

8. The Mass Movement in Action.

‘On the very day the expedition arrived at the island the lairds paid their rates, leaving the expedition to be directed entirely against the crofters. It is all very clever [but] one week of a local parliament in Scotland would smash-up the rotten system’.

DESPITE THE passage of the Crofters’ Act (or perhaps as a partial consequence of it) the following two years were marked by an intensification of popular agitation on the land question in the Highlands. The autumn of 1886 saw, firstly, a combined police and marine invasion of Tiree; secondly, a notably militant conference of the Land League at Bonar Bridge; and thirdly, yet another naval invasion of Skye. This agitation continued right throughout the following year, and on into 1888, with large-scale anti-landlord direct-action and associated military activity, in the outer Hebrides in particular.

Tiree, however, was the first location to draw the attention of the authorities. As early as July 1886, the county sheriff was warning that the Duke of Argyll feared a violent response to his forthcoming attempt to serve interdicts ‘in consequence of certain lawless acts by crofters’. The authorities therefore sought ‘the help of a detachment of military in aid of the civil power’.

The background to this request was, as the Oban Times reported, a Land League meeting of Tiree crofters some weeks earlier, which had decided - in the spirit of crofters right across the Highlands during those weeks - that ‘some of the lands unjustly taken from themselves and their fathers, and now lying waste, be taken possession of and planted with potatoes’.

Within the month, therefore, planting was under way on the land of the farm of Greenhill, which had been occupied and distributed among 300 crofters and cottars. As a result, the duke had petitioned the Edinburgh courts for more of the sort of intimidatory provocation that was already well known on the island. When the Napier Commission had arrived to take evidence on Tiree, for instance, it was only with considerable reluctance that an undertaking was offered by the duke's factor (and not by the duke himself) that no one would be victimised for what they might tell Napier's commissioners.

In any case, and as a direct result of the occupation of the farm, forty policemen were sent along with a sheriff-officer, to serve writs on the raiders at Greenhill. They were met, however, by a force of 300 men and boys armed with sticks and clubs, which promptly drove them to a refuge in the inn at Scarinish. And then, at the end of July, the inn itself was mobbed, with the police forced to leave the island that same day: a precipitate departure that serves to highlight the extent to which popular confidence had grown across the Highlands since the Battle of the Braes.

Years later, the depute procurator fiscal of the county recalled events on Tiree: 'Whether the authorities acted wisely in sending an escort at all has been open to doubt. The very nature of it was provocative'. It is arguable, indeed, that the sending of the police party was intended as a provocation: the notices, after all, could have been sent by post.

In any case, the scene was now set for a test of will between the classes - a flavour of whose relationship with each other can be guessed from an ascerbic observation penned a full century later (by a university professor of Tiree origin): 'Tiree was worth between four

and five thousand pounds a year to the duke. His son was singled out as a suitable bridegroom for the daughter of Queen Victoria. To have a Royal Personage tweak one's whiskers and call one Papa was something which only came the way of the well-lined. It was the fate of the citizens of Tiree to supply some of that lining'.

In the 1840s, when the Destitution Committee of the Free Church raised money for the relief of poverty on the island, it found the duke trying to get some of the cash, which he intended to spend on the deportation of the island's population to Canada. And when some did leave, the duke had refused to give the land they vacated to those who remained - but made sheep farms out of it, as the local doctor told the Napier Commission.

James Cameron later recorded that the policy of the Argylls with regard to Tiree had rendered it keenly ready for the Land League. He observed, 'His Grace could not get over the damning fact that between himself and the potato disease of 1845 the population of Tiree was reduced in four years after his accesssion from 5,000 to a little over 3,000': or, as the county's depute-procurator recalled afterwards, 'The frame of mind of the islanders saw only the application of the law for the benefit of the rich against the poor'.

And thus, on the last Friday of July, the lookouts posted above Scarinish spotted off Coll the Royal Navy's guardship on the Clyde, the Ajax, a recently-built 280-foot warship, armoured with 17-inch thick plates, and armed with four 15-ton guns, two quick-fire 14-ton guns, and fourteen smaller quick-fire guns. Along with the Assistance (lately of Skye) and a chartered steamer, the Nigel, the Ajax - it quicky became clear to the lookouts - was heading for Tiree.

Having left Oban that morning, the ships made anchor while the day was still light. And as night fell, the people of the island were left to the wonders of the Ajax, the depute-procurator being witness 'of the terror which the ship's searchlights aroused in the minds of these simple people'.

