skye. Highland support for, for example, the evicted tenants of Bodyke, went against Whig and Tory press opinion, but the period after 1887 saw many Highlanders standing, in their words, 'shoulder to shoulder' with the Irish people. After many years of fear, over acknowledging any Irish influence, meetings in the region at this time showed no reticence in expressing solidarity with Ireland.

The Irish Parliamentary Party were, therefore, able to reap what had been sown by men who were not notable amongst Parnell's followers. The presence of Home Rule supporters in Inverness and other parts of northern Scotland between 1887 and 1893, however, was not related to the crofters' agitation to any significant degree. T.P O'Connor, John Dillon – and also Parnell himself in Edinburgh – called for support from the Scottish people, but did not acknowledge that the Highlands were a distinct region. The Home Rule agitation in the Highlands at this time can only be seen as part of a much wider picture – Irish MPs were present throughout Scotland at this time – and indeed even Angus Sutherland travelled the length and breadth of the country in support of Gladstone and his policies.

The crofters themselves, especially, as has been shown, in Sutherlandshire, claimed to be well versed in the politics of the whole country. Although it was the land question which had claimed the attention of most people in the Highlands during the 1880s, when the politicisation of the region – led by men such as Sutherland – took place, by the 1890s the Highlands differed from the rest of Scotland only inasmuch as a majority of the region seemed to be strongly in favour of Home Rule. Although Irish MPs were held up as firm friends of the crofters in Parliament, it was in fact the impact of Angus Sutherland himself, far more than any Irishman, which brought about this state of affairs. Although Davitt advocated a dual policy of Home Rule and radical land reform, his main concern for most of the 1880s and 1890s was the latter. Edward McHugh was certainly an advocate of the Single Tax in all areas of life, to the exclusion of any other cause.

It was Angus Sutherland who provided the main stimulus for Highland support of Irish Home Rule. Through his early links with the Glasgow Irish, his 'political education' under John Murdoch, his speeches in parliament and visits to Ireland on



behalf of Gladstonian Liberals, Sutherland was able to link the issues of land and Home Rule in the minds of his constituents. His main political platform, from the moment he was announced as a candidate for Parliament in 1885, combined radical – Georgite – land reform, and Home Rule. It was on this platform, allied with a resolute unwillingness to compromise with moderates, that Sutherland and Gartimore managed to build up their own political bloc in Sutherlandshire.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This thesis has concentrated most specifically on the involvement of three men, Michael Davitt, Edward McHugh and Angus Sutherland, in the Highland land agitation. The examination of the issues surrounding the nature of this involvement, and their own motives for their activity in northern Scotland, has shed light on broader issues of co-operation amongst reformers, internal tensions within Highland and Irish circles, and also of the historiography of the period. It has been demonstrated that the Irish influence on the crofters was 'radical' rather than 'nationalist', but deeper examination of that radicalism displayed further differences of opinion. In general, though, these differences were kept in check during the early years of the agitation.

The thesis has also demonstrated the diligent work which went into politicising the crofters in various localities in the Highlands, and the extent to which antagonism towards Ireland and radicalism had to be countered, even from perceived 'friends' of the crofters, such as the *Oban Times*. It also illustrated how it was Sutherlandshire, rather than Skye, which received the most thorough politicisation, and thus the importance which should be placed on local Highlanders, Angus Sutherland in this case, on organising the crofters. Whilst not being an Irishman, Angus Sutherland had been strongly influenced by the Irish of Glasgow, and his activity in his native county has been overlooked in the past, in favour of comparatively fleeting visits to the island of Skye by McHugh and Davitt. These visits were vital in raising awareness of a Highland land issue, but were of less long term importance than Sutherland's concerted agitation.<sup>1</sup>

### **Michael Davitt and the Highland land agitation**

The 'Father of the Land League' epithet which was given to Davitt even during his own lifetime certainly gave him a great amount of influence during his later career, but in the eyes of some Irish historians it referred to a golden age which he could

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<sup>1</sup> Although detailed comparison between the land wars of Ireland and the Scottish Highlands has not been the primary objective of this thesis, the involvement of men such as Davitt and Ferguson in Scotland, and the consequence that historians such as Hunter have described the Scottish agitation as 'analogous', force certain contrasts to be made. It has also been displayed that the formation of an organised Highland agitation, albeit in the very moderate shape of the Federation of Celtic Societies, actually predated the outbreak of organised land agitation in Ireland.

never live up to again. As with some Irish nationalists in the later 1880s, who considered Davitt's later career 'one of disappointment', he has been seen as drifting, albeit sincerely, from one good cause to another. Away from the mainstream of Irish (or Parnellite) politics, it has seemed axiomatic that his importance diminished after 1882.<sup>2</sup>

This perception has also, perhaps, influenced the way Davitt's mission in Scotland and the Highlands has been portrayed. The fact that he arrived in Scotland in 1882, not long after Edward McHugh had been in Skye, has meant that the part he played in the Highland agitation has been seen as a continuation of his work in Ireland. This impression is compounded by Davitt's own pronouncements, along with those of John Ferguson, McHugh and others, in the nationalist press, and especially the *Irish World*. Describing Skye as 'the Scotch Irishtown', for example, although clearly an attempt to stoke passions and raise cash in America, has garnered over-simplistic interpretations of the relationship between Scotland and Ireland at the time.

Davitt has been fêted for setting in train the events which led to the 1881 Irish Land Act, and – via the 'New Departure' – the failed 1886 Home Rule Bill. By his own reckoning, however, the Irish Land Wars failed in that they brought about neither land nationalisation, nor any real union of the workers of Ireland.<sup>3</sup> This is partly because his own philosophy on the land question developed over the period of the Land Wars, but it may nevertheless be recognised, as Moody has pointed out, that 1882 started a new era in Davitt's life. The 'Scotch Campaign', as Ferguson referred to it, was a part of the beginning of this new era, not a postscript to the old. Davitt's interest in the crofters was not to support a particular 'cause', as he did with the Boers or the Russian Jews, but to advance his theories of land nationalisation in a specific context.

This reference to a 'Scotch Campaign' is also vital in understanding the roles of Davitt, Ferguson and McHugh, because in spite of their assertions of an oppressed, but doughty, Celtic population in the Highlands, they saw no real difference between rural and urban society in relation to the overall land question. They saw the Highlands as part of a much wider agitation, and especially they saw the need, along

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<sup>2</sup> See above, Chapter 4

<sup>3</sup> Although he later softened this position. M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, or, the Story of the Land League Revolution* (New York, 1904), 317. See above, 131

with Henry George, to get city dwellers to understand the vital importance of land reform. In Glasgow in particular, these men realised the importance of breaking down prejudice against Ireland amongst Scots in order to popularise land reform.

The work of presenting the case of the land reformers to a wider, British, audience, is one of the themes which links the visits of Davitt to Highland Scotland in 1882 and 1887. Working class radicalism within Irish politics in Britain was making its presence felt even before the formation of the LLGB. One of the main quests for these people was to break down mutual prejudice and suspicion between immigrant Irish and the host community. Between speaking in Inverness in 1882, and his tour with Angus Sutherland in 1887, great changes had taken place in Highland society, and the different reactions of the crofters reflect this. Initially reticent to the point of denying the existence of any organised Highland land agitation, the Highland population eventually became one of the few regions of Britain not containing Irish emigrants which unreservedly backed Irish Home Rule. Gladstone's Bill was not supported by the majority of Scots, and the Liberal split of 1886 has been identified as a key date in the history of Scottish Unionism. Even Glasgow, with its large Irish community, became a heartland of Unionism.

