

13. The Cat Stroked is Meek.

'You Highland swine
These Hills are mine
This is all Lord Brocket's land'.

IN THE AFTERMATH of the Second World War, there were sufficient murmurings of land-centred discontent on Skye for the remaining farmers and landlords in the island to be privately concerned. And in Ross-shire there was agitation for land raids in the spring of 1947, to have farms, which had been requisitioned for wartime use, turned into crofts for homecoming service personnel.

And in the autumn of 1952 a land-raid, drawing on long-established tactical traditions, did take place in North Uist. Crofters there had asked for help from the Department of Agriculture in an attempt to extend their holdings. They wanted land that was occupied at the time by the 850-acre Balelone Farm - owned by Henry Cator of Norwich. But Cator, who owned a number of estates in various parts of the country, would not relinquish the farm. The crofters were also refused assistance from the department.

They wrote to the Labour MP for the Western Isles, Malcolm MacMillan, who had taken the seat on the retiral of Ian MacPherson, author of the introduction to the second edition of Alexander MacKenzie's *Highland Clearances*. In their letter the crofters let it be known that, 'we are going to raid the farm of Balelone on the 28th day of November. By so doing we shall give the whole world an opportunity to judge the righteousness of our request and actions. We have nothing to hide. It is our intention to give ample warning to all parties concerned and to conduct ourselves in as orderly a

manner as possible in the circumstances. This is no idle talk on our part. We are on no account going to turn back’.

In the event, there was no need to. Cator - mindful, perhaps, of land-agitation traditions - backed-off from confrontation and in due course a successful settlement was reached.

A few years earlier, in 1948, the Lochaber Crofters’ Union contested in the Court of Session the resumption of croft land at Caol, near Fort William, under the leadership of Donald Kennedy of Lochyside (grandfather of Charles Kennedy, the Liberal Democrat MP). At the time of the court action, Kennedy recalled that his great-grandfather had been one of the original settlers at Caol, who had reclaimed it from bogland after their eviction from the shores of Loch Arkaig. The efforts of the Union to block the proposed resumption originated in an attempt in the immediate post-war period, to form an all-Highland Crofters’ Union. At a conference in Mallaig in February 1949, it had been unanimously agreed to express concern at the reluctance of the authorities to, ‘utilise their powers of large-scale land-settlement in the Highlands’. The conference had also called for a Crofters’ Commission, ‘able to form new holdings, enlarge existing holdings and procure more land for common grazings’.

The onset of war put an end to this. In 1948 the Court of Session refused the appeal of the Lochaber Union. But the appeal, and other post-war disputes, serves to illustrate the extent to which the land question was still a living one in the 1940s. The most notable of these illustrations was to be the land-raid at Knoydart in 1948: that raid recalled in Hamish Henderson’s celebrated song which includes the following verse:

‘You bloody Reds, Lord Brocket yelled

Wot's this you're doing 'ere?
It doesn't pay, as you'll find today,
To insult an English peer.
You're only Scottish half-wits,
But I'll make you understand,
You Highland swine
These hills are mine,
This is all Lord Brocket's land'.

Knoydart had, of course, been savagely cleared in the middle of the previous century. This savagery was recognised during the Napier Commission's visit to Portree in May 1883, when it questioned the owner of Knoydart, John Baird, the thirty-one year old nephew of its original purchaser, the ironmaster Baird. (Incidentally, one of young Baird's answers to the commissioners clearly suggests that there was resistance to this clearing).

The original Baird had acquired the estate in 1859, shortly after it had been cleared. By the 1880s, of its 67,000 acres from sea-level to over 3,000 feet, 18,270 were under deer. Young John Baird had taken over the property in 1876 on the death of his uncle, and had found it largely given over to sheep farming. There were five farms laid out on the lands of Knoydart, but two of them were vacant and he was soon forced to take over the stock of another, due to the downturn in the profitability of Highland sheep farming.

Baird complained to the commissioners about the fall in wool prices and the consequent fall in rental income. He said he was keen to extent his deer-forest operations, which could double his income from the land. Though there was what he called 'considerable' signs of the remains of crofting populations on the estate, Baird thought that the re-introduction of crofters into these

places - as there once had been - would be 'an injury to the property'. He also thought that it would be much better for his remaining indigents to quit crofting for fishing: 'I had a good deal of annoyance with them some years ago, I was very much annoyed at their not fishing'.