The next morning, 100 police and 250 marines were landed at Scarinish, pitching camp there: and within a week eight crofters' leaders had been arrested on charges of mobbing, rioting, and deforcement. (The nephew of Colin Henderson, one of those arrested, would become professor of theology at Glasgow University - and the author of the spiced observation on the well-lined duke, quoted above).

The eight were taken to Inveraray, where they lay in gaol for a week, until a lawyer came from Glasgow and bailed them. They were met at the gates of Inveraray by a piper and a large crowd of supporters. Their departure for Tiree on the steamer Lord of the Isles was marked by sustained cheering - as the depute-procurator noted, 'there was no question as to where public sympathy lay'.

Throughout August, meanwhile, Tiree was garrisoned by 250 marines and 16 policemen: though this did not prevent a speaker from the English Land Restoration League addressing a crofters' meeting at Moss (from which the correspondent of the pro-landlord Scotsmas was ejected). Nor did it prevent D. H. MacFarlane from arriving at the end of the month in the yacht Hiawatha, 'displaying a red flag', and coming ashore to be met by 150 cheering crofters.

In October, the eight Land Leaguers, though entitled to be tried at Inveraray, were taken instead to the High Court in Edinburgh. After a trial lasting three days, they were found guilty and sentenced to six months in the Calton Gaol. The following

January, however, they were freed and returned home to a tumultuous - and entirely unrepentant - welcome.

Meanwhile, during the autumn of 1886, the Land League met for its annual conference at Bonar Bridge. The spirit of the delegates was heightened by the results of the general election which had closely followed the passing of the Crofters' Act. Once again, it had been a good election for the crofters' movement. J. M. Cameron, standing in Wick (with Land League support) took 57 per cent of the vote. In Caithness, Dr. Clark took 78 per cent. Fraser-MacIntosh had been unopposed in Inverness-shire. Dr. MacDonald got nearly 80 per cent in Ross-shire. And Angus Sutherland had taken the constituency of Sutherland with well over two thirds of the vote. Only in Argyll had D. H. MacFarlane been beaten, by 613 votes (though he would win the seat back in 1892 and hold it in 1895).

The North British Daily Mail approved of Bonar Bridge as a location for the conference: 'It is singularly appropriate at this stage of the agitation - Sutherland stands out pre-eminently above all other counties in Scotland for eviction and clearance'. The land-reform movement in the county was 'immensely strong', with twenty-two branch associations and a membership of 3,000 overall.

The agenda and organisation of the conference showed ample evidence of the political identity that the League had attained in a few short years. Indeed, by the time of Bonar Bridge it was on the brink of constituting itself as an independent political party in the Highlands. Until then, its organisational nature had been that of a single-issue mass campaign, with all the strengths and weaknesses of that form. Now, however, it was to re-shape itself, with a formal structure and rule-book. And though this new form was not to survive for long - due to wider political considerations and the

alteration of its mass-basis within two or three years of the passing of the Crofters' Act - the programme adopted at Bonar Bridge says much for the League's confidence at the time, as well as for enduring themes in Highland political life. Not least of these were the game laws, and what they were taken to symbolise.

The principal slogans of the conference were simple. Firstly, the restoration to the Highland people of their native land on equitable conditions and the resistance by every constitutional method of the depopulation of the Highlands by eviction, forced emigration, or any other means. Secondly, the abolition of the game laws. Thirdly, the emendation of the laws relating to sea, loch and river fishing; and fourthly, the restoration to the people of the foreshore rights.

There was also a new organisational structure adopted at Bonar Bridge, which suggests the extent to which the League was moving beyond a single-issue mass character. A twenty-five strong executive was to be formed, along with district councils and county boards, the latter to be responsible for the selection of parliamentary candidates. A pan-Celtic league was also to be established, 'for mutual co-operation in securing necessary reforms and promoting the welfare of the Celtic people': while delegates were to be chosen with a view to promotional touring in England, North America and the colonies.

There was also a very impressive body of Highland and pro-Highland talent present among the 300 delegates. From Parliament there were the 'crofter members' of Dr. Clark, Dr. MacDonald and Angus Sutherland. Stuart Glennie and Donald Murray had also come from London; while the anti-landlord Skye poetess Mary MacPherson was also present. Among the delegates too were three

of the Tirie men recently held until bailed in Inveraray gaol and shortly to be gaoled again at Edinburgh following their court appearance there.