The Highlands – with the possible exception of Dundee, which had a very high proportion of Irish – were isolated in supporting the Irish cause in 1886.<sup>4</sup> The irony of all this could be that whilst the likes of William Carroll believed that by giving John Murdoch \$2,000 to secure the future of the *Highlander* they could convert Scotland, and then Ulster, to Home Rule, the strongest feelings of support came after the issue of land had become more identified with labour politics.<sup>5</sup> The Highlanders were thankful for the support the Irish MPs had given in parliament, and when the politics of the whole country were fought out between Davitt and Chamberlain, with the Highlands and Hebrides as a battlefield, the depth of feeling for Ireland was manifest.

From 1886, Davitt's life was mainly taken up with his role as a 'nationalist, labour leader, democratic reformer, humanitarian, and internationalist'.<sup>6</sup> Along with several

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<sup>4</sup> A. Brown, D. McCrone, L. Paterson (eds.), *Politics and Society in Scotland* (London 1996), 126; C. Whatley, D.B. Swinfen, A.M. Smith (eds.), *Life and Times of Dundee* (Edinburgh 1993), 146.

<sup>5</sup> See above, Chapter, 294-311

<sup>6</sup> T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), 547

other erstwhile Land League colleagues, he championed the cause of the working man throughout Europe and throughout the world. He never again visited the Highlands, even though the 1893 Highland Land League convention was put back by two weeks with the sole intention of allowing him to attend.<sup>7</sup> Davitt was unlike the other two principal figures in this thesis because he had such wide interests, socially, economically, politically and, indeed, geographically. Angus Sutherland certainly had wide-reaching politics, but his attention was always focussed on the Highlands, and often even more specifically on Sutherlandshire. Even in his later career with the Fishery Board, his responsibilities did not stretch beyond Scotland. Edward McHugh, like Davitt, travelled the world in an attempt to improve society, but in all of his endeavours he stuck to his task of propagating the theories of Henry George and the Single Tax.

### **Edward McHugh and the Highland land agitation**

Edward McHugh's involvement in the Highlands, as the previous chapter demonstrated, can only be seen as a part of a lifelong commitment to Henry George. No commentators on the Highland land agitation have noted his close friendship with George, and the fact that, of all the leaders of the Single Tax movement, McHugh was seen as the real expert on George's life and philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

In some respects, it is possible to view McHugh's mission of 1882 to Skye as a failure, but not, as suggested by MacPhail and Hunter, because he was shunned for being a Catholic, or because he preached Irish Nationalism. With the benefit of hindsight, McHugh might have considered that the visit had failed, because there was little support amongst the Skye crofters for land nationalisation. The Skye crofters, for example, seemed perfectly content to accept dual ownership schemes as established in 1886. The Kilmuir crofters even refused to consider land purchase between 1904-08, and in Glendale they did accept land purchase in 1904.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the fact that he had to return to Skye in 1908 to promote the taxation of land values rather underlines this. On another level, however, McHugh was enough of a realist to see that there could be

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<sup>7</sup> *Highland News*, 13 Aug. 1892, 20 Aug. 1892, 10 Sep. 1892, 1 Oct. 1892.

<sup>8</sup> See, however, J.P.D. Dunbabin, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York, 1974), 194, 269. Here, Dunbabin claims, anachronistically, that after the 'Battle of the Braes', the Scottish Land Restoration League sent McHugh to Skye. Although this predated the establishment of the SLRL by two years, it shows an awareness of McHugh's true message.

<sup>9</sup> See Cameron, *Land for the People*, 96-98 (Glendale), 102-109 (Kilmuir)



no overnight revolution. He laid the ground for what was a well received tour by Henry George and, more importantly, McHugh's visit to Skye in 1882 raised the profile of the Highland land issue both in the press and amongst the crofters themselves.

Having decided that to send an envoy – Angus Sutherland – in the wake of the Valtos rent strikes would be premature, the radicals in Glasgow grasped the opportunity presented by the 'Battle of the Braes'.<sup>10</sup> They did not seek to establish an exclusively Highland agitation, but a general attack on the land system of Britain and Ireland. The stark example of inequity in the crofting regions would, they hoped, contribute to the process of education on the land issue in British cities. Unlike Ireland, the Highlands were free from the stigma of nationalism, and McHugh and his Georgite allies hoped that if a people perceived as amongst the most loyal in Britain were seen rebelling against the land laws, the general public could not put the agitation down to Fenian plots. This, in turn, demonstrates why Whig and Tory press attempted to link the crofters with the Irish, and also why McHugh and Murdoch seemingly instructed the Skye crofters to play down the Irish influence.

In spite of being portrayed as a somewhat shadowy figure in terms of the Highland land agitation, there is no doubt that, in his day, McHugh was a fairly well-known radical. McHugh was a single minded agitator on the land issue, which helps place his visit to Skye in 1882, if not as a personal crusade, as an attempt by a fairly small group of like-minded Georgite radicals to instil advanced land reform ideology into an area they considered to be more receptive to the ideas than Ireland – which was obsessed once more with the national question. McHugh was determined to show that uneven distribution of the land lay at the root of all social ills, and like John Ferguson, he felt that he 'must bring up the land issue in any form', never missing an opportunity to raise the subject.<sup>11</sup> The brief examination of his later career in chapter 6 reinforced this impression.

### **Angus Sutherland and the Highland land agitation**

Whilst many have focussed, with good reason, on John Murdoch's links with the Irish land – and national – movement, Sutherland's vital role as a leader of a new

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<sup>10</sup> See above, Chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Land Values*, May 1905

generation of radical Highlanders coming up behind Murdoch, has not been appreciated. People like Donald MacFarlane have attracted attention through their Irish links, but in fact his commitment to Ireland and, indeed, *radical* land reform, was much more muted than Sutherland's. Much of the attention on Ireland during the Crofters' War initially came from the fact that Donald MacFarlane, who had been an Irish Nationalist member for Carlow, was involved in the early stages of the agitation. His commitment to Irish Nationalism, and Charles Stewart Parnell, however, was lukewarm. In 1885, Meek observes, MacFarlane 'stated that he was a stranger to the people of Carlow when they elected him, and we may perhaps deduce from this that, in 1880, he was probably not long resident in that part of Ireland'. He became known as the 'Member for Skye' after his advocacy of the Braes crofters, but this was only some eighteen months after he had been elected in Carlow. In being described as a 'Parnellite', he has been given a more radical hue than he should have been, for one of the reasons he gave for leaving the Irish Party was disagreements with Parnell's direction.

In fact, MacFarlane considered himself as a 'Liberal Home Ruler'.<sup>12</sup> Contrasting the 1880s radicalism of Sutherland and G.B. Clark with other MPs in the crofting regions emphasises the disparate nature of the so-called 'Crofters' Party'. Through Sutherland and the Gladstonian-Liberal assault on public opinion in the Highlands, it is seen again that the Highlands was a part of the wider UK, not a place apart.

Angus Sutherland was instrumental in politicising the FCS, and even at that early stage it was clear that he was not afraid to make enemies. As a native of the Highlands and, between 1886 and 1894, as an elected representative, Sutherland had the opportunity to implement radical ideas in the area in a way in which Davitt, McHugh, Ferguson or George could never hope to. Sutherland realised fairly quickly that truly radical land reform (in the shape of Georgite land tax) was not acceptable to the majority of the crofters – his SLRL activity lapsed, and he concentrated on Ireland and the development of local organisation, improvements in services and making amendments to the 1886 Act. It was through these issues, rather than land, that Sutherland sought to maintain his powerful position within the Highland agitation, but although he managed a remarkable degree of uniformity within his native county, the

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<sup>12</sup> See Meek, 'Catholic Knight of Crofting', 78; *Oban Times*, 5 Sep. 1885

splits which had existed within the Highlands ever since the birth of the agitation refused to go away. The dichotomy between Sutherland's organisation in Sutherlandshire, and the antagonism which many other areas felt towards him, especially after the Deer Forest Commission, all served to back up the impression that a single, unified Highland agitation could never come to fruition.