These remaining indigents were, Baird claimed, not overcrowded and, being 'pretty comfortable', they had no complaints. In any case, there were only fifty of them left on Knoydart, gathered in eleven families in one township on the shore beside the Sound of Sleat.

The land-use pattern on Knoydart, established under the Baird regime, outlasted the family's interest in the estate. Indeed, the Bairds had gone from Knoydart within a matter of years, and by the time of the Deer Forest Commission the estate was in the ownership of the Bowlby family. However, when the commission visited Inverie in July 1894, it heard one labourer and four crofters from Airor: but not Bowlby, who instead sent his solicitor from Inverness. And by the 1920s, though still in the ownership of the Bowlbys, Knoydart remained an estate dedicated to deer, with some sheep and a residual population to tend them.

With the coming of Lord Brocket, however, conditions on Knoydart began to deteriorate in serious fashion. Brocket (family motto: 'the cat stroked is meek') was the second holder of a title created in 1921. Born in 1904, he was educated at Eton and Oxford. In 1927 he went to the English Bar, in the same year marrying; and in 1931 he was elected Tory MP for Wavertree until succeeding to his father's title in 1933. He also succeeded to a very great deal of money, deriving from his family's investments in alcohol production. By 1939, he was able to list as his addresses

Brocket Hall in Hertfordshire; Bramshill Park in Hampshire; a 'town-house' in Wilton Crescent, London; and Knoydart in Inverness-shire.

Popular disillusion with the new owner did not take long to set in. One resident later recalled, 'when he came to Knoydart at first it appeared that he was going to carry-on the work of the man before him. But eventually things began to change, and he seemed to turn against the people. Then he started evicting, especially the older employees here and there, and restrictions were put on the movement of people. They weren't allowed near or around Inverie House where he lived, and things like that'.

One of those evicted thus had left his ten-acre holding because, 'the estate was allowing his house to fall into ruins, the house where he had been born and learned the shepherding trade from his father'. In time he had become the breadwinner for his mother and sister. 'But when the only three houses beside them were allowed to go empty and it was plain that the estate was running down, the time had come when he must go'.

Another Knoydart resident recalled that it soon became a common sight to see boat-loads of furniture being ferried across to the railhead at Mallaig: 'As numbers of long-serving members of the local staff were paid off, it became apparent that the object was to get rid of the local people. Even tourists, campers and hill-walkers were not welcome. The gamekeepers were instructed to see them off the land. Children seen walking or playing along the beach in the vicinity of the mansion were warned away'.

Brocket, meantime, entertained mightily on his increasingly empty estate. Among his guests were Neville Chamberlain, Lord Woolton and the exiled monarch of Romania, King Peter. Others were rather more sinister, among them some rather important

Germans. Hitler's ambassador to Britain, Ribbentrop, may even have visited the estate; there were at least 'a number of Nazi big-wigs visiting the place'.

Central to these friendships was Brocket's involvement in the pro-Hitler fascist Right of pre-war Britain. Brocket was not alone in this sort of infatuation, of course. Hitler had many covert supporters beyond the ranks of Mosley's British Union of Fascists. They extended across industry, politics, the armed services and the press, to the churches (many Anglo-Catholics having spent the 1920s increasingly attracted by the fascist experience in Italy) and land-owning circles, as well as what was known generally as 'Society'. Not least of these socialite Nazis was, of course, Unity Valkyrie Mitford. Roughed-up by a proletarian mob in Hyde Park for wearing a swastika brooch, she would in due course shoot herself (romantically, if not immediately fatally) in Munich's Englischer Garten and be retired to Inch Kenneth island off the west side of Mull - from which she was carried, in 1948, to die in Oban Hospital, at thirty-four years of age.

Somewhat more substantial allies of Hitler included the Bank of England's Montagu Norman, a staunch supporter of rapprochement with Germany. Thirty members of the House of Lords were members of the pro-Nazi Anglo-German Fellowship (AGF), including Brocket. The leader of the Fellowship was Major-General 'Boney' Fuller, the tank-warfare theorist, who was also a member of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) as well as a writer in *Fascist Quarterly*.