And the underlying tone of the conference was voiced by one of the delegates from Mull, one MacPhail, when he told his listeners that 'the core of England was rotten with Toryism and to be rid of these Tories they must have Home Rule the sooner the better'.

John MacPherson of Glendale was also present: 'He believed that they had compressed the work of a century into four years'. Another Glendale delegate boasted of how, eighteen months earlier, he would have been gaoled for taking a fish from the river there: but of how no one now dared to interfere with him when he did so, for they had 'already broken the back of landlordism in Skye'. (Yet again, the game laws: - and game poaching as a repudiation, covert or otherwise, of the cultural legitimacy of the landlord Žlite!)

From Lewis, meanwhile, a delegate described the Crofters' Act as no more than a 'device to stave off the evil day for landlords': for what they wanted 'was more land for those who have too little, and some for those who have none at all'. Among other speakers were John Murdoch, and the Rev. Donald MacCallum. And at one stage the conference adjourned to take part in a 3,000-strong demonstration, in which the Ross and Sutherland men carried a banner inscribed 'Men of Kincardine - remember Glencalvie, Greenyards and Culrain'. At a rally which followed the procession, Dr. Clark declared that the Crofters' Act was entirely inadequate to redress the grievances of the Highland people, and insisted that no legislation would be satisfactory unless it provided for the restoration of the land to the people. Fraser-MacIntosh, meanwhile, demanded for Scotland 'full control of her domestic concerns by means of a

separate parliament': and there were further resolutions on the game laws and the deer-forests.

But the landlords were still prepared to fight. Even as the conference drew to a close, the authorities in Argyll were preparing to drag the men of Tiree to court and gaol. And from the south of England, the gunship Humber was taking her departure from Portsmouth, with 100 marines embarked, bound towards the Hebrides.

The day following her departure, the police committee of Inverness-shire met. It became evident that yet another police expedition to Skye was under way, for the purpose of giving protection to officers serving writs for arrears. Within hours of the police committee convening in Inverness, the news had reached Portree: 'The rumour spread rapidly, causing quite a flutter of excitement among the prominent parties connected with the Land League'. The local branch of the League nevertheless met to hear their delegates report on the Bonar Bridge conference, which had been 'another nail in the landlord coffin'.

Three days later the Humber was 'hourly expected', and 'great excitement prevailed' in Portree: 'The news spread rapidly throughout the island. The excitement, which was at a very high pitch before then, was intensified'. But first the steamer Glencoe arrived at Portree from Strome, carrying Ivory himself. He was quickly recognised and 'followed all the way to the Royal Hotel, the crowd hooting and yelling all the time'.

By this time, the Crofters' Commission was ready to begin the long process of reviewing crofters' rents around the Highlands. It was scheduled to begin operations at Wick in the middle of October, where in addition to the 300 applications already received, it would

also adjudicate on Sir Robert Sinclair's crofting rents - which he had recently refused to reduce. Its deliberations formed an essential backdrop to the agitation throughout the years from 1886 to 1888. The crofters' movement was thus in the difficult tactical position of imminent, if partial, redress on the one hand, and coercion on the other. Of that second strand, Skye was to be the cockpit towards the end of 1886.

In fact, sheriff-officers had been expected to begin serving writs, or attempting to serve writs, prior to the arrival of the Humber and Ivory on the Glencoe. But they then refused to proceed, as they considered the police then available to them no match for the forces likely to oppose their attempt, and had thus chosen to wait for the arrival of the Humber's marines.

In Sconser, meanwhile, on the very morning that the Humber was steaming for Portree, the crofters there found some of Lord MacDonald's deer among their crops, about which traditional deprecation they had complained so bitterly to the Napier Commission. (Readers might need reminding that to this day landlords have the exclusive right to shoot deer, and penalties are severe for anyone inclined to test this exclusivity. Landlords do not, however, own the deer: and are not, therefore, in law, responsible for any damage that the deer might cause). A large crowd of men, women and boys drove the deer into the sea, where they were captured by boat, towed ashore and then slaughtered. (For crofters on a Highland estate, in broad daylight, to behave in this manner today would be considered revolutionary, if not psychotic: in the 1880s, it was at least an act of revolutionary sedition - and eloquent testimony to the extent to which active anti-landlordism had grown in Skye since the trouble at Braes just four years earlier). By then, it

had become known that on the day Ivory reached the island, its landlords had agreed to end their rates-strike, and pay off their arrears, 'in order to avoid the service of writs on themselves'.