Throughout his involvement in Highland politics and society, whether as an agitator, a legislator or an administrator, Angus Sutherland remained an uncompromising and determined figure.<sup>13</sup> Sutherland realised that his style would make enemies, but this never seems to have forced him to compromise what he was trying to achieve at any given time. He was content to alienate people if what remained was a united and determined body of men with the same radical ideals he espoused.

Although the reputation he achieved as an urban agitator led directly to his career as an MP, it is far too cynical a reading of the evidence to suggest that he saw Westminster as a career option at an early stage of the Highland campaign. He had a secure job as a teacher, and even though he foresaw the opportunities presented by the reformed franchise, it is unlikely that the idea of being an – unpaid – MP for an indefinite period would appeal greatly to someone interested in making money. Sutherland's argument, that he stood as a crofter candidate because it was the will of the people, rings true.

As a young man in the early days of the Highland land agitation he was an idealist, stirred by a hatred of landlordism, and especially the House of Sutherland, because of the tribulations of his ancestors. Angus Sutherland, predating the establishment of the Irish Land League, was a zealous land and social reformer. Influenced by the company of John Murdoch and the presence of an extremely advanced and politicised Irish population, in Glasgow, Sutherland was undoubtedly a prime mover in the politicisation of urban Highlanders and their direct intervention in Highland affairs. Whilst his methods, and direct, 'Irish style' rhetoric of his speeches were not universally supported, it should be remembered that there was substantial support for Sutherland's actions. Indeed, he waited until he was confident of support before he,

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<sup>13</sup> It was said that even in his final post, the relatively uncontroversial Chairman of the Fishery Board for Scotland, he faced 'bitter opposition' for several years. *Highland News*, 21 Jan. 1922

along with Henry Whyte ('Fionn'), J.G. Mackay, James Cruikshank and others, began to take the FCS down the road to radicalism. His progress thereafter left a trail of bitterness from those who had not agreed with his radicalism, or the way he appeared to be leading the Highlanders. John Mackay of Hereford and other moderates were joined by three members of the House of Sutherland: the Master of Blantyre, the Marquis of Stafford, and the Duke of Sutherland himself, who crossed swords with the agitator. They would not be the last.

It is unlikely that Sutherland saw the Sutherlandshire Association as a Scottish successor to Michael Davitt's Land League of Mayo, but there were parallels not only between the leaders, but between the organisations themselves. The Land League of Mayo had, after its instigation, been the most radical body in Ireland, demanding tenant right and Home Rule, and its speakers and leaders were so sought after that the National Land League, centred in Dublin, inevitably soon followed. Although the Sutherlandshire Association was only one of three reform bodies which grew up more or less at the same time, the marked reluctance which Sutherland displayed in allying his organisation with the others hinted at a grander plan. The Sutherlandshire Association showed consistently more radical solutions to the land question than the London and Edinburgh based associations, and was also a keen proponent of Home Rule and co-operation with the Irish. It also followed the Irish example of infiltrating other bodies to a greater degree than other Highland reform bodies. With the power he wielded in his own county under little threat, Sutherland had no desire to over extend the Sutherlandshire Association and weaken his own position, but he knew that with such strong support behind him, he could have considerable influence in Highland Land League (or, previously, HLLRA) circles. As Alexander MacKenzie had pointed out as early as 1881 there was, in any case, no chance of a Land League 'in the Irish sense' ever being formed in Scotland.<sup>14</sup>

Sutherland has also been criticised for steering the Highland Land League, at the end of the 1880s, too close to official Liberalism and sacrificing its independence. Sutherland, however, saw no contradiction in his position, and indeed suggested that it was the Liberals who had come closer to Land League principles, rather than the other way round. At Bonar Bridge in 1894 he had said that 'he was not inclined to say

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<sup>14</sup> See above, 91

whose side the advance had been, but he was very glad to be able to state that at the present moment the cause they had so much at heart was identical to the Liberalism of today. That was the strength of their position.’<sup>15</sup> He also came to accept that, due to the small number of MPs being returned from the crofting counties, and the internal divisions amongst the reformers on issues such as Home Rule and Disestablishment, there could never be a ‘Scotch Parnellite Party’ as had been hoped, or feared, in the early 1880s. Thus, in spite of the protestations of Alexander MacKenzie, another man who fell foul of the Sutherlandshire Association’s ruthless unwillingness to compromise, Sutherland reasoned that alliance with the Liberals was the best way for the crofters to secure redress.

In spite of an earlier commitment to the SLRL, which saw many of his contemporaries become involved in the birth of the Scottish Labour Party, Sutherland felt at home in a Liberal Party which contained several like-minded radicals and which, after 1886, had shed many of its Whiggish members.<sup>16</sup> The involvement of many Liberals in the increasingly strong campaign for the taxation of land values in the 1890s and 1900s underlines that there was no contradiction in being a Georgite and a Liberal. Sutherland was certainly no political chameleon, and his loyalty to the Gladstonian Liberal party was, after 1886, little stronger than that of Michael Davitt or most of the Irish MPs. T.W. Moody has quoted J. Keir Hardie’s 1897 ‘Young Men in a Hurry’ manifesto, in which Hardie attacked Davitt, Bradlaugh and Burns as men who could have led the democracy of Britain ‘whither they would, but who had succumbed to the seductions of the Liberal Party and thus lost their terrors for the oppressors of the people’.<sup>17</sup> Sutherland could be remembered in a similar way, and yet this picture painted by Hardie has not been allowed to taint the memory of Davitt’s radicalism, and contribution to the labour movement.

It is, perhaps, his thoughts and actions on the Irish question which mark Sutherland out as a political opportunist, and yet this has been one of the least researched areas of his career. So strong was his commitment to the first Irish Home Rule Bill that it seems remarkable that, by the time of its successor seven years later, Sutherland was unusually silent, leaving the advocacy of the Irish in the Highlands to Gartiemore and

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<sup>15</sup> *Highland News*, 15 Sep. 1894

<sup>16</sup> A Whiggish faction, led by Lord Rosebery, still existed, however.

<sup>17</sup> T.W. Moody, ‘Michael Davitt’, in J.W. Boyle (ed.), *Leaders and Workers* (Cork, 1965), 54



Murdoch. Nevertheless, his commitment to Ireland had not been insincere, nor was it a crude way of attracting the support of the Irish MPs for the crofters, although this was a useful corollary.

Sutherland's support for Irish Home Rule in the 1880s was so noted that, at least in hostile elements of the press, he was known as the 'Parnellite' or 'Home Rule' candidate before 'Crofter' candidate.<sup>18</sup> Given his journey to political maturity amongst members of the Irish Land League and the LLGB, his sympathy for Irish self determination was perhaps inevitable. Many of his early speeches display a mistrust of centralisation – especially on the injustice of Westminster legislating for Gaelic speaking schoolchildren – which inculcated a firm belief in the need for not only a Parliament in Ireland, but also Scotland and Wales. The strictures of the *Highland News*, the resolutions of the Sutherlandshire crofters and the speeches of Sutherland himself between 1885 and 1889 all serve to emphasise this. Yet, after his re-election in 1892, virtually nothing on Home Rule, for Ireland or Scotland, was forthcoming from Sutherland, even though support for the measure remained firm in the county and in the pages of the *Highland News*.

