

## 7. Crofters' Party, Crofters' Act.

'We must not rest satisfied until every inch of productive land in the Highlands is placed at the disposal of those who are able and willing to till it. Until this is assured, the people must resolve to maintain the most persistent and determined agitation'.

FROM THE start of 1884 the efforts of the crofters themselves on the one hand, and the efforts of their external allies on the other, began to produce results that could scarcely have been dreamt of a matter of years earlier. The press continued to play the role pioneered by Murdoch's Highlander and MacKenzie's Celtic Magazine. The churches, at least, offered no consolation to the social forces urging a return to the economic relations which had hitherto pertained. The agitation on the ground was more determined than ever. And in the southern towns the Gaelic societies with their progressive allies retained their place as an urban focus of publicity for the cause of the Highland crofters.

Thus the two years from the autumn of 1884 to the passage of the Crofters' Act in the summer of 1886 were to see the high point of the Crofters' War - as it has justly been called - when agitation and organisation came together in an unprecedented way to win for the crofter cause very considerable attention in the press and public life in general.

At the beginning of November Fraser-MacIntosh was challenging the Home Secretary in the House of Commons as to whether he would make available police-government communications with regard to the situation in Skye. Harcourt stalled, saying that such communications were not complete, but

that when they were he would 'have no objection to lay them on the table of the House'. And five days later, MPs again clashed with Harcourt over developments in the Highlands. One asked about Kilmuir and the interests of its proprietor, Fraser, adding that the demands of the crofters, 'are nothing more than a fair rent, and the restoration of sheep land of which they were deprived many years ago'.

Had the government, he asked, considered the expediency 'of creating a public tribunal to fix the rents to be paid by tenants in the exceptional conditions of crofters in the Highlands and Islands?' Was the government considering the report of the Napier Commission with a view to acting on it? And, finally, would the government therefore be bringing legislation on the crofter question at the opening of the next session of parliament?

Harcourt thought that there was no justification for the defiance of the law and the breach of the peace which had 'unhappily occurred at Skye'. But he added, 'the government will feel it to be their duty to take action at the earliest possible time, so far as they can, upon the report of the Royal Commission'. Harcourt also clashed with MacFarlane in the same sitting, over the 'petty outrages in Skye'.

The matter of the crofters also came up later than same month in the House of Lords. The attack there on their cause was led by the Duke of Argyll, a leading apologist for the landlords. His view on the matter was simple. Emigration (though not for the landlord class) was the answer.

'I am in favour of emigration and I hope the day will come when the overpopulated districts will be relieved of their surplus population. I do not say that the Highlands are over-populated as a

whole - far from it. But in the Long Island [Lewis] and other places they are undoubtedly over-populated. Before I sit down I wish to say a few words with regard to the lawlessness which has prevailed in some districts of the western Highlands. I believe, and I know, that this lawlessness has not been born among the people of the country. It is the work and active propaganda of Socialistic agitators. In the island of Skye, when I was there last year, I heard details which left no doubt whatsoever that the minds of the people have been poisoned by active emissaries altogether outside the people. Naturally they are the most tractable, the most loyal, and the most law-abiding people in the world. The whole thing has been got up by one of the societies in London. I wish to explain to the House the extent to which lawlessness has gone. So far as I know the fact, it is not a question of resisting rents. It is not a question of resisting evictions or removals. It is a question of seizing other people's land. A great many of the crofting townships there have issued and executed a threat of entering on the ground of the large tenants and seizing it by main force. If such a thing is allowed to go on, all capital will be driven from the country'.

It was a clear expression of the Highland landlord case: of its urge to deport the common people (allied to a concession that they suffered a shortage of land), its fear of united popular action, its enduring loyalty to the tradition of recreational patronage, and of its attribution of popular discontent to 'outside agitators'.

By way of reply, Lord Napier himself noted - somewhat drily, it might be thought - that the Duke of Argyll was 'usually ranked among those who, in theory at least, would rather apply a strict economical principle to the management of land than those

practices of benevolence and mutual accommodation which are advocated by others’.

That same month the Commons debated the question of the crofters, on the motion of Donald MacFarlane, with Fraser-MacIntosh seconding. The motion asked the government to give effect to the proposals of the Napier Commission, ‘or to apply such other remedies as they deem advisable’.

In a remarkably favourable response, from the crofter point of view, Harcourt noted that he had spent his leisure time on Skye for the best part of twenty years, and claimed that two years earlier he had refused appeals to send a force of soldiers to the island. He added, ‘some people say, the remedy for all this is emigration. Well, in my opinion emigration is a very poor remedy indeed. (Irish cheers). I have myself no sympathy with a policy which improves a country by getting rid of its people. To my mind this is the policy of despair. I at all events do not accept the policy of making a solitude and calling it political economy’.

With this deftly classical conceit - the allusion is clearly to Tacitus on Calgacus - Harcourt moved to speak more generally on land-ownership in the Highlands. ‘The number of proprietors in these districts is very small. I think in the outer islands, in the Long Island, I doubt whether there are six separate proprietors altogether. When you come to Skye the number is very few of proprietors of any magnitude at all. When you come even to the mainland the number is not considerable. Certainly, there are no people who have more reason to desire to see this question settled than the proprietors of the West Highlands. It is certainly not in their interest to raise a great land question in Scotland’.