Meanwhile the Presbytery of Skye had met at Portree to resume consideration of charges against the Rev. Donald MacCallum. These charges followed their censure of him the previous March 'for his connection with the crofters' agitation', and for his 'incitement of the crofters to violence and class hatred'. On this occasion, after acrimonious debate, MacCallum was again censured for writing to the newspapers to dispute, it was claimed, the accuracy of the Presbytery minutes from the previous March. A sideshow to the military invasion, it speaks eloquently enough of the strains that agitation were causing in the Church of Scotland. It was also a prologue to further trials for MacCallum in the coming weeks.

As to the invasion itself, the North British Daily Mail persuasively editorialised that it had all been got up by the Skye landlords as a trick to get their rents from the crofters.

'Yt will be remembered that the landlords refused to pay their poor and school rates on the grounds that they had not received the rents upon which the rates were assessed. Of course, the withholding of the rates was illegal; but few persons imagined at the time what a beautiful piece of legal procedure the landlords intended their illegal action to bring about. They made out lists of arrears which were due; lists which somehow did not show by whom the arrears were due, but gave the impression that the crofters were the offenders, and that nothing but force would put an end to their defiance of the law. Inquiries in parliament, however, brought out the fact that the landlords owed by far the largest part of the arrears. In the parish of Portree, for instance, the crofters owed only £47 for

arrears, while the landlords owed £336. So the armed force has been sent; and what has happened? On the very day the expedition arrived at the island the lairds paid their rates, leaving the expedition to be directed entirely against the crofters for the small amount they owe. But for what purpose then did the lairds get the expedition there? Not to serve writs for rates, but to serve writs for rent. It is evident that the landlords were not only well organised, but were kept well informed. How did the landlords know the day the expedition would arrive? But as the crofters have not paid their insignificant amount of rates - not having had the chance which was given to the landlords - the expedition goes on, and the opportunity is obtained for serving the rent writs under its protection. It is all very clever. One week of a local parliament in Scotland would smash up the rotten system'.

Trick or not, the Humber was shortly to leave Portree for Glendale, having embarked seventy-five marines, thirty police, and two sheriff-officers and attendants. The vessel reached Colbost in Loch Dunvegan at noon and landed her soldiers, 'armed to the teeth', shortly afterwards.

And the next day, Ivory's expedition turned its attention to the village of Stein on the estate of Waternish, where writs were served again for arrears of rates and rents. With the Humber lying in Lochbay, there was no overt opposition, although the cattle of the township had earlier been driven to the hills to avoid any chance of their being pointed.

The North British Daily Mail observed, 'every village and hamlet throughout Skye is permeated with the doctrines of the Land League. The land-reform agitation now has a grip of the entire island. Stein is no exception. A number of the inhabitants are

Radicals and sturdy land reformers'. Some fifty summary warrants and summonses were served in the Stein district, and the following day another fifty warrants were served in Glendale, Roag and Edinbane. And it was reported, not perhaps without justice, that 'several crofters will shortly be evicted from their holdings at the point of the bayonet, and should this be done, it is feared there will be a general uprising throughout the length and breadth of the island'.

The next Monday the military expedition travelled to Uig, where around twenty five warrants were served for arrears of rent and rates in Kilmuir. Still, there had been no violent response from the crofters - despite the clear pro-crofter nature of the evidence unveiled in the press, whose corps of reporters trailed Ivory around Skye, and whose reports were not considered by him to be favourable to the landlords. In fact, his co-operation was denied to all but the correspondent of the Scotsman.

Ivory also moved against Valtos and Lealt, where the record of landlord-tenant conflict and the spirit of social relations in the Highlands over the previous century is caught in one paragraph: 'Valtos has a notorious reputation for the persistency and in many cases the violence with which it has kept alive the land war. The crofters have been harshly dealt with by the proprietor, and by exorbitant rents and excessive sub-division of crofts the people have been reduced to the verge of starvation. In 1854, when Fraser purchased Kilmuir, the township of Valtos paid a gross rental of £48. The rent some years afterwards was raised to £94'.

As Peter MacDonald had complained to the Napier Commission, 'the principal cause of our grievance is the repeated raising of our rent. We pray that the Royal Commission will give us

the land in a way that we can live on it, and in such a way that the proprietor cannot raise our rents or remove us’.