Significant elements of the press were also pre-German. The Times strongly supported appeasement; while the Daily Mail was violently pro-Nazi, its owner Rothermere (who would shortly invest in

Hungarian estates, lest Bolshevism triumph in Britain) having described the 'sturdy young Nazis' as Europe's 'guardian against the Communist danger'. And if Mrs. Ronnie Greville, daughter of the brewer William McEwen ('a fat slug filled with venom', in Harold Nicolson's felicitous phrase), was 'bowled over by Nazism', so too did the Duke of Buccleuch remain (until 1939) a 'hard-core positive enthusiast'.

Not all the British 'enthusiasts' were themselves Nazis, of course. A legitimate distinction may be allowed between full-blooded fascism and an inclination to remain friendly with Germany at whatever cost, in the cause of avoiding - or at least delaying - a resumption of the hostilities laid-aside with the Armistice of 1918.

(Not all of the enthusiasts were English either. As any glimpse at the membership lists of the AGF will demonstrate, an interesting number were members of Scotland's landed and industrial elites).

But the links between the AGF and the Hitlerite leadership were strong. As a contemporary report noted, 'the Nazi government must thoroughly approve of the Anglo-German Fellowship, for among the leading Nazis who have been guests of the organisation are such famous figures as Herr von Ribbentrop (on several occasions); Dr. Ernst Woermann, Counsellor of the German Embassy; the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha; and Freiherr von Hadeln, SS Adjutant to Herr Himmler, head of the Nazi Secret Police and of the SS. Many members of the Anglo-German Fellowship have in turn been guests of leading Nazis. Lord Londonderry has frequently visited Germany where he has previously been guest of General Goering and Hitler. Herr von Ribbentrop has also been guest of Lord Londonderry at his Irish seat, Mount Stewart, County Down. Members of the Fellowship who have met Hitler include Lord

Mount Temple, Sir Barry Domvile, Lord Brocket, Lord Stamp, Lord McGowan, and Lord Lothian’.

Among the activities of the AGF was the hosting of grandly formal dinners. One evening reception was held in London’s Dorchester Hotel in the middle of 1936, in honour of the pro-Nazi Prince and Princess von Bismarck. Those present included Barry Domvile, Lord David Douglas Hamilton, ‘Boney’ Fuller, members of the Guinness family, Lords Londonderry and Mount Temple, and Lord Redesdale, father-in-law of Oswald Mosley. (Not everyone at the Dorchester reception that evening was a fascist, however. Another guest was one H.A.R. Philby - known to his friends as Kim - at that time working for the Fellowship’s propaganda department, in which work he so impressed Mount Temple).

In all of this, Brocket took a prominent part. In 1938 he was in Germany for the Nazi party rally at Nuremberg. ‘The Parteitag is drawing to a close in an atmosphere of indescribable tension. Herr Hitler was speaking today to 120,000 of his Storm Troopers and SS men, paraded before him. Sir Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador, remained here until the evening. He attended the parade of the Youth Movement yesterday morning, and in the evening was the guest of Herr Himmler, Reich Leader of the SS, at supper in the SS camp on the outskirts of Nuremberg, at which Herr Hitler had a friendly conversation over the tea-table with some of his English guests-of-honour. Among those at the Furher’s table were Lord Stamp, Lord McGowan, and Lord Brocket’.

Subsequent to this SS supper there was a second reception, hosted by Ribbertrop, at which Brocket sat next to Hitler. And a year later, in April 1939, the thirty-five year old Brocket was a guest of honour at Hitler’s fiftieth birthday celebrations. ‘All Germany is

tonight celebrating Herr Hitler's birthday. Major-General Fuller and Lord Brocket, vice-president of the Anglo-German Fellowship, are the private guests of Herr Hitler'.

Within a matter of months, of course, both countries were at war. Overnight, the pre-war 'enthusiasts' were reborn as staunch patriots and anti-Nazis; or were otherwise interned, from May 1940, under the provisions of Defence Regulation 18b, with Mosley's wife Diana Mitford famously reduced to dining in Holloway 'on grocer's port and inferior Stilton'.