Whether he had, indeed, become disillusioned with Irish affairs, whether the cause seemed hopeless, or whether he was busy with the Royal Commission, Sutherland might still have been expected to play up to his constituents with some rousing Home Rule speeches. It is the lack of this passion, more than anything else, which suggests that 1894 was a convenient time for Sutherland to be able to quit Parliamentary politics.<sup>19</sup> As he repeatedly stressed himself, Angus Sutherland was fortunate to have a view of the Highland land agitation from several perspectives. Through his involvement with the CDB he also had, along with Edward McHugh and G.B. Clark, a longer involvement with the area than most of the other late nineteenth century agitators. Sutherland's influence on his nephew led to a successful parliamentary career for William Sutherland as MP for Argyll and a close confidante of David Lloyd George. Another legacy, perhaps, was the framing of the Small Landholders

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<sup>18</sup> See above, 230

<sup>19</sup> Some historians, apparently following misinformation in *Who Was Who*, vol. ii., 1916-28 (London, 1992), have wrongly given Sutherland's retirement date from Parliament as 1896 or 1897. D.W. Crowley, 'The "Crofters' Party", 1885-1892', *Scottish Historical Review* xxxv (1956), 127; E.A. Cameron, *The Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh, Crofter MP* (Aberdeen, 2000), 214

(Scotland) Bill of 1906-11. As tutor to the young John Sinclair who – as Lord Pentland – was the Scottish Secretary responsible for the Small Landholders Act, Sutherland's influence must remain conjectural. Aside from the fact that he was Sinclair's teacher, however, they seem to have been on good terms in later life, with Sutherland persuading Lady Pentland to undertake the launching ceremony of a new ship for the Fishery Board.<sup>20</sup>

With so many different aspects to his career, Angus Sutherland remains an enigmatic figure. After representing his native county from 1886 to 1894, he will remain known as one of the 'Crofter MPs' which appeared on the scene after the 1884-5 Reform Act. As more becomes known about this disparate group of men, however, and indeed as more research is done into the other individuals involved in the land struggle, the fact that people with such different backgrounds, beliefs and ambitions should unite for a common cause becomes more remarkable.

### **General Conclusions**

Through studying the actions of three important protagonists in the Highland land agitation, this thesis has shown that the agitation was far from monolithic, either amongst Irishmen or Highlanders involved. Some historians have started to emphasise that there was not, in any meaningful sense, a 'Crofters' Party' in the House of Commons after 1885, merely a group of members from the crofting counties who attempted to reflect the views of the majority of their constituents and promote land reform. There were several other lines of cleavage running through the Highland land agitation, however.

On a broader level than the Crofter MPs, land reformers and pro-reform newspapers in the Highlands faced not only antagonism from the forces of conservatism, but also from each other. The Irishmen involved in the agitation, after 1882, were not representative of the majority of politically active Irishmen at the time. Not only was the early involvement of the 'Irish Land League' in Glasgow influenced as much by Scots as Irish, this group, in its guise as the 'Home Government Branch' of the INL,

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<sup>20</sup> Cameron, *Land for the People*, 124-8; *Dundee Advertiser*, 10 Mar. 1909

would eventually become an object of suspicion and derision amongst many nationalists in the city.<sup>21</sup>

The thought processes of the leading agitators display an elasticity of terms and definitions which has played a part in muddying the historiographical water of the last century. This was undoubtedly caused, at least partly, by considerations of time and place. Whatever the rhetoric of some of the agitators, the Highlands of Scotland were not a part of a Greater Ireland. They were a part, albeit a peripheral part, of the United Kingdom. The land question could not, as in Ireland after the 'New Departure', be bound up with nationalism, or even be sustained by powerful parliamentary pressure. It was also vital that demands were not perceived as being outside the realms of practical politics. Only after the 1881 Irish Land Act had passed into law, did these reformers feel secure in demanding forms of land nationalisation.

The historiography of the period is confused further by exaggeration and anachronism on the part of the radicals, and also on the part of opponents, hoping to temper public opinion by allying their minds the Highlanders with the Irish. This led to a situation whereby the radicals played down the Irish impact when speaking to predominantly Scottish or British audiences, stressing the separate nature of the Highland agitation, but talked up the links when speaking to America or Irish Nationalist audiences in Scotland or Ireland.

As has been demonstrated, however, the truth lay somewhere in between these two extremes. The Irish involvement in the Highland land agitation was real, but it was mainly led by those who had been frustrated by the turn events had taken in Ireland. While Irishmen such as Davitt, Ferguson or McHugh took an interest in the land agitation in the crofting regions, their interest was of the same nature as Scots such as Shaw Maxwell or Glasier, or Englishmen such as William Saunders or, initially, Joseph Chamberlain. Nationalism only entered into the equation in the years directly after the first Home Rule controversy, but the identification of Irish reformers with the Highlands was strong enough to convince many in the region that they should stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with the Irish people.

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<sup>21</sup> See above, 30

## Appendix A: Organisations described in the text

Name of organisation	Date of foundation	General area of operations	Brief description of activities
Federation of Celtic Societies	Oct. 1878	Highland communities in cities and towns.	A loose amalgam of various Gaelic associations. Generally cultural, but some radicals were partly able to politicise its activity.
National Land League of Mayo	Aug. 1879	Mayo / Connaught	To publicise the land issue and reform the land system. To publicise the plight of evicted tenants, and aid them financially.
Irish National Land League	Oct. 1879	Ireland (fundraising activities amongst Irish communities all over the world).	To force land reform for small tenants in rural Ireland. A vital strand of the 'New Departure', aiming at Irish Home Rule.
National Land League of Great Britain	Mar. 1881	Great Britain – especially in towns with a large Irish population.	Promotion of the 'Irish Question' in British towns. Unofficially a much more 'left wing' body than the Irish National Land League.
Skye Vigilance Committee	May 1881	Glasgow / Isle of Skye	To draw public attention to events in Skye, and co-ordinate action. An alliance of radical FCS members and Land Leaguers in Glasgow.
Democratic Federation	Jun. 1881	GB & Ireland. London based, with some local branches, including Scotland.	Promotion of radical land and social reform. Became the Social Democratic Federation in 1884.
National Land and Industrial Union of Ireland	Jul. 1882		A brainchild of Michael Davitt which was not allowed to get off the ground.
Irish National League	Oct. 1882	Ireland and Great Britain. Irish communities overseas.	To organise the Irish electorate and promote Irish nationalist principles. Eventually subsumed into Sinn Fein in 1917.
Highland Land Law Reform Association	Mar. 1883	Scottish Highlands. London based with local branches.	To organise crofters in regards to land reform and elections. Edinburgh body also established, leading to tension with London.
Social Democratic Federation	1884	GB & Ireland	H.M. Hyndman's organisation, influenced by Marx's <i>Das Capital</i> . Hyndman broke away in 1911 to form the British Socialist Party.
Scottish Land Restoration League	Feb. 1884	Scotland, although with a branch also in Liverpool.	Set up to promote the ideas of George's <i>Progress and Poverty</i> , and the Single Tax.
English Land Restoration League	1884	England, although some representatives also took an interest in the crofters.	Set up to promote the ideas of George's <i>Progress and Poverty</i> , and the Single Tax.
Sutherlandshire Association	1885	Sutherlandshire	Federation of 21 local HLLRA branches in Sutherlandshire. Often took an independent line from London / Edinburgh HLLRA.
Highland Land League	Sep. 1886	Scottish Highlands	Amalgamation of the London and Edinburgh HLLRA, and the Sutherlandshire Association. Failed to bring true unity.