The motion, to give effect to the proposals of the Napier Commission, was accepted by the government and passed unanimously. But by this point, however, a force of soldiers and police was already on Skye.

The intervention stemmed from reports that some crofters in the west of the Skye were preparing forcibly to bring before their mass-meetings such of those as did not agree with them - and in particular some farmers, 'for statements reported to have been made by them' in connection with the evidence taken before the royal commission. Though Harcourt repeated these claims in the Commons, according to MacKenzie they were manufactured. But they do serve to highlight the growing confidence of a movement that had as yet won in law nothing of its demands. To paraphrase Argyll, the people clearly were ready to take by this point what they demanded, whatever the law and its agencies might rule or attempt to enforce.

Whatever the truth of the matter, a small party of police was sent to 'protect persons threatened with outrage by the crofters'. But it was turned back forcibly. As a result, the demands of the landlords and authorities in Inverness-shire for the military were at last met.

As the county chief-constable MacHardy reported at the end of October, the state of the land agitation had been gradually increasing over the previous four months. At Glendale, there had been land raiding by the Hamara and Ferrinvicquarrie crofters, while in August Blackie and MacFarlane had visited the glen. It was also rumoured, MacHardy reported, that secret societies existed in the district 'for the purpose of committing outrages on proprietors, and their property, and also for the injury of persons unfavourable to the

crofters' agitation'. However, beyond the declaration of secrecy exacted from persons who became members of the Land League, and 'kindred' associations, 'no direct evidence has been got of the formation of secret societies of the serious nature referred to'.

Glendale, of course, and the west of Skye in general, was perhaps the area in the Highlands which had enjoyed closest contact with Ireland over the previous ten years. Such contact existed via the Kinsale fishings, the visits of trading vessels, and 'emissaries' of the Irish Land League (and the long tradition of secret and direct-action societies that lay behind it). Whether secret societies did really exist is now not known, far less the extent or proposed tactical and policy programmes that might have had: nor the precise nature of the 'outrages' they might have considered.

At the end of the previous August, one of the land-raiding crofters in the district had been ordered by the landlord to take his stock off the raided land. The crofter refused, and went to Uist to buy more stock - which he also put on the land in question. In September, a party of landlord's men removed some crofters' stock from raided land at Scor. They were interrupted in this by a body of crofters, and the stock returned. As Sheriff Ivory noted of the district and his agents there, 'the people of the district continue in an excited state over these matters, and it is with the utmost caution that Constable MacVicar performs his patrols among them'.

Affairs were similarly tense elsewhere in the island. In Kilmuir and Uig, the authorities were reporting a 'crisis' in landlord and tenant relations.

'Meetings of the local branch of the Land League have been frequently held throughout the district, and large gatherings of the people have taken place. At Land League meetings later held,

those who attended the same are said to have made a declaration, and banded themselves together to carry out several resolutions passed at such meetings in regard to land. Each crofter agrees to pay ten shillings and each cottar five shillings, agreeing not to do any work for any of the district farmers, and that under pain of injury to person or property, and it is stated that they have appointed persons to watch over the district to see that these directions are carried out. It has been arranged that all the crofters on the Kilmuir estate are to hold a mass meeting at Quiraing on 31st December. A no-rent proclamation has been issued, and published in the Oban Times of 25 October, from the Kilmuir branch'.

To this clearly high degree of community organisation, rent striking and land seizing, the crofters were now adding the 'Irish' tactics of boycott: and enforcement of it. They were also preparing, in a remarkable form of popular trial, to force the attendance at a mass-meeting of two local farmers and a factor, 'for the purpose of demanding some explanation from them'.

It was, in the chief-constable's phrase, 'in anticipation of these outrages' that Fraser of Kilmuir asked for additional police protection. And though MacHardy had sent more men, and a consignment of fifty revolvers from the War Office, he also reported that, 'with special reference to the present serious outbreak of disorder and lawlessness in Skye, I beg respectfully, but candidly, to state that the available force of police under my command is entirely inadequate to maintain order, and carry out the law'.

And indeed the force of police sent to Kilmuir under the command of Superintendent Aitchison, was turned back by force, as the superintendent's exchange of telegrams with MacHardy

bears witness. While Aitchison awaited further orders in Portree, the sub-committee of Inverness police, with the strongly anti-crofter Lord Lovat in the chair, wrote to the Home Secretary noting the urgent need for more police to be made available for Skye.

Over and above this, 'all the additional police sent to Skye as well as those located in the disturbed districts should be armed with revolvers. The men should be openly instructed in the use of these at Portree'. He added that as many as possible of the additional police - more especially those engaged in patrol duty - should be mounted, 'and an application should be made to the Government to station a gunboat with marines at Portree'.

Sheriff Ivory also wrote to the Lord Advocate, in similar terms. He was strongly of the opinion that 'the immediate despatch of a gunboat and marines to Skye is absolutely necessary to protect the police and assist them in protecting the property and persons of the lieges of that island'.