Meanwhile, as the sheriff-officers served notices at Sconser and Breakish the following day, the Crofters’ Commission held its first hearing at Dornoch. The majority of the applicants were crofters from the estate of a Mr. Sutherland of Skibo: and his response to the crofters’ claims and demands was to typify another forty years of landlord-obstruction of land-reform in the Highlands. Sutherland appeared in person to argue (in a brazen attempt to subvert the intentions of the Act) that his estate did not fall within the provisions of the Crofters’ Act, as he had ‘already warned the crofters from their holdings’. But the significance of this was not confined to Skibo, of course: these proceedings would in full be available to the crofters in Skye, through the daily press, within a day or two at most.

By this time, Ivory had served notices all over the MacDonald estates in Skye. The day that the Tiree land-raiders appeared in court in Edinburgh, Ivory left Skye for a few days, leaving its crofters to anticipate the arrival of the Crofters’ Commission - for already hundreds of them were demanding a stay of any evictions and rent-payments until the commissioners had visited the island (very clearly indeed, the proceedings of the commissioners were followed with detailed interest!)

The Scotsman meantime suggested that John MacPherson had been paying his rent in secret, but 300 Land Leaguers met in the Colbost schoolhouse to deny the claim with appropriate scorn.

Until this stage, Ivory’s expedition had passed fairly peacefully. But on Monday 25 October, the press announced latest developments with shrieking headlines - ‘exciting scenes on Skye’, ‘desperate resistance of crofters’, ‘writs served at the point of

bayonet': and reports of deforcement and arrests. The scene of the violence was again Kilmuir, the expedition having left Uig in the morning with eleven police and seventeen marines to protect the sheriff-officers in serving charges of decrees obtained in the Portree sheriff-court on crofters in the townships on the western side of the estate.

At Borneskitaig, 'fighting broke out, involving a large number of people in the township. This fighting lasted for nearly an hour, with the police and sheriff kicked and pelted with mud, until the writs were served at the point of bayonets and six crofters arrested'. And the following day a sheriff-officer was again deforced while serving a writ for arrears of rent in Garalapin, on land owned by Lord MacDonald.

By this time, Ivory was on his way back to the island. He arrived the following day, and took seventy-five marines and thirteen police to Kilmuir, to conduct arrests for deforcement. When they reached Herbusta, however, they found the township deserted. After a diligent search and questioning of children, they apprehended one cowherd and a Mrs. MacMillan, who were both then taken off to Portree under marine guard. And the next day Ivory was back at Herbusta, at midnight: but all the men wanted for deforcement were in hiding and no-one was to be found, despite Ivory arriving in the township at one in the morning and searching the houses for two hours.

On 29 October, however, Ivory's force did arrest eight men and a woman on Lord MacDonald's townships in the vicinity of Garalpin, in connection with the deforcement of the sheriff-officer the previous week. The North British Daily Mail editorialised that Ivory's actions were clearly illegal, though destined to mark an epoch for the

land movement. 'The whole process of serving writs for rents in Skye has been illegal from beginning to end. In places which come within the Crofters' Act all question of rent are by that Act held in abeyance until decided by the Crofters' Commission. Skye comes within that Act. The formal document signifying that fact was signed by the Secretary for Scotland on the 18th of this month. Skye has been under the Act since the 18th inst. and the writs for rent were not begun to be served till that date. The service has therefore been illegal: and Sheriff Ivory has been raiding the island not only in a lawless manner, but on a lawless errand, while the crofters have only resisted unlawful proceedings'.

Nevertheless, throughout November the sheriff went on with his work, poinding possessions from Broadford to Staffin. In consequence of his conduct, thirty three members of the Skye Volunteer Corps tendered their resignations, so reducing its numbers that it was 'likely to become extinct'. 'The Mutiny Act was dangled in the faces of the men, but they have refused to be intimidated'.

Ivory journeyed to Braes with forty marines and a dozen police. Later, at Broadford, they found the road blocked with stones, and two boys were arrested. Then another midnight raid was launched against Herbusta - again without success. As a result, crofters' meetings were banned (although this did not stop them). Ivory, in short, was not prepared to surrender Skye without a fight. And at the beginning of November, John Nicolson of Portree was arrested on charges of defaming and insulting the sheriff.

Nicolson had written to the pro-crofter press, claiming to have witnessed Ivory in Portree post office, 'endeavouring to press the telegraphist to disclose the names of persons who had occasion to

send messages through the office in November of 1884, when the first military expedition visited the island' (trying, in other words, to break the Land League system of communication from the mainland to Skye, and within the island itself).