Brocket, perhaps on account of an alleged nervous breakdown, was not interned. But he had little opportunity during the war to visit his Highland estate, as Knoydart - and much of the surrounding district - was required for the training of Commando and Special Operations Executive (SOE) personnel. The two Czechs who assassinated Reinhard Heydrich in the centre of Prague were partly trained in the area, for instance. (The records of the Gestapo interrogations relating to the operation are still extant in the appropriate archives in Prague and Berlin).

Knoydart, therefore, saw little or nothing of its owner during the war; and the estate was geared, for the duration of hostilities, to food production as well as special-forces training. But Colin MacPherson, who arrived as priest at Inverie in December 1942, recalled that even then, 'there was a fair turnover of shepherds who came into Knoydart and shortly after coming they wanted to get away' - not because they disliked the area, but because they found 'that the conditions which they had been offered by way of remuneration and perquisites when they were engaged were not being honoured by the estate'.

At this time, shepherds wishing to move required the permission of the wartime Agricultural Executive Committee. According to MacPherson, 'many of these people, nearly all of them, landed on my doorstep and I had to write their letters'. He told of 'this consistent tale of failure by the estate', to honour its agreements with them: 'Reducing their wages after they arrived, for example. There may have been economic reasons for this, but this was the picture that was consistently thrown up'.

Post-war, however, Brocket - very clearly recovered from his nervous exhaustion - returned to Knoydart, and brought his wife with him. Lady Brocket's first decree was that her employees were to dump - with strict warnings that her orders be carried out to the letter - in the deep hole in the mouth of Loch Nevis, all the cutlery, crockery and water-closets of Inverie House and the estate lodges with which the trainees of SOE might have come in bodily contact.

The Brockets then turned their attention to the estate. At this stage, according to MacPherson, 'a pattern seemed to emerge that the policy was to curtail agricultural activity and turn Knoydart into a purely sporting estate. The corollary of that obviously was that there would have to be a reduction in the number of people'.

And according to Duncan MacPhail, one of the land-raiders, who had served six years and four months, mostly abroad, during the war: 'It was very obvious what he was up to. It was a question of putting off all the sheep. All he wanted was the deer. People began to realise that he had no interest in them, that he was going to force them out bit by bit. There's no doubt about it, he wanted to get rid of all the locals, he just wanted it as a big estate for deer-shooting. I always thought that, and I always will think it. That was the whole thing, to get rid of the locals'.

The farm manager in Knoydart at the time later recalled, 'I went there in the belief that Brocket wanted the estate to be one of the finest in the west, but shortly after I got there things didn't seem quite the same. Of course, the Highland Clearances were very much in the minds of the people there, I was very kindly lent the book on the Clearances [Alexander MacKenzie's history] which had a lot in it about Knoydart. The local people thought the estate should have been their own, that they had a right to the land, that it had been stolen from them, from the crofters. But Brocket was Lord Brocket on the estate, he made it very obvious who he was, he wanted all things on the estate just to suit himself, not for other people. He was running Knoydart all for his own personal benefit, not for the community there. The shepherds weren't allowed in the hills to look for sheep when he was shooting stags - maybe just as well, in case they got shot. He didn't like visitors about the place. But his standard of living was tremendous - even the piano was painted white, it was just a notion Lady Brocket had. She wasn't popular with the local people, I don't think she was popular anywhere'.

And according to one of the Knoydart gardeners of the time, Braocket was a man who looked down on working people. 'In fact, if there was one of them coming along the road smoking, he would stop them and tell them to put their pipe out. I left in November 1947, and inside the next year about fifteen families left the place'.

As another of the land-raiders, Archie MacDougall, recalled, 'At the end of the war the military left, and once more the estate resumed its role as a sporting paradise for the Brockets and their guests. It soon became apparent that changes were imminent. Even the local children were prevented from walking on the beach in the vicinity of the mansion. Employees could be sacked at will, and

Brocket did just that. One after another the workers were made redundant. The reason given was heavy costs, and another excuse was the shortage of houses, as many held rented houses, and once their employment was stopped they could be forced to leave and go elsewhere. It could clearly be seen that the prime motive was to get the local people out'.