Thus the Highland Žlite, at least, was keen for a trial of strength with the Skye crofters (though the authorities in the south were less keen, or more cautious). The outcome of such an all-out trial, both in the short and the longer term, is open to a degree of interesting speculation. Might a violent intervention by soldiers have ignited in the island a response on the Irish (to name but one) model, with shootings, lootings and burnings? Such a confrontation would not exactly have gone un-noticed in the rest of the Highland where absentee landlord property was peculiarly open to destruction, at no cost and very little risk to the crofters' movement. If nothing else, it might well have led, on a generalised scale, to a downward trend in property values and even recreational occupancy. The publicity attendant on such a course of events

would also have been enormous: and though its effects on the rest of Scotland might be incalculable, they were scarcely likely to be in favour of the landlord or the industrial capitalist classes or government.

In the event, matters did not come to this stage. But popular morale in Skye against the police was certainly very high.

To accommodate the force of constables planned for the island, for instance, a steamer was to be chartered on the grounds that nowhere safe could be found ashore for such a purpose. This popular antipathy was known to the chief-constable, MacHardy, who was clearly spoiling for some sort of fight at the bidding of his police committee under Lord Lovat. According to his reports, since the earlier rebuff of his men: 'The people of Kilmuir have turned out and held possession of the district, determined to resist the police entering or going about among them. They have for the past week assembled in hundreds, day and night armed with sticks for the purpose of assaulting an expected body of police, and declare that they will attack any number of constables so long as soldiers are not sent. A force of fifty constables including those presently stationed on Skye has been made available for the enforcement of law and restoring order to the island, under Government protection'.

MacHardy then went to London, while from Inverness Aitchison kept him informed of developments on Skye. His reports testify to the extent of popular solidarity on the island with regard to the land question. According to one such report, for instance, there was 'great excitement prevailing in Uig and East Side today. Watchers on all conspicuous places armed with long sticks. Crowds going about Uig'. Two days later, there was, 'great excitement prevailing in district. Still determined to resist any police force

whatsoever. Groups constantly on watch'. And the following day, people were seen 'going about in great numbers about one in the morning, waiting to receiving the police. Great meeting held at top of Rha yesterday evening, watchmen posted all over Kilmuir. The agitation throughout the whole island is in the highest degree, and undoubtedly all would turn out'.

By this point, Harcourt had told the Commons that the conduct of the Skye crofters could no longer be tolerated and that it was the duty of the local authorities, 'with the entire support of the executive government, to take all such measures as may be necessary to the observance of the law'. By the second week of November, therefore, the Lochiel was ready at Stornoway, whence she was to steam south to Strome Ferry, and there collect the force of police coming by train from Inverness. A violent gale over the weekend delayed a proposed mass-meeting of crofters at Kilmuir. Nevertheless, supporters from throughout Skye were expected to lend their weight when it finally took place, and it was anticipated that the crofters could field a demonstration of perhaps 2,000 people.

On Monday the crofters heard that the police had yet to leave Inverness, as Sheriff Ivory and Chief Constable MacHardy had still not returned from London. They had also heard from Stornoway that the Lochiel was unable to sail, as her Highland skipper and crew were refusing to 'serve in the ungrateful task of carrying armed men for the purpose of shooting down their helpless and unoffending brethren'. And on Tuesday 12 November, supporters in Stornoway telegraphed to Skye: 'Lochiel's crew refuse to proceed to Skye. Thousands of Lewis men threatening to proceed to Skye to help crofters. Great excitement here'.

By this point a veritable fleet of vessels was heading for Skye, in the cause of restoring its crofters to the condition of traditional subservience and good temper so lately attributed to them by the Duke of Argyll in the House of Lords.

On the Monday evening the gunboat Forester had sailed from Greenock. She called briefly at Tobermory (where her temporary presence must have caused something of a sensation among the Land Leaguers of Mull), and thereafter resolutely headed rounded Ardnamurchan, and Skye opened ahead. On the Wednesday the Lochiel was coaling at Stornoway, her owners still trying to find a crew for her: MacHardy arrived back in Inverness: and the Assistance and the Stormcock were reported to be on their way north to join the Forester. That afternoon, the Forester herself came into Portree bay (anchoring half a mile off, which suggests that her commanding officer feared some sort of assault on his vessel).

The following morning the Lochiel arrived at Strome where she was met by a relief skipper and crew 'in room of Captain Cameron and the Highland crew who have refused duty'. And on Saturday afternoon she arrived in Portree with twenty-five police, Ivory, MacHardy and the Inverness procurator-fiscal - who had all travelled down from the Highland capital by train that morning. On the Sunday the Assistance arrived with 350 marines and 100 sailors: the following morning, the Banterer arrived at Portree with another sixty-five marines.