And in the middle of November, J. G. MacKay, 'one of the most prominent leaders of the land movement in the island', was also arrested on a charge of defaming and insulting Ivory. MacKay, the author of several pamphlets on the land question, was said to have defamed Ivory in a letter published in the Inverness Courier. According to the North British Daily Mail, he had called the sheriff a 'judicial monster'. (The following day's paper, incidentally, reported a meeting of Highlanders resident in South Africa, 'condemning in the strongest terms the Duke of Argyll', and the conduct of Highland landlords in general).

The landlords of Skye at this point tried another manoeuvre. They jointly appealed to Ivory to proceed no further: and on 11 November Lord MacDonald, Fraser of Kilmuir, Robertson of Greshornish and MacDonald of Waternish had their solicitor announce in Portree sheriff court that they had decided to suspend further action in the matter of recovering rent arrears - on condition, however, that the crofters consigned two-thirds of those arrears to that court. The landlords also announced that they were prepared to abide by any decision of the Crofters' Commission.

In fact, they had little option but to do so anyway. The crofters, therefore, spurned the offer. They considered it a trick and believed that consigning the money would be equivalent to paying it. Ivory consequently voyaged yet again to Glendale with marines and police, and also to the north end of the island. At Stein, two vessels anchored offshore and forces were landed to locate and arrest the

Rev. Donald MacCallum - 'a man of considerable intellectual ability', and one who had 'a thorough grip of the land agitation'. Since becoming minister of the Established Church in Waternish, he had 'taken an active part in indoctrinating the islanders with the principles of the Land League'. And in Glendale, John MacPherson was also arrested once again.

MacCallum was to have preached in the Stenscholl church the following Sunday. Instead, he was in gaol in Portree along with John MacPherson. But when bailed on Monday, he returned to Stenscholl and delivered his Sunday sermon then. Perhaps understandably, J. G. MacKay wrote to the North British Daily Mail to say that the struggle in Skye was now at an acute stage: 'Landlordism is making its strongest and last pull; it is playing its last card, and it is time for the masses to rise up'.

And in fact the Ivory expedition was coming rapidly to a close. In London, a crofter delegation was pressing the case of the crofters on Skye; while in simple financial terms Ivory's invasion, quite apart from its cost to county and central funds, had been a failure. It had also been a disaster in terms of publicity - 'Midnight raids worthy of Zululand have been the order of the night, and sheriff Ivory has had a judicial and martial debauch', in the words of one account.

Despite the gunboats, marines and police, not much money had been collected. 'Seventy five marines collected between them £200 in rent. The arrears still due, or supposed to be due, are £19,500. If it takes seventy five men and a sheriff thirty days to collect £200, how many will it take to collect £19,500?', demanded one observer. (In fact, said the North British Daily Mail, money collected for rent, due to the authorities, was actually being debited

for rent, due to the landlords: the rates-collectors being also the estate-factors).

In short, Ivory had failed once again on Skye. And as the government was not prepared to force the issue, the sheriff returned home, though in the week of his going it was reported that a two-month old baby had been pointed in lieu of rent. 'The baby's value was declared by competent appraisers to be the equivalent of 2p, and to be the property of the complainer, Lord MacDonald. At the same time, a collie puppy was valued at the equivalent of 5p, and a graip at the equivalent of 10p'. Given the prevailing conditions, the significance of the report lay not in its accuracy (it was denied), but in the publicity it attained: and the extent to which it was seen at least to be accurate in spirit. And for many people, both within the Highlands and without, it was certainly that.

At the beginning of December, the marines left Skye too, bound for Chatham. There remained the matter of court cases for those crofters arrested during the Ivory campaign. Shortly before Christmas, six men from Bornaskitaig appeared in court in Edinburgh charged with mobbing, rioting and assault. They drew six months each. And on 28 December, another batch of Skye crofters left Portree for court in Edinburgh.

Ivory, however, had failed to crush agitation in the island, while an upsurge in anti-landlord direct-action across the Minch in Lewis can only have been fuelled by the ongoing proceedings of the Crofters' Commission.

The commission, after all, was still touring the Highlands, examining (which would mean reducing) crofters' rents - to intense interest on the part of the crofters themselves, and with an effect similar to that of the Napier Commission tour. Initially a matter of

some debate and doubt, the commission's membership was approved of by MacFarlane and Fraser-MacIntosh; and by October the commission was in Sutherland, to hear the claims of seventy crofters there with regard to the rent they were paying.