Knoydart, therefore, in the immediate post-war period, was in a fairly explosive condition - not least because of a consciousness of the long Highland tradition of anti-landlord direct-action; because of a radical Labour government making encouraging noises about Highland development; and above all, perhaps, because of a consciousness of the Napier Commission in the 1880s, the suggestions of the Deer Forest Commission that followed it a decade later - and the subsequent legislation (most notably the 1919 Land Settlement Act).

As MacPherson said, the Deer Forest Commission was set up to 'look at areas in the Highlands and Islands which might allow people to return to more spacious circumstances, and you'll find that there are areas of Knoydart scheduled as suitable for settlement in the maps and in the text of the commissioners' report. This was known to the men'.

As a result, therefore, a development plan for the estate was drawn up by the land-hungry of Knoydart and presented to the Highlands and Islands Advisory Panel. It argued that the estate's 70,000 acres could yield £50,000 per annum, and increase the local population from 80 to 500 in five years. In a period of food rationing, it would mean Knoydart carrying 15,000 sheep, 200 dairy cattle and 400 summer cattle, with forty holdings of 1,000 acres each, comprising ten of arable and the rest grazing for around 400 sheep.

The plan also made provision for the growth of inshore fishing and forestry, along with a ten-mile road to meet the railway at Spean Bridge. Underpinning the plan was the claim that a century earlier Knoydart had supported 1,500 people, 20,000 sheep and 200 cattle - while by 1947 there were only four landholders, with twelve usable houses lying empty.

Nothing, however, came of the plan. And thus, as Duncan MacPhail remembered, 'We put our heads together and thought, all this lovely ground and everything going off. Brocket kept putting off the stock, it was obvious all he cared about was the deer. We thought, why not have a crack at getting some of the land? I was very keen, it was dash hard lines that after all these years fighting, if you weren't going to get something out of it for yourself. Probably we all had the idea at the back of our minds that we were going to be put out - and we thought, well, we're entitled to a bit of our own land'.

In the autumn of 1948, therefore, the Knoydart land-raid went ahead. Soundings had been taken in the previous months by MacPherson with regard to re-settling families from the Hebrides on the estate, as people from Harris had been re-settled on Skye after the First World War. And he did find a number of people from his home area of the southern isles who expressed an interest in the idea. With the press invited to attend, and Brocket also on the estate, the raid took place on 9 November, with the six raiders (the seventh would add his name later) staking out 65 acres of arable land and 10,000 acres of hill - each stake bearing the name of a raider.

The chief-constable of Inverness-shire reported on the raid to the secretary of the Scottish Home Department a week later.

‘One 9th November, the lands of Kilchoan Farm, Scottas Farm and fields in the neighbourhood of the village of Inverie, all of which are owned by and in the occupation of Lord Brocket, were raided by six local people who ‘staked’ claims to the land. No offence under the Trespass Act appears to have been committed and the raiders were orderly. The raid appears to have been well-planned, press reporters and photographers from far afield being on the spot in advance. It is understood that for some years the raiders have been agitating with the Department of Agriculture for occupation of land. The parish priest Father Colin MacPherson is playing a leading part in the effort of the raiders to draw public attention to their desire to obtain land. On complaining to the police, Lord Brocket was advised that the only action possible at the moment is action in the Law Courts and it is understood that his Law Agents had applied to the Court of Session and have obtained Interim Interdicts against the raiders. It is believed that the raiders will persist in the raiding’.

Public support from throughout Scotland was instantaneous and widespread. The Inverie post office was quickly in receipt of telegrams of support ‘flowing in from across the country’, while the Lochaber Crofters’ Union pledged full support and re-affirmed its policy that ‘a bold and imaginative scheme of land-settlement is required for the Highlands and Islands. They urge that full advantage should be taken of the existing powers of the Secretary of State for Scotland’.