By then, the Forester, Assistance and Lochiel had all steamed for Uig. The Forester, being the last to arrive, anchored in such a way that she could cover with her guns the landing of the marines and the police: a comment on the seriousness with which the county authorities, at least, were prepared to confront the crofters'

movement in the island. That afternoon, seven police came ashore along with Ivory, MacHardy and Aitchison, the Fiscal, the captain of the Assistance, and the officer in command of the marines. At the inn, however, they were refused accommodation, by way of introduction to the mood prevailing on the island. The police were therefore sent to the school and the sheriff's party retired to their ships. As darkness fell seventy marines came ashore in full marching order, that they could protect the seven policemen in the school from the attentions of the crofters.

To all this, however, the response of the crofters was one of sublimely passive resistance. Such action may well suggest a very intelligent response on the part of the local Land League leadership - for, though the national leadership was publicly counselling just such a course, there can be no doubt that direction of the immediate course of events on Skye lay in the hands of the islands' crofter leaders themselves.

There was to be no violence, there were to be no outrages. Even as Ivory's fleet had steamed along the north-eastern coast of Skye, 'everywhere people were ostentatiously and conspicuously seen to be at work, along the coast, digging potatoes'. At Staffin, where signs of opposition had been expected, 'the utmost quietude and decorum prevailed'. And at Uig the 'crofter population made big efforts to look busy. Not a single grown-up crofter came down to the shore, either to defy or welcome the visitors'. As the special correspondent of the Glasgow Herald observed, 'The long-threatened expedition to the country of the crofters is now an accomplished fact. The district was found in a state of the most perfect peace, with every crofter minding his own business'.

The morning following the arrival of the fleet at Uig, 250 marines were marched over to Staffin, the flanks of their force protected with marine artillery and scouting parties. But this four-hour procession, by any standards an intimidating provocation, was the occasion of no violence at all: and night fell 'amid a scene of perfect tranquility on the part of the villagers'.

The same sort of tactic was applied in the west of the island. At the end of that week, Ivory took three of his ships to Glendale and went ashore with twenty police and three companies of marines. Once ashore, and on the march to Hamara, they came on a Land League meeting with John MacPherson in command. Marine buglers failed to disrupt or provoke the meeting: and Ivory was left to station six police and seventy-five marines at Hamara Lodge. On the Sunday following, more marines and police were stationed at Dunvegan and Ivory, who had already indicated his willingness to undertake 'pacification' of other 'disaffected' islands and areas, returned to Portree to organise it. By the Monday, therefore, his fleet had completed coaling and provisioning for such an expedition to Uist: but the Home Secretary prohibited it 'for the time being'.

Under the spotlight of very considerable national interest, and the watchful scrutiny of their friends in the newspapers and parliament, the crofters - it can persuasively be argued in retrospect - scarcely put a foot wrong in a situation fraught with possibility of tactical error. To Ivory's expedition, however, they paid wilfully scant attention. The men of Valtos and Staffin, for instance, met in public (with the press in attendance to record and report) and announced a new rent-strike (having first expelled four of Ivory's men from the meeting). And at Uig the people also met in an autumn gale of wind and rain, 'in order that the sheriff and armed

men in the bay might see what was going on, and learn the fact that the men of Uig have not yet been frightened into forgetting their grievances’.

In Glendale too, the tenants of both estates agreed that they would not pay any rent until further notice: and when the factor called for his rents, no one was there to pay him. Indeed, the tenants of Fasach wrote to their landlord, baldly informing him that they too were on rent-strike. The announcement formalised the de facto strikes of earlier, and signalled a new confidence and organisation in the movement - as well as a consciousness of the publicity and support it enjoyed in the wider political world.

They also added the explanation (itself mute testimony to the crofter viewpoint on the ownership and use of land and the origin of profit deriving from it) that they were in any case not morally bound to pay rent, because, ‘our poverty is not our fault. We have worked to pay you for what should be our homes. But we are now so poor that we must first obey the law of nature, to feed and clothe ourselves, and we therefore cannot pay you the rent which you wish to exact from us. Owing to thus being deprived, we consider that you are owing us £40, and in all seriousness we say that you should pay us this instead of asking us for rent’.

And in the south and the east of the island, on Lord MacDonald’s estates, the rent-strike tactic was spreading too. In the words of John MacPherson at a meeting of MacDonald’s striking tenants at Braes, ‘it would be as easy to stop the Atlantic ocean as if would be to stop the present agitation until justice has been done to the people’.

The long record of conspicuous expenditure of what people saw as their rents by the MacDonalds was not unknown, of course,

to the tenantry of the estate (for many years, Lady MacDonald had demanded a freshly-torn tongue from a freshly-slaughtered animal on her ladyship's daily luncheon-table). And while a rent-strike was promptly declared at Snizort, the people of Braes and Sconser also announced a suspension of all monies formerly payable to the estate - bringing the number of townships on strike to fourteen on the MacDonald estates alone.

By this point, in other words, social relations on Skye had tilted alarmingly (from the landlord point of view) in favour of the crofters, and the landlord fear of a generalised expropriation had been given eloquent expression. In Kilmuir, for instance, the landlord Fraser invited his crofters to send delegates to discuss matters with him - itself something of a concessive novelty in class relations on the nineteenth century island of Skye. But the crofters, their expectations clearly expanding in precisely the way that pro-landlord observers had so feared, refused. Instead, they invited Fraser to come before the crofters and explain himself - and before a mass meeting of tenants, at that.