No one had expected the commission to favour the landlords. As the North British Daily Mail editorialised, 'According to the Act, a landlord may apply to have fair rents fixed for his land, but it is somewhat significant that not one of them has as yet troubled the Commission with an application'.

The same paper extensively covered individual crofter applications with regard to land and housing. For instance, it reported the case of Andrew MacKay, applying on behalf of his mother, with regard to a croft of four acres of arable and two of outrun. 'His grandfather was the first tenant. He came there in 1812, at the time of the Sutherland clearances. There was then no arable land at all, the whole of the place being moorland. All the arable ground has been reclaimed by the family on the croft'.

Meanwhile, at Shean, beyond Invershin, the croft of Hector Forbes was 'little better' than the surrounding moorland: 'The house was the most miserable one which till then the commissioners had seen. Situated on a damp foundation, built up for perhaps a foot and a half, with loose water-stones, on the top of which are constructed rude walls of peat, the house presented an appearance which it was difficult to associate with a habitation intended for the abode of man'.

The Mail's news-desk and reporters diligently followed the commission throughout November. The reporters' despatches never failed to underline, inter alia, the extent to which so many

witnesses simply refused to give evidence except through the medium of the commission's Gaelic-language interpreters.

By the beginning of November the commissioners had moved to consider applications from tenants of various proprietors in Sutherland, despite attempts to thwart its work by the landlords. At Gruids, for instance, on land owned by Lady Matheson of Lewis, an attempt was made to persuade the crofters to spurn the protection of the Crofters' Act, and thus of the commission. This persuasion, however, they ignored: and their evidence was given by the local Land League leader William Black, who had also given evidence before Lord Napier.

According to one report, Black had been the subject of an eviction attempt. But his neighbours from Lairg, Rosehall, Bonar Bridge 'and many other districts', assembled 'to his aid and made such a determined resistance that the officers of the law were forced to decamp without effecting their purpose'. Once again, the evidence heard sustained that collective sense of injustice, that collective vision of redress, that had in the previous decade been heard with increasing volume across the Highlands. Its central theme was the old one: the land for the people.

However, by that Christmas the commission, acutely aware of the continuing agitation in Skye and elsewhere, was drawing favourable comment from pro-crofter sources: not least because of its decision to thwart landlord attempts to circumvent the spirit of the Act by getting their crofters to sign leases. The commission ruled in this respect that only leases of more than one year (precisely the sort of crofting lease that a landlord would avoid) would render the Act inapplicable.

The perceived pro-crofter rulings of the commission had a dual effect across the Highlands. Early adjudications tended to serve as an incitement to crofters everywhere to have high expectations of the commission when it reached their area, thereby serving also as an encouragement to sustained agitation until such time as it did.

So once again there was trouble on Skye - at Elishader in Kilmuir - with the by now usual disturbances when sheriff-officers attempted to force payment of rent arrears. And just weeks later, further trouble erupted on Lord MacDonald's lands in south Skye, at Sconser. In March, with the Crofters' Commission on the island and taking evidence, the Sconser people readily admitted that on more than one occasion 'they had driven deer found among their corn into the sea, where the animals were caught by fishing boat, the spoil being equally divided'.

By now, in the spring of 1887, having won security of tenure in law and being in the process of winning rent-reductions, the land movement was in the course of moving towards the demand of the return of the land increasingly under deer-forests. Towards the end of the year, this would re-appear in spectacular form. But meanwhile, the Act of the previous summer was amended, again in the crofters' favour: an amendment of which even the Times approved: 'By the Crofters' Act of last year, power is given to the crofter to apply to the commission to have a fair rent fixed. But during the period between the date of application, and the final decision of the commission, it is possible according to a judgement of the Scotch courts, for the landlord to make the crofter bankrupt for non-payment of arrears of rent, and so expel him from his holding and deprive him of the benefit of the Act. This would in reality be an evasion of the statute; for the commission is expressly authorised to

stop proceedings for removal of the crofter in respect of non-payment till the application is determined’.

The Times therefore approved of the amendment, which allowed the commission to postpone any attempt to bankrupt a crofter - by delaying an action for recovery of rent, until the commission had a chance to lower it.