## Appendix B: The demands of the land reformers

### Three F's:

The Irish Tenant League was established in 1850 to defend tenants against post famine 'Clearances'.<sup>1</sup> They demanded: (1) a fair rent, to be decided by an impartial tribunal; (2) fixity of tenure, subject to payment of this fair rent; (3) freedom for the tenant to sell his interest in his holding. It was rejected as a method of land settlement by Gladstone in 1870, but was revived by Isaac Butt's land bill in 1876.<sup>2</sup> At a meeting in Killanin, Co. Galway (16 Nov. 1879), Davitt totally rejected the 'Three F's', and dual ownership, as a solution, arguing that Peasant Proprietary had as good a chance of being conceded.<sup>3</sup> This was a misjudgement, as the 1881 Land Act only went as far as granting the original demands.<sup>4</sup>

### Peasant Proprietary:

By the system of peasant proprietary, the state would buy out the landlords, and finance mortgages, which would be offered to the tenants on easy terms. First demanded in an Irish context by Fintan Lalor.<sup>5</sup> Meetings in Mayo as early as 1876-77 demanded the 'Three F's' as an immediate aim, but with the ultimate goal being peasant proprietary.<sup>6</sup> John Devoy reiterated the call at a meeting in New York in 1878.<sup>7</sup> Soon afterwards, at a meeting in Brooklyn, Davitt himself called for 'an agitation for a settlement of the land question on the basis of security against eviction (except non-payment of a just rent) and the gradual growth of a peasant proprietary, holding the title from the state.'<sup>8</sup> By 1882, however, he considered that Parnell's peasant proprietary scheme would be unworkable, claiming that 'the very small number of men who have been able to take advantage of [the 1870 Bright Clauses]

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<sup>1</sup> J.H. Whyte, *The Tenant League and Irish Politics in the eighteen-fifties* (Dundalk, 1972), 8; P. Bull, *Land, Politics & Nationalism – A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin, 1996), 38; T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), 39

<sup>2</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 127

<sup>3</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 347; *Freeman's Journal*, 17 Nov. 1879

<sup>4</sup> Bull, *Land, Politics & Nationalism*, 88; D.B. Sullivan, 'The land law (Ireland) act, 1881', in A. Mitchell & P. Ó Snodaigh (eds.) *Irish Political documents, 1869-1916* (Dublin, 1989), 52-56

<sup>5</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 40; Bull, *Land, Politics & Nationalism*, 33

<sup>6</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 191

<sup>7</sup> *Irish World*, 21 Sep. 1878

<sup>8</sup> Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 237; *Irish World*, 26 Oct. 1878



has shown conclusively that any scheme which depends upon the tenants making any advances must be a failure, for the simple reason that they, as a rule, have no money.’<sup>9</sup>

### Land Nationalisation:

Although Henry George, Michael Davitt and John Ferguson was referred to as ‘land nationalisers’ in the 1880s, this later became an inadequate term, as the so-called ‘nationalisers’ split into different groups.

### Single Taxers / Land Restorers:

Dunbabin has noted the rather confused state which existed amongst some of the ‘advanced’ theorists involved in the Highland land agitation:

In theory, land nationalizers believed in expropriation with compensation, while land restorers sought to tax land values until they were completely eroded. But this was not fully worked out until the end of the decade; and in any case platform utterances, especially those of Henry George in his celebrated lecture tours of 1884 and 1885, were aimed at securing acceptance rather than precision.<sup>10</sup>

Advocates of the Single Tax argued that since land is a fixed resource, the economic rent is a product of the growth of the economy and not of individual effort; therefore society would be justified in recovering it to support the costs of government. They accepted the view of the economist David Ricardo that a tax on economic rent could not be shifted forward.<sup>11</sup> A further argument was that acceptance of the single tax would ‘dispense with a multiplicity of taxes and a horde of tax-gatherers.’ Importantly, the Single Taxers also stressed the it would abolish the ‘fines and penalties currently levied on anybody who improves a farm, erects a house, builds a machine, or in any way adds to the general stock of wealth and employs labour’.<sup>12</sup>

As early as 1881, when Karl Marx dismissed George as ‘utterly backward’, there were some tensions between the reformers.<sup>13</sup> Davitt and George differed over the question

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<sup>9</sup> D.B. Cashman, *The life of Michael Davitt, founder of the National Land League, to which is added The Secret History of the Land League, by Michael Davitt* (London, 1882), 241-2

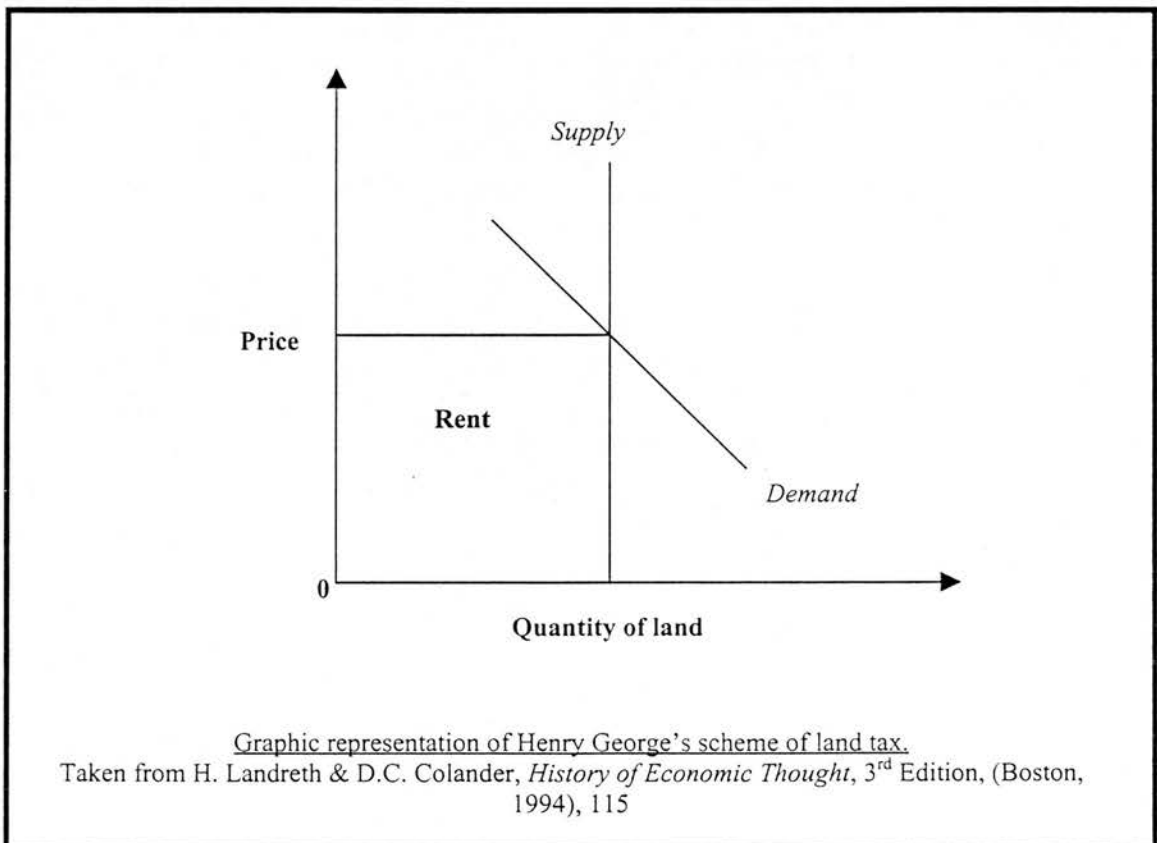
<sup>10</sup> J.P.D. Dunbabin, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York, 1974), 271.