Similar conditions existed throughout the island: and while the rent-strikes and other strikes began to bite into the landlord purse, the marines could not be used in a military capacity for fear of what such an action might by then ignite across the Highlands. Nor could anything be done in effect about the thousands of crofters technically breaking the law, whether by rent-striking or by land-raiding.

Meanwhile in Westminster their supporters, in a skilled demonstration of campaign co-ordination and parliamentary tactics, agitated for emergency legislation to legalise eviction for rent-

arrears until such time as laws were enacted to meet the crofters' grievances.

As a result of this public scrutiny on the one hand, and the crofters' passively insolent reponse to the marine invasion of their island on the other, the bulk of Ivory's force was shortly withdrawn from Skye, with just a token party left on the island. The Home Office told the Lord Advocate in January, 'you will make it quite clear to the police committee that Her Majesty's government regard the military force as acting in support of and not in substitution of the police, on whom properly devolves the duty of maintaining order and executing the law'.

The will of the Skye crofters was underpinned by other events occurring at the same time as Ivory's invasion. By that winter poverty had become particularly severe on the island, with £2,000 needed for meal and clothes to meet the relief of distress, 'which is of an exceptional character and may be expected to be at its worst at the beginning of February'. Just a week after that report Henry George was touring the island urging the people to take 'what was justly theirs' - an appeal, whatever the precise details of George's remedies, that can only have powerfully reinforced crofter opinion on the land question.

And by way of further reinforcement, there was widespread - and highly unfavourable - publicity for a civil action in the sheriff court at Dingwall, where the American millionaire Walter Winans was taking legal action against a Kintail crofter and shoemaker who had allowed his pet lamb to graze on land owned by the railway tycoon. (Winans was not the first or last eccentric to own land for deer-stalking in the Highlands. But he may well have been pre-eminent among them. A superb shot and fanatical stalker, he once

had a white pony camouflaged with make-up acquired from a hair-dresser in the West End of London).

In Kilmuir, meanwhile, Fraser was continuing with action in the courts against some of his tenants (including Davidson, the local minister). The grounds for the action were that, 'if under Land League direction crofters who until of late have paid their rents so well will not now pay them at all, and if no processes are to be used against them, how can landlords so placed recover their rents, or defend their non-crofter farms from seizure?' And further: 'In such cases, how can those whose incomes may be derivable from their estates pay their accounts if the crofters cannot be called upon to pay theirs?'

This hint referred to the forthcoming landlord version of the rent-strike - their short-lived 'rates-strike' on Skye. Meanwhile on a Highland-wide scale the landlords, recognising that the government could not be depended on for an all-out coercive move against the crofters, met in conference in Inverness to offer concessions to them. These concessions included 'an undertaking to increase the size of their holdings as suitable opportunities arose, and where the crofters are in a position profitably to occupy and stock the same'. Such offers were more or less risible by this stage, given that the record of landlordism did not suggest a high frequency of 'suitability' with regard either to land availability, or to 'profitability' as far as their crofters were concerned. The landlords also offered long-term leases, such as Lord Lovat had introduced for some of his own tenants (though only to crofters who were not in arrears with rent). But as Lovat's conduct with regard to leases within three years would demonstrate, the offer was properly judged by the crofters as little more than a manœuvre. The landlords also suggested

compensation to outgoing tenants for improvements that they had made to their holdings: but did not forget the old refrain on the importance of 'granting assistance to those who may be anxious to emigrate'.

The outcome of the conference, in fact, served to demonstrate just how little the landlords could agree on any significant measure of concession. By the crofters, therefore, their offer was simply ignored - itself a powerful demonstration of the extent to which the agitation of the previous years had encouraged 'visions of a crofters' millennium'.

On the ground, meanwhile, the agitation was unabated. By the end of January in that hard winter, the Sheriff of Ross had been visiting Lewis aboard the Seahorse, for the purpose of arresting crofters charged with deforcement of a messenger-at-arms while he was attempting to serve interdicts from the Court of Session.

By now, the roads in the west of Lewis were blocked with boulders, to dissuade any other expedition of sheriff-officers: while in Skye too, court officers were deforced at Valtos and Glendale in the course of serving summonses for rent-arrears.

Later that month, therefore, following widespread speculation fuelled by the crofters' contacts in the south, Ivory returned to Skye with another fleet carrying marines and police. At Glendale six men, including John MacPherson, were arrested and accused of rioting and deforcement. As they were led away, MacPherson assured his fellow-tenants that they had nothing to worry about, as he and the other arrested men would soon be back in the glen.

Ivory's force was also deployed at Valtos, landing from the Assistance. Immediately on getting ashore, 'operations for arrests were commenced', but after a whole day's search the officers of the

law were only successful in apprehending two out of the eight against whom warrants had been issued.

‘The other six had betaken themselves with a number of others to the surrounding hills, and the excitement throughout the entire island is intense’.