A packed meeting of supporters was also held, appropriately enough, in Glasgow’s City Halls. MacPherson told of ‘the past 150 years on Knoydart, the depopulation there and the need for re-population of the Highlands’. Brocket, meanwhile, had fled Knoydart almost at once, for sanctuary in the south of England. Passing of

necessity through Mallaig, he told an enquiring newspaper reporter that Knoydart 'was not suitable for many people as there is too much rain there'.

While the raiders cleared the land they had staked out, Brocket went at once to the court with his petition for interim interdict. 'On or about the 8th November 1948 the Respondents entered upon cultivated parts of the said farms of Kilchoan and Scottas to which they have no right, title or interest whatsoever, and staked out claims to smallholdings thereon. Each claim was pegged out and contained a post bearing the name of the person who alleged that he was the owner of that particular smallholding. As the action of the Respondents in staking their claims was well organised, carried out in concert, and with the press having been duly informed beforehand, the Petitioner believes that for some unknown reason some of the local people object to the Petitioner's ownership of the said estate of Knoydart and that further action may be taken'.

(In the Closed Record of the case, dated 9 March the following year, Brocket affected to believe that 'the said priest Father Colin MacPherson has induced and persuaded the Respondents to take the action they have taken and has persuaded them to trespass upon the said lands, and has since his appointment to Knoydart in 1946 [sic] consistently worked against Lord Brocket').

On 11 November, a seventh man joined the party of raiders, and it was announced that they were in the process of hiring a lawyer. The following day, however, messengers of the Court of Session arrived. The raiders could, in traditional manner, have deforced the messenges, and triggered the law as it related to criminal conduct. Instead, they debated at length a plan to accept

the interdicts, but counter them with an interlocutor or similar procedure against the Secretary of State for failing to recognise the land-settlement provisions of previous legislation. (Clearly, it had not taken the raiders long to acquire the services of a lawyer).

This stratagem was in the event dropped from consideration, due to lack of funds with which to finance a protracted legal struggle in the courts. The raiders therefore accepted the writs, and quit the land they had pegged out.

Meanwhile, Brocket countered the raiders' proposals for the estate with an alternative development plan. Affairs on Knoydart were also drawing close attention from the government. Curiously - or otherwise - the government lost little time in commissioning a third report on Knoydart, and its potential for development.

In the Commons on 25 November, Arthur Woodburn, Secretary of State for Scotland, did what his civil servants told him to do, and announced that, 'in view of the conflicting nature of proposals for the development of the resources of the Knoydart peninsula which have been submitted by different interests in the locality, I have decided, after consultation with the Highlands and Islands Advisory Panel, to invite Mr. John Cameron, formerly of the Land Court, to examine the position and to advise on the best means of securing the full development of the resources of the area, taking into account the social, economic and financial issues involved. Mr. Cameron will be given details of the various proposals for developing the area which have so far been put forward, but he will be free to hear any representations and to suggest any alternative or modified proposals'.

This may have been an understandable position for Woodburn to take in public, though his reputation as a man long concerned

with the land question can only have encouraged the raiders to believe that their case would receive favourable attention from the government of which he was part.

In Woodburn's papers in the National Library of Scotland (oddly enough, there is no material specifically concerned with Knoydart) there is much on the land question in general, including a scrapbook of his time as election agent in the 1936 by-election in Ross and Cromarty, along with a brief diary of the campaign. In his draft (typescript) autobiography, he notes, 'I saw the valley of Strathnaver filled with thriving farms which was the result of land settlement schemes about thirty years before, and there is no doubt that a consistent and determined policy could change the face of the Highlands'. (He adds in manuscript, at another point in the draft, 'Afforestation is the one hope for the Highlands. When trees went so did the people. As trees come back, so will the people').

There is also a press-cut, dated 19 August 1948, (that is, just three months before the Knoydart land raid), reporting a speech given by Woodburn to the Larbert Labour Party, during which he said, 'it is absolutely necessary that we should grow more food in our country. Great areas of Scotland have been allowed to deteriorate by depopulation and the surrender of great stretches to deer and grouse'.

A month later, the Inverness Courier was reporting Woodburn at some length. 'There was a revival of interest in the Highlands for the re-development of the Highlands and the rehabilitation of the people throughout the countryside. Among ex-servicemen he found a certain impatience with what they felt was the delay in doing all things they considered should be done for the Highlands. It was possible to increase the number of people who could live on the land

in the Highlands, as so far as the government policy was concerned, they were anxious to see that the man who was getting to live on the land would have enough of it'.