<sup>11</sup> H. Landreth & D.C. Colander, *History of Economic Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, (Boston, 1994), 141

<sup>12</sup> *Land Values*, Jul. 1906

<sup>13</sup> C.A. Barker, *Henry George* (New York, 1955), 356-358. In his first visit to Britain and Ireland in 1881-82, however, George made no effort to distinguish himself from Socialism or Marxism.

of compensation to landlords, and Davitt's advocacy of some measure of compensation, unacceptable to true Single Taxers, makes it even more difficult to label him.<sup>14</sup> Later, the Single Taxers themselves pointed out the differences between the two groups: 'Nationalisation of the land looks well as an abstract principle, but the taxation of land values is the readiest method to the settlement of the land question, and it is the best understood and most popular before Parliament and people. Even the Land Nationalisers profess to be strongly in favour of taxation of land values as a first step.'<sup>15</sup> The ongoing debate between Restorers and Land Nationalisers was given further elucidation by J. Keir Hardie in 1906, who claimed that 'as a Socialist, I differ from Single Taxers in that I regard all unearned incomes, whether from land or capital, as being alike an impost on the industry of a nation, and therefore a fit subject for taxation.' This view of matters was described by John Paul, a prominent Glasgow Single Taxer, as 'immoral and confusing'.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Cashman, *Life of Michael Davitt*, 245

<sup>15</sup> *Land Values*, Apr. 1905

<sup>16</sup> *Land Values*, Feb. 1906

**Appendix C: Report By Malcolm MacDonald, Sergeant, Portree, on the state of  
the Kilmuir district. 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1882**

In terms of the instructions received from the Procurator Fiscal, I went on Tuesday the 4<sup>th</sup> current to the district of Uig in plain clothes, and where I am not known, with a view to find out if possible what advice had Mr McHugh of the so-called National Land League been giving to the crofters on the Estate of Major Fraser, Kilmuir.

On my arriving at Uig I had a conversation with a man who told me that he was one of the crofters of the township of Uig. After being a while in his company, I managed to get in to the land question, and Mr. McHugh. This man said that Mr. McHugh had never to his knowledge visited Idrigill, and that the only persons seen there, this year talking about their lands, were four men who came in the month of April, but that he did not know them. I understood these to be newspaper reporters, and did not care to know what information they were inquiring after. I then went on towards Staffin and on my way there I met several persons and all of them gave me distinctly to understand that they never saw this Mr. McHugh down in the Stenscholl district. I continued until I reached Staffin Inn where I stayed all night. While there I had been a good deal of the time in the company of Mr. Nicolson, the Innkeeper, and he told me that Mr. McHugh had never been as far as he was aware at Stenscholl or at any of the townships thereabout. Finding that I could not get anything as to McHugh at Stenscholl, I returned to Uig, and between these places I had been speaking to several persons, but could not find any trace of McHugh having been there. On coming to Idrigill I went into the shop of Donald Ross there and had a long conversation with him and another man (then in the shop) as to the disaffection prevailing throughout Skye on the land question, either of them made mention of the name of McHugh whereupon I asked who McHugh was? Ross said that he was a 'Land Leaguer' that was going through Skye. I asked if he had given them a visit to Idrigill and was told that he did not, nor did they want him, that they got a reduction of twenty five percent of their rent this year from their proprietor and they were well enough pleased. When they spoke of McHugh, I found they spoke of him in a contemptuous way, and often called him 'Trusdair', which in English means 'filthy fellow'; and that they were sure he was well paid for his trouble or he would not have remained for so long in Skye.

I then went to the township of Earlish, where I was told that McHugh intended having a meeting with the people there on Saturday last, but that only one man met him; This man's name is Roderick MacNeil, a crofter at Earlish on whom I called, and had a talk with him as to his meeting with McHugh. McNeil told me that McHugh spoke to him enquiring as to what the present rents were, what the rents had been many years back and when the rents were raised. All this information as far as he (McNeil) gave, McHugh wrote down in a book, and told McNeil that he was to report it to the Land League Society. McNeil also told me that he was asked by McHugh if he did not think that the first rent was sufficient: to which McNeil agreed, provided it could be got at that rent. McHugh then told him 'not to pay but his first rent.' McNeil told me that his first rent was £2 and had been from time to time raised until it is now £6:5 or £6:10. I was also told by McNeil the information McHugh was collecting would get laid before parliament, and that McHugh would see that their grievance would be answered, and that the Court of Session would yet compel the proprietor to give them their lands at their old rents. I could not find that McHugh had advised him to attempt to deforce the law further than to decline paying the first rents £2.

I next visited the house of Archibald Gillies, crofter and cattle dealer Earlish, where I learned McHugh had also been on Saturday. The people of that house told me that they did not wish to see him and that when he came in, they went to the other end of the house and left him alone in the kitchen, and after being so left for a time, he left having at the same time handed to a little girl a few pamphlets – asking of us to read them. They told me they knew him to be a Roman Catholic and that they did not in consequence want to have anything to do with him. I got from the people of this house the pamphlets McHugh left with them, and I enclose them with this report. I could not find anything further as to McHugh, except that Ronald MacDonald the Catechist at Earlish said to me that the people of Earlish did not want anything to do with McHugh. I could see that his being a Roman Catholic is very much against his cause in the place which I visited. From Earlish I returned back to Portree.

Malcolm Macdonald,  
Sergeant<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> SRO. Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/6/4

**Appendix D: Threatening Notice addressed to 'Lord MacDonald, Skye,  
Inverness', 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1882**

The Skye CROFTERS

Watch what you are about.

The poor people want

Nothing but justice

And by the holy

St. Patrick

And the Blessed Virgin

They will have it

For MCDONALD'S

Days ARE numbered

Your humble servant

D. Sutherland

This is not a joke as the world will soon know – D.S.

Read this and let the Blackguard

Prepare for death

The tears he has caused to flow

Will not save him.

The Glen + Dale Office

24 Novr. 1882

Lord MacDonald,

This is to intimate to you that the weapon is charged which is to lay you as low as Thos. Bourke and Sir Fred. Cavendish are at this present moment. Scotland will not lament you as it has done them. They died in harness but you will die a villain, a disgrace to your country and a foe to humanity. Woe is me that I'm commissioned to



do the deed, done it must be and that speedily, as you have already resisted too long. This present year shall see you shot like a hare or a rabbit too good for you as my fingers are itching your craven, coward heart with a dirk which has drawn better blood than yours. Give your honest crofters justice as one of your forefathers would have done and this sentence will be held in abeyance while you temper justice with mercy the land belongs not to you but to the people from whom your ancestors STOLE IT to further their own selfish gratifications. You make such a noise either my dirk or my revolver will silence you in one moment; two thousand is laid upon you already but not by your Skye crofters but by others who can manage you better than they. And who would be such a flat as not take such a handsome sum for ridding the world of such a cruel tyrant. Oh may I glory over your destruction. I am your bitter enemy, D. Sutherland, Clerk.