In Valtos there had been a struggle with the police, requiring 100 marines to fix bayonets; and that evening when the official party reached Portree with its prisoners, further trouble was feared. In the morning, when the prisoners were taken under very heavy guard to the County Buildings, they were ‘greeted by the assembled crowd with ringing cheers, again and again repeated. The excitement in Portree on Saturday night continued most intense, and the policemen who patrolled the streets were hooted and hissed in the wildest manner’.

To this sort of intimidation, however, the crofters of Skye and elsewhere paid scant attention. At Strome (from which ten men had appeared in court eighteen months earlier on a church-riot church), the crofters demanded the distribution of sheep-farms and deer-forests among the people, ‘and shall not permit these to be robbed by the landlords as they notoriously have been’. Similar demands came from Stornoway, at the inaugural meeting of the League’s branch there; while on the Dalglish estate in Ardnamurchan, fears were being entertained that ‘troublesome times are impending’.

In the Ross of Mull, the League branch on the Duke of Argyll’s estate was reported active, and of especial worry to the authorities on account of its decision (suggestive of the ‘secret societies’ reports from Skye) to conduct its proceedings in private: while nationally, the League announced that it would arrange the legal defence of the men lately taken prisoner at Valtos and Glendale.

In South Uist land-raiding was under way, the people of Boisdale taking possession of an island in the loch for potato ground. At Lochcarron, Donald MacCallum and John MacPherson addressed the crofters, the latter assuring them that from the first 'he had discerned the hand of Providence in the agitation, and now rejoiced at the dimensions and importance it had assumed'. In Daliburgh, South Uist, three fields were seized and the factor's remonstrations simply ignored. In Lewis, 400 men met at Barvas to demand land reform; while on Tiree, 'a large number of rents due at Martinmas last are still unpaid, and as his grace has now expressed his resolution to enforce payment in the usual way, the outlook at the present time is very dark'.

Throughout the following months the agitation grew across the Highlands. It was also pursued without rest in the pro-crofter press and by the pro-crofter MPs. Prospective pro-crofter MPs were also playing a role, for the Third Reform Act gave crofters the chance to vote, and they were now preparing to run their own candidates in elections at the end of the year.

From the Celtic Magazine, a steady stream of articles poured in the crofters' favour. Fraser-MacIntosh wrote on where to get money for the stocking of 'new and enlarged crofts', and MacKenzie himself reported on the annual meeting of the Gaelic Society of Inverness where speeches were delivered by Cameron of Lochiel and Sir Kenneth MacKenzie - both ex-members of the Napier Commission. In March, MacKenzie found room for cartoon coverage of the Skye invasion from the Graphic and the Pictorial World: for John MacKay of Hereford on croft and farm rents in Sutherland: and for reports on affairs in Kilmuir, on the landlord

conference at Inverness; and (as his lead story), on 'terrorism on Skye - Sheriff Ivory's latest folly'.

In April, space was given to land courts and Highland sheriffs, the trial of the Lewis crofters, Lord Napier and the Duke of Argyll, and a review of Blackie's newly-published Scottish Highlanders and the Land Laws. May's edition covered MacDonald of Skeabost on the landlord conference at Inverness (with a reply by MacKenzie), 'Sheriff Ivory's mountain and his mice' (the trial of the Glendale and Valtos men), and a general piece on the land-reform movement in Skye.

In June, MacKenzie covered American sympathy for the Highland crofters, reprinted a biography of John MacKay of Hereford, and carried an analysis of the proposed crofting legislation introduced to parliament in May (which would fall with the government in due course). And in July, in the last edition of the Celtic Magazine to cover agitational material relating to crofting (due to the launch of the Scottish Highlander) MacKenzie again covered the proposed crofting legislation: he also carried a piece on the Scottish Land League of America.

By then preparations were well in hand for the national League conference, held in Portree in September. This was covered by the national and English press as the major event that it had by then become. The Glasgow Herald, Scotsman, North British Daily Mail and Times covered at great length in their broadsheet pages both the conference and the demonstration through Portree that followed it. By any standards, certainly, it was an impressive exhibition of the extent to which the crofting movement was organised by the autumn of 1885.

Delegates from within Skye marched in from Braes, Glendale, Valtos, Snizort and Staffin, carrying banners and headed by pipers. There were delegates from Lewis and Harris and the Uists, and every corner of the mainland Highlands - nearly 200 in all, as well as visitors from a host of southern organisations, and also from the United States, Canada and Australia. The Glenelg delegate set the tone of the proceedings when he announced 'that the people walk about with a new freedom for they have almost entirely thrown off the nightmare of landlordism'. And from Lewis Alexander Morrison, anticipating developments there, said, 'the question of the hour is the destruction of the deer-forests. The people have been kept down in poverty and oppression for centuries through unjust and cruel land laws'.

That evening, a general meeting drew speakers from not only the Land League itself, but also the Scottish Land League of America, the Land Nationalisation League, and both the English and Scottish Land Restoration Leagues. There were speakers from Skye, Chicago, London, Hull, Caithness, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Oban, Liverpool and Barra (the crofters's delegate from there being Michael Buchanan). The next day, thousands of people marched through Portree: 'It is not too much to say that an equally animated scene has never before been witnessed in that place. When all was in order, the procession, following its banners, and with its pipers playing, marched round and about and through the village of Portree. As many of the inhabitants as were not in the procession turned out to see it, and during its progress cheered with the greatest enthusiasm'.