Also among Woodburn's papers are 'Labour's Broadcast to Ross and Cromarty'. This was an election broadsheet for the 1936 election, in which the Labour candidate was supported by Malcolm MacMillan, MP for the Western Isles since the previous year. A further item entitled 'The Land League Still Lives' notes, 'one of my most cherished memories is the part I took in securing the return to parliament for Ross and Cromarty of Dr. Roderick MacDonald. Our first attack on the stronghold of landlordism in 1884 did not succeed. Nothing daunted, we returned to the fray in 1885. Let this victory be repeated in 1936'.

Yet another item reads, 'from the glens and straths, from the western seaboard, from the islands, the tale has run these many years; the people go to the south, to the towns and to the cities. There is not a living for them in their own country'. A final item is headlined 'What Labour gave the Highlands and Islands from 1929 to 1932'. It says, 'at Luskentyre the land-hungry raided and seized arable land in the deer forest. The Labour government acquired the deer-forest under compulsory powers, took the crofters out of gaol, and settled them upon the land'.

In short, Woodburn was entirely aware of the historical background to the aspirations and actions of the Knoydard land-raidiers of 1948: though, having announced the formation of the Cameron Inquiry, he could hardly be expected to pre-empt its findings.

That enquiry got under way before Christmas. Brocket did not come to a December meeting in Mallaig. He said he was sick. He

sent, however, his factor, who agreed that nothing had been done on Knoydart between 1937 and 1947 'to contribute to the country's food supply'. He retailed the information, presumably supplied by Brocket, that he could not furnish precise details as 'a great part of the estate records had been destroyed by enemy action in England' - which might be one way of saying that Brocket was not going to have the estate accounts open to any sort of public scrutiny.

The Edinburgh lawyer representing the raiders said that it was essential to re-populate Knoydart in the national interest, from the point of view of defence and food production, and also of improving social conditions. The Secretary of State had ample powers to re-populate Knoydart under the Small Landholders' Act and the Land Settlement Act. The only means whereby people had been kept on the land, he said, 'was by giving them holdings of an economic size with security of tenure, a fair rent, and compensation for improvements'.

After stating that the population of Knoydart of 100 was much too small, he added that 150 years earlier there had been ten times as many people on the peninsula. But by 1931, the population had dropped to 186. 'In view of these figures, and in view of the fall since 1931 by nearly fifty per cent, I do not think it can be disputed that something requires to be done very quickly to repopulate Knoydart. Otherwise, any measures will be too late. From 1861 to 1931 the local population has decreased by 67 per cent, compared with a decrease of only seven per cent in the county of Inverness during the same period'.

Cameron issued his report the following March. Astonishingly, he found against the raiders' proposals and in favour of the

development of Knoydart as a single unit, preferably under Brocket. Even more astonishingly, Woodburn agreed to this.

The raiders petitioned Woodburn, urging him to ensure that tenants on Knoydart 'be given the protection of the Small Landholders' Act. They submit that it is the statutory duty of the Secretary of State immediately to form smallholdings for them at Knoydart'. Woodburn, however, rejected the petition - and that, largely, was the end of the matter.

In retrospect, it was an extraordinarily bad decision and one with catastrophic consequences for Knoydart. It represented a cruel betrayal of Highland crofters, to the worst sort of English landlord, by a Labour government with radical pretensions. And it can also be said that the raiders were cruelly misled by the lawyers and legal system in which they had been advised to put their trust.

The appointment of the Cameron Inquiry had served splendidly as a diversion; and its mere existence fatally damaged the impetus of the raiders' own aspirations (which may well have been its intended effect in the first place).

Spurned by the government, the raiders would shortly be spurned by the courts too. Had funds been available, might they have won a case in the courts, and forced the government to apply the provisions of existing legislation? Or should they have ignored the government and the courts, and simply taken and held possession of Knoydart by the force of their own little number and the extensive public sympathy they enjoyed throughout post-war Scotland?