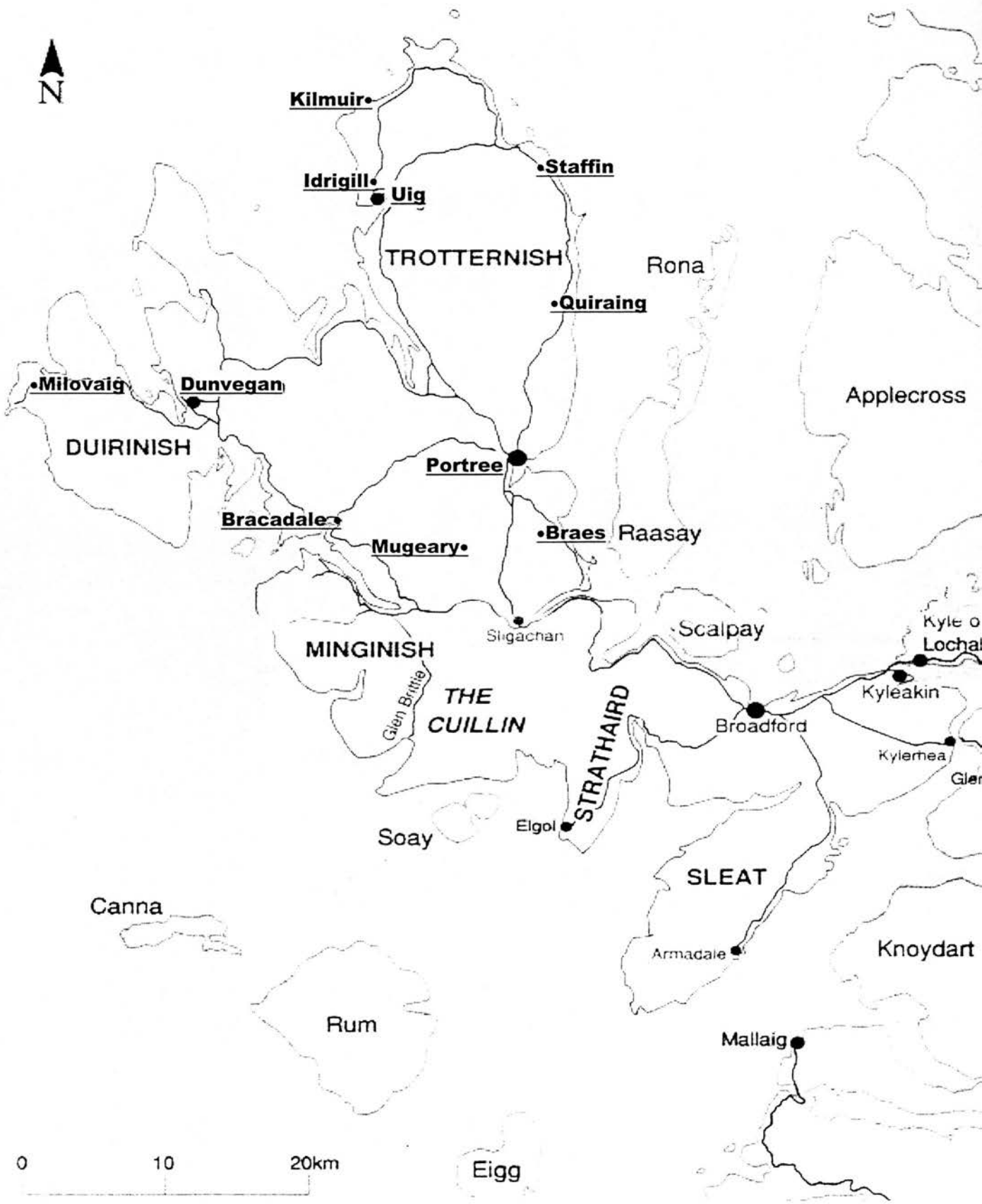
Ps – I will post this in a part of the country one of our numerous AGENTS are and who will send it to you, D.S.

Sad Tragedy As Lord McDonald's \_\_\_\_\_ called upon his master he was horrified to find that a crime had been perpetrated a few hours before which is too heinous for description. He lay upon \_\_\_\_\_ with a fearful wound in his heart, which evidently had been done by someone who knew the late gentleman's...

Capt. Fraser is already spotted out for hid cruelty, and his sentence unexecuted, D.S.<sup>18</sup>

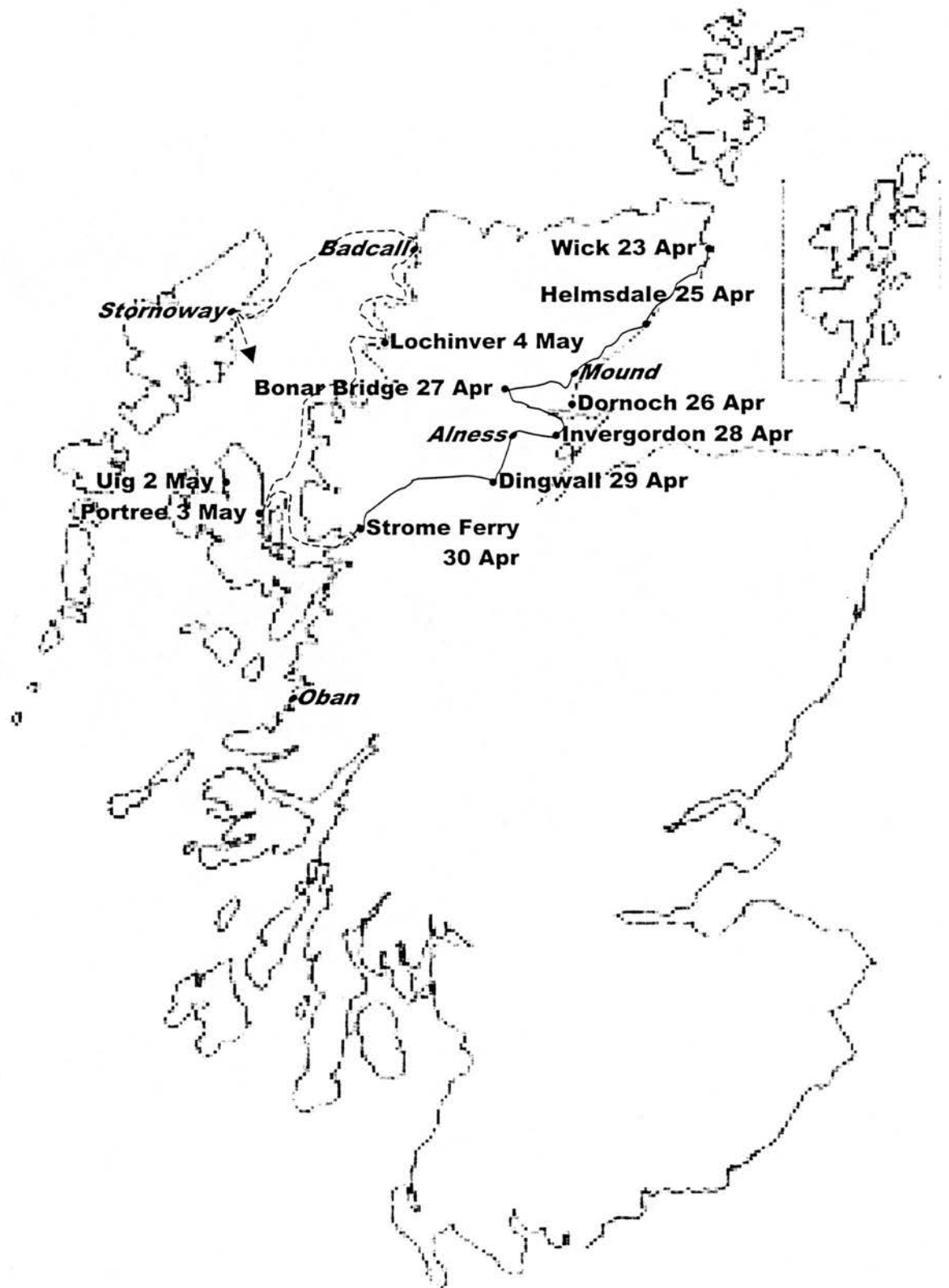
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<sup>18</sup> NAS, Ivory Papers, GD1/36/1/10/53



Key: **•Dunvegan** Major speech or meeting  
**•Bracadale** Place visited by McHugh or mentioned in police reports.