A string of resolutions was announced. Of them the Scotsman observed, 'if we are not to break up our whole social system, the

demands of the conference at Portree must be set aside as monstrous and utterly inadmissible'. According to the paper the 'incendiarism' of the Portree conference did no more than 'hold out a bribe to the lawless to encourage and practise lawlessness'.

Most critically, however, the conference agreed on candidates to stand in the crofters' cause at the coming general election. Prior to the extension of the franchise, the electorates of the Highland counties were tiny compared to their populations: for Argyll, 3,300; for Caithness, 1,250; for Inverness-shire, 1,860; for Ross and Cromarty, 1,720; and in Sutherland no more than 325. And traditionally these seats had been in the hands of the landlords.

In Argyll, the sons of the duke had held the seat non-stop since 1868. In Sutherland, one or other of the duke's family had been returned since 1852 (with the exception of six years, when it was held by Sir D. Dundas, who got it on the elevation to the peerage of the previous holder, the Marquis of Stafford). Dundas resigned to let Lord Ronald Leveson-Gower (that is, another Sutherland in secular form) back into the seat. Caithness told the same story: while in Ross and Cromarty there had been but one election between 1847 and 1884, during which time the seat was held by Sir James Matheson and then by his nephew, Sir Alexander Matheson. Inverness-shire, meanwhile, was held from 1840 to 1865 by H. J. Baillie, and then mainly by Cameron of Lochiel.

But the extension of the franchise increased the electorate in Argyll by over 200 per cent, in Inverness-shire by over 400 per cent, in Ross and Cromarty by nearly 500 per cent, and in Sutherland by nearly 880 per cent. The campaign, therefore, was a fierce one, with the landlords attempting to defeat the crofters' own candidates of Fraser-MacIntosh for Inverness-shire, MacFarlane for Argyll,

Roderick MacDonald for Ross-shire, G. B. Clark for Caithness (where his opponent's father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been MPs for the county), and Angus Sutherland for his home county. In Ross-shire the landlord candidate was the young Munro-Ferguson of Novar, who had plotted with the Duke of Argyll an attempt to gerrymander the Highland constituencies in the landlords' favour, and who would go on to a successful career in British imperial affairs in later life.

From the beginning, however, it was clear that the crofters' candidates had massive popular support - not least in Inverness-shire, where Fraser-MacIntosh toured the western coasts and islands of the constituency by boat. At Kilmaluag, for instance, in Staffin, the League branch meeting (the first since the return of the local men from the east-coast fishing) agreed to complete support for Fraser-MacIntosh. Throughout the district the League was ensuring that every crofter was on the roll of voters. At Stein, men were set to watch from the highest hill in the district, that the people might have time to prepare a suitable welcome for the visit of their candidate.

In Lewis, the Park branch of the League met at Gravir, to show support for Dr. MacDonald, the Ross-shire candidate. The secretary of the branch assured the meeting that, 'Novar is a landlord and that is sufficient reason why we should do all in our power to oust him at the general election. Whatever landlords say, we cannot place any confidence in their promises, when we consider how they have acted towards us during the last eighty years'.

In Fort William, Cameron of Lochiel was shouted-down at an election meeting with demands that he reverse an eviction at Achintore. On the Dochfour estate, the factor reportedly went

‘among the tenantry using such methods as factors know how to use for procuring support for the landlord candidate’. And in Argyll, mocked the new Scottish Highlander, ‘the climax of daring wickedness was attained when the minister of Inveraray chose to oppose the electoral choice of the Duke of Argyll’.

In the event, all the candidates won, with the exception of Angus Sutherland (who would take the seat the following year anyway) - a defeat which MacKenzie thought in the Scottish Highlander to be a victory ‘for the most disgraceful servility’. The results, nevertheless, led MacKenzie to believe that overall, ‘the crofters’s cause is advancing at an extraordinary and unexpected pace’.

As the pro-crofter Oban Times memorably proclaimed, ‘from the Mull of Kintyre to the Butt of Lewis, the land is before us’: while the pro-crofter Invergordon Times thought that the result showed landlordism ‘trampled in the dust’, and at last ‘an object of derision, even to its former slaves’.

The Invergordon paper - if anything, stronger in its language and politics than even the Oban Times - reported: ‘Dr. MacDonald was everywhere received with loud demonstrations of welcome. His views, especially on the land question, were in entire harmony with the vast majority of the electors, who were sickened of landlord rule, and who were determined that they would have a member who thoroughly understood their wants and wishes to represent them. The victory was hailed with great delight throughout the counties by the crofters, and bonfires blazed and general rejoicings took place in honour of the victory. It was a terrible defeat to the holders of the soil, and we trust that it will have a good effect’.