Whatever the case, the damage had been done. Brocket was free to indulge such taste as he had for retribution - he having none, certainly, for development. He did his best to humiliate the raiders.

One of them wrote to him on the last day of October 1949 asking for work.

Brocket wrote back, 'if you send me an unqualified apology and undertaking never to repeat such acts as those on November 9th 1948, I will then give consideration to the question of your being employed again on the estate'. The raider in question met both conditions and for good measure withdrew his claim to a smallholding. Brocket, the millionaire brewer, replied, 'in view of your apology and undertaking never to behave in the same way again, I have instructed my solicitors not to proceed against you, of course on the understanding that you pay your own costs up to date'.

Further: the report of Cameron, despite its major recommendation for single-unit development of Knoydart, had also suggested that the estate did give land to those men who clearly wanted it. Brocket, however, replied that 'he didn't intend to offer any land unless enjoined to do so by the government' - something, it was already clear, the government was quite unwilling to do.

The raiders, in their answers to the Court of Session lodged in the November of 1948, argued that they had acted within their rights in terms of the Small Landholders' Act of 1911 and the Land Settlement Act of 1919. They argued that their actions, being for the purpose of assisting the Department of Agriculture for Scotland in the exercise of its statutory duties, were not an infringement of any rights of ownership. The interdict sought was, therefore, in the circumstances, contrary to public policy.

The Lord Justice Clerk, however, did not agree. In his opinion of February 1951, he wrote that, 'the justification which the respondents put forward is that they were within their rights in terms

of Section 7 of the Small Landholders' Act 1911 which, as amended by the Land Settlement Act of 1919, Section 9, provides that when the Department of Agriculture are satisfied that there is a demand for smallholdings and that suitable land is available for that purpose, it is their duty to prepare a scheme for the constitution of new holdings under certain circumstances. I can only characterise this contention as fantastic'.

In short, Brocket had won a magnificent victory and the raiders had suffered a terrible defeat. By 1951, people were drifting steadily away from Knoydart. Whether a criminal course of action would have been better is, with the benefit of hindsight, at least arguable.

Thirty-odd years after the raid, Duncan MacPhail argued, 'well, I was in favour of sticking on the land like in the olden days they did. But this lawyer said that in these modern times these things wouldn't need to take place, that we should do it in the legal way and things would work out pretty good. But I am afraid that was our downfall. We would have been far better to have done what the old boys in the olden days did, stick on the ground till they put you in gaol. We thought it was a very good idea, that it was going to be legal. But afterwards, when we saw the whole thing, and you look back on it, you realised it didn't pay to be doing it in the modern way. Oh yes, it would have worked, if we had got the ground. I am sure we would have made a go of it. Anything was better than the way it was. It was getting less and less used, Knoydart - plenty of ground in Knoydart, and good ground, but all that Brocket was interested in was deer. That's all he lived for, to come up and shoot the deer: and I always said, to get rid of the people'.

Brocket did not stay long afterwards in Knoydart (though his taste for the Celtic fringe was undimmed and in 1949 he acquired a

substantial property in the south of Ireland). He died in 1967 and eight years later the twenty-three year old Lord Charles Brocket, ex-Eton and the Hussars, inherited Brocket Hall. The mansion was shortly afterwards broken up into flats, 'as England's finest privately owned residence for executive meetings and incentive groups'. Its grounds were let for corporate conferences and motor-trade promotions. Later, Brocket was to serve a gaol sentence on account of an insurance fraud relating to his collection of vintage motor cars.

And by the 1980s, Knoydart was largely empty. Between 1985 and 1988 thirteen houses were sold-off as holiday homes. The original estate had been carved-up and sold-off as individual lots. Most of the peninsula was in the anonymous ownership of companies registered in the tax havens of the Dutch Antilles, the Bahamas and the Channel Isles.

In 1989 Knoydart was scheduled as the location for that year's Goose Run. The Goose Run, reported the Oban Times without a flicker of shame, was in aid of Survival International. And what was this Survival International?

Why, it was 'an organisation which works for the rights of threatened peoples and aims to ensure that they keep communal ownership of their lands, have facilities which are suited to their own needs, and are not exploited'.