Sources: *Glasgow Herald* 24 Apr. 1882; *Scotsman* 28 Apr. 1882; *Oban Times* 29 Apr. 1882, 13 May 1882, 15 Jul. 1882; *Celtic Magazine* Jul. 1882; *Northern Chronicle* 3 May 1882, 10 May 1882, 7 Jun. 1882, 14 Jun. 1882, 12 Jul. 1882; *Inverness Courier* 11 Jun. 1882, 27 Jun. 1882, 29 Jun. 1882, 8 Jul. 1882, 15 Jul. 1882, 26 Jul. 1882; *Irish World* 3 Jun. 1882, 10 Jun. 1882, 15 Jul. 1882, 2 Aug. 1882, 19 Aug. 1882; NAS Ivory Papers GD1/36 (see Chapter 3 for specific references); NC qq. 3176-3678, 7220-7221, 74463. Map of Skye taken from: <http://www.cordee.co.uk/Books/CN0261.htm>



Key: **•Bonar Bridge 27 Apr.** *Major Speech (with Date)*  
**•Badcall** *Other place visited*  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *Train route*  
 - - - - - *Sea route*

Sources: *Freeman's Journal, Scottish Highlander, Scottish Leader, Oban Times, Glasgow Observer, Highland News*

## Appendix G: Charles Stuart Parnell and the Freedom of Edinburgh: A Gaelic Perspective.<sup>19</sup>

### Mr. Parnell: His Welcome To Modern Athens: Scotland Gives Him Greeting

From near and far the addresses of welcome were presented to him – some 150 in all, a number that would have been largely added to had there been more time to prepare them – and the Highlands was not behind-hand. From the Wick Liberal Association, the Caithness County Liberal Association, the Barra Land League, the Skye Land League, the Lochalsh Land League, the Tain Liberal Association, the Inverness Burgh Liberal Association, the Nairn Liberal Association, the Elgin Liberal Association – these are but a few of the organisations that hastened to welcome the leader of the Irish democracy. But certainly the most unique address was from ‘An Comunn Catach’ – the Sutherlandshire Association – written in Gaelic and engrossed on vellum, by Mr. David Kennedy, architect, Inverness, who spared no pains to make it worthy of its object. Embellished with Mr. Parnell’s arms, and wreathed with shamrocks and thistles this beautifully illuminated address was fittingly enclosed in a case covered with Sutherland tartan, and presented by two sturdy Highlanders, Messrs. R. Mackay and A. Munro, respectively vice-president and secretary of the Edinburgh branch of the Association. The branch was not to be outdone, for they also presented an address beautifully engrossed on vellum, and ornamented with quotations in Erse and in Celtic characters round the margin. It was bound with green silk, enclosed in a morocco leather case, and presented by Mr. D.D. Thompson, Leith Walk, also an official of the branch. The following is the text of the Gaelic address, it being the only one in that language presented:

### *DO THEARLACH STIUBHART PARNELL*

*UASAIL URRAMAICH:- Tha sinne, an ainm a’ CHOMUINN CHATAICH, a’ gabhail cothroim air an là ghreadhnach so, gu bhith a’ togail ar guth leis na Comuinn lionmhor eile a tha a’ cur fàilte agus urrain ort air son do bhuadhan mòra, agus gu sonraichte air son cho s’leas, daingeann agus a tha thu a’ seasamh còraichean do luchd-dùthcha Eireannach, ann an aghaidh mòran bacaidh agus tuailleis.*

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<sup>19</sup> *Highland News* 27 Jul. 1889

*Tha sinn gu h-àraidh a' dèanamh co-ghàirdeachais leat aig an àm seo, an uair a tha sinn a' faicinn grian soirbheachaidh agus buaidhe, a réir coltais, ag éirigh air an aobhar sinn anns a bheil thu fhéin agus do chomblan tréun de luchd-cuideachaidh cho fada a' saothrachadh; is e sin a bhith a' saoradh na h-Eireann a' n chor chlaoidhta, bhochd, anns an d' fhàgadh I le droch ghiallachd a luchd-riaghlaidh coigreach.*

*Tha e gu sònraichte iomchuidh gum biodh co-bhàigh aig na GAIDHEIL ALBANNACH ris na GAIDHEIL EIREANNACH: dà thréubh a shruth bho 'n aon fhrèumh agus a tha fhatast ann an thomhas mór co-ionann ann an cainnt agus anns na tograidhean gnèitheil, dùthasach sin a tha a nis ré ùine cho fada air am mùchadh le mi-ghnathachadh an-tighearnail an cuid uachdaran, cho math ri neo-churam agus mi-dhilseachd an luchd-teagaisg.*

*A bhàrr air se, tha e mar fhiachaibh air na Gàidheil Albannach gu léir a bhith a' cumail cuimbe air gach cuideachadh a thug thu fhéin agus do luchd-leanmhuinn ann an cothachadh as an leith anns a' Pharlamaid, agus air a liugha fear-tagraidh deas-chainnteach, cumbachdach a thàinig uaibh do 'n Ghàidealtachd a chur spreigidh anns an t-sluagh, agus g'am misneachadh gu bhi dileas, gaisgoil anns a' chomhstrith.*

*BUAIDH LEAT! PISEACH ORT!*

**Translation:**

*TO CHARLES STUART PARNELL*

HONOURABLE SIR:-In the name of the SUTHERLAND ASSOCIATION we have availed ourselves of the present auspicious occasion to add our voice to that of the numerous other societies which seek to welcome you and to honour you for your eminent gifts, and chiefly for the faithful and courageous manner in which you have advocated the rights of your Irish fellow countrymen in the face of much opposition and obloquy.



We specially desire to congratulate you at this time, when we see, to all appearance, the sun of victory and prosperity rising on that cause on which you and your able band of co-adjustors have been so long labouring, that is, to set Ireland free from the prostrate and wretched condition in which she is placed by the misgovernment of her alien rulers.

It is highly appropriate that the GAEL OF SCOTLAND should sympathise with the GAEL OF IRELAND, two tribes which sprung from the same stock, and which are still in great measure one in language and in those native and national aspirations so long suppressed by the oppressive treatment of their rulers, as well as by the remissness and unfaithfulness of their instructors.

Moreover it is the duty of the Highlanders of Scotland to remember the assistance rendered by you, sir, and your followers for the advancement of their cause in Parliament, and the many who have visited the Highlands for the purpose of inciting the people and encouraging them to be steadfast and faithful in the strife.

Victory and success attend you!

In behalf of the Sutherland Association.

(Signed)       ANGUS SUTHERLAND, President

( " )         JOHN SUTHERLAND, Treasurer

( " )         JOHN MACLEOD, Secretary

The delegates, in presenting the address, filed past Mr. Parnell, who was on the platform. Among them was Mr. John Murdoch, 'The Highlander', who received quite an ovation on making his appearance, the hearts of the audience at once warming to the kilt and the veteran who wore it. Mr. Parnell shook his hand warmly and detained him quite some moments in conversation. Almost before the audience knew it, the moment for which everybody had been waiting had come, and MR. PARNELL with his frock coat buttoned closely about his spare figure, his dark eyes flashing from behind their pale frontage of face with suppressed excitement, but otherwise without a solitary trace of emotion, stood there before them.

**'SHOULDER TO SHOULDER'? SCOTTISH AND IRISH LAND  
REFORMERS IN THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND, 1878-1894**

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