As a result of this electoral victory, the 'Crofters' Party' entered Parliament on a tide of expectation in the Highlands - where agitation, if anything, was encouraged by the prospects of parliamentary fireworks. From South Uist, for instance, even as the Crofter Members took their seats, the landlords were alerting the authorities that 'influences have been at work which if allowed to remain unchecked must lead to a very alarming state of matters'.

Land League associations had been formed throughout the Hebrides, forcible possession had been taken of the land with threats of violence, the fences had been destroyed, the telegraph wires cut, and 'dangerous obstructions made at night on the public road near Sir Reginald and Lady Cathcart's residence'. The 'terrorism' prevailing was such that no culprit could be identified (by the authorities); and throughout the island, 'law is practically in abeyance'.

If anything, in fact, the early months of 1886 saw an escalation of agitation. During the first fortnight of the new year, the Invergordon Times covered anti-landlord meetings at Alness and Creich; there was another meeting at Melness where ten new subscriptions to the paper were taken out, and during which the League chairman - once again eloquently voicing the popular view of land ownership and use - hoped that the people would soon show the landlords, 'that they had been robbed of their natural rights in their native soil, and that they would not be satisfied with less than a full restoration of the lands of which they had been deprived by fraud and usurpation'.

Further meetings were reported from Clyne, Loth and Kildonan, Rosehall and Laid, from Golspie and Stoer, as well as from Halladale, Strathpeffer, Garve and Dornoch. At Durness, the

people demanded a 'proper and final settlement of the land question'.

At Lochinver, the League branch demanded the restoration to the people of the deer-forest of Glen Canisp, 'where there is plenty of provision for ourselves and our families. It extends twenty-one miles and is in the possession of an Englishman called Painter, while we are at home starving and the land of our fathers laying waste'.

Similar demands were reported from Strathy, Drumbeg, Achmelvich, Resolis, Ferrintosh and Culbokie: while at Tongue the chairman reminded a League meeting that they should stick more closely together than ever, for 'to the eye of the political seer', the future was 'pregnant with work'. This was as clear a warning as any that, to the League's local leaders at least, an item very much on the agenda was indeed something akin to 'the restoration of the land to the people'.

The same feeling was evident across the Highlands. Sheriff Ivory, for instance, warned his superiors in Edinburgh that the Skye crofters were now two years in rent arrears, to the value of something like £17,000. Meanwhile an Inverness law firm was calling urgent attention to the cottars on the estate of Kintail, 'who have pledged themselves to take the land'. At Resolis, the tenantry refused to pay their rents for the previous six months unless it was reduced by one third. In Lewis, some Uig people were in court following charges of assault. In Skye the landlords were by now on rates-strike, as Fraser of Kilmuir had earlier hinted, pleading poverty as a result of their tenants' rent-striking (and Lord MacDonald's factor thought it 'perfectly plain that a most serious crisis has arrived - the present state of matters cannot last').

Again, the Inverness solicitors wrote to Edinburgh, reporting that 'the cottars on the estate of Kintail have carried out their resolution to take possession of the land'. They added, 'if the government do not look to the matter, they may soon find themselves face to face with an insurrection of the labouring population of the Highlands'.

By this point, the government had indeed introduced a Bill to parliament on the subject of crofters. But time and again Sheriff Ivory wrote to Edinburgh warning that the Edinbane, Waternish and Kilmuir crofters were not satisfied with the provisions of the Bill. He reported that in April, 'only one fisherman had left Staffin for the Irish fishing instead of thirty as usual', and that 'the crofters are determined to agitate for more land than the Crofters' Bill proposes to give them'.

That same month, he warned that at Waternish, 120 crofters had made an announcement: unless the Bill, with amendments to meet their objections to its shortcomings, was law within a month, they 'would begin to cultivate the land wherever they found it suitable'. In May Ivory reported that on Barra Michael Buchanan had conceded that the Bill was only 'a step in the right direction', and asserted that the agitation must be kept up.

Nor did the Bill please the crofters' members of parliament either. MacFarlane called it 'a miserable, deluded, rubbishy measure' - in a phrase that in general matched crofter opinion of it. But the government was by now headed for a general election, and determined to enact something at least on the 'crofter problem'. As a result, on the last day of the parliamentary session, the Bill received its royal assent, and the 1886 Crofters' Act passed onto the Statute Book.

Its principal provisions were security of tenure and fair rents; concessions of outrageous character, in the view of the landlord ideologists such as the Duke of Argyll, and testimony to the power of the crofters' agitation of the previous years. But if the Act was a response to agitation, it did not meet all of that agitation's demands. The agitation therefore went on. It was, in the memorable words of the Oban Times, no more than 'an instalment of justice': for it did nothing, for instance, about returning the land to the people.

And it was left to Alexander MacKenzie to warn: 'We must not rest satisfied until every inch of productive land in the Highlands is placed at the disposal of those who are able and willing to till it. Until this is assured, the people must resolve to maintain the most persistent and determined agitation. And if this resolute and comprehensive movement should end in the total abolition of the Game Laws, the sporting element, in and out of parliament, who so stolidly opposed the demands of the people, will only have themselves to blame'.

The were 'sowing the wind', concluded MacKenzie: 'and they will most assuredly reap the whirlwind'.