In parliament too, the work of the Crofters’ Commission was being raised. The member for Ross and Cromarty urged the government to appoint more valuers, to speed up its work. In May, the member for Caithness was reporting to the Commons press coverage of crofters’ grievances in Skye, with particular attention to the availability of the land lying under sheep and deer. As these reports said of the commissioners’ work on the island, the visit of the commission to one township caused a ‘great deal of excitement: the people crowded out to meet them and followed them from croft to croft, with long tales of their grievances’. At various points of inspection the commissioners were met by groups of men who urged them to give the crofters more land. ‘It was in vain that the commissioners pointed out that under the present Act they had no power to create new crofts, even in the land were available’.

Thus the government was asked (in anticipation of legislation still many years distant) to empower the commission to form new townships and holdings to relieve such congestion. But the government would not do so.

The strains induced by concession on one hand and attempted coercion on the other, along with attempts to restructure it as a formal progressive political party in the Highlands on the other, were by now having a noticeable and public effect on the Land League. Acrimonious debate began to surface in the columns of the

North British Daily Mail, particularly at the approach of the 1887 League conference, which was to be held at Oban in September and which was intended to unite 'under one name and one organisation all societies advocating law law and other reforms in the Highlands'.

Once again, however, the established leaders were in attendance at the meeting. Among them were Dr. Clark, Dr. MacDonald, D. H. MacFarlane, Donald MacCallum, Donald Murray, John MacPherson, Stuart Glennie, and John Murdoch - most of whom formed the new executive. Generally, the view of the conference was that the original Act was no more than 'an instalment of justice'.

The by-now familiar call for a Scottish parliament was made; it was agreed that the land question in the Highlands 'would not be settled until they had a Scottish Legislature and a Scottish Executive'. As Stuart Glennie advocated, it was time to establish a Scottish National League (again, anticipating events by many years) with its object, 'the securing of Home Rule for Scotland to achieve a satisfactory settlement of the land question, which they could not get as long as they were overruled by English members of parliament'. Suitably enough, another speaker was Donald MacRae of Lewis, whose name was soon to be associated in a major way with the land movement in that island, and who warned that Lewis 'would fight rather than surrender'.

Shortly before the island had this opportunity, however, there was to be the celebrated case in Sutherland of the fugitive Land Leaguer Hugh Kerr, as a result of trouble at Clashmore in Lochinver deriving from a crofters' decision to seize a local farm. The farm was duly seized and it transpired that the steading of the farm had

been destroyed by fire - 'singularly enough', in the words of the Scotsman. Some days earlier a barn and byre at Glendhu had also been burned to the ground - 'as yet, no cause has been publicly assigned to the origin of the fire'.

A correspondent in the North British Daily Mail observed that if there were less deer in the Highlands there might be more room for men, 'and fewer Cockneys and German Princelings': while at Land League meetings throughout the district, raids on deer-forests were under discussion. Similar action was also being discussed with reference to the Winans deer-forests in Ross-shire and Inverness-shire. A detachment of crofters connected with the League was reported in Beauly, canvassing for support. The plan was also being 'seriously discussed by both cottars and crofters who have been evicted out of Strathglass and neighbouring glensÓ.

At the beginning December, therefore, eleven policemen and forty men of the Royal Scots arrived at Lochinver, aboard the gunboat Jackal. They were under the command of the chief constable and the sheriff of Sutherland, who had for the past week been in urgent communication with London and Edinburgh regarding events in Assynt.

After an 'exceedingly stormy passage', the gunboat reached Lochinver, the party marched for Clashmore, and managed one arrest. But Hugh Kerr, a well-known and popular local League leader, had disappeared into the hills - with a symbolism unlikely to have gone un-noticed by the indigenous population of his immediate district, of the Highlands, or or Scotland as a whole.

The prospect of a raid on the Winans deer-forest was still being discussed. In the middle of December, a special meeting of the Lovat Land League was held at Kilmorack. It was denied that

moves were afoot to organise a mass raid: but also denied were claims that the estate was so well-guarded that the League would be unable to take possession of it in any case.

Clearly, crofter consciousness was at a high pitch. It was encouraged, doubtless, by the continuing and widely-publicised work of the Crofters' Commission, with even the traditionally pro-landlord Scotsman showing signs of criticising some landlords. As the paper said, 'whatever may be thought of the Crofters' Act in its bearing on the relation between landlord and tenant, there will be a general conviction that it has been the means of doing good in the case of the Clyth tenants. The commissioners in that case have reduced the rents on average by 50 per cent, and have wiped off 82 per cent of the arrears. It was shown that there had been the most unmerciful screwing-up of rents, and that practices had been resorted to as to arrears which were on the sharp side'.

In Assynt, meantime, affairs at Clashmore were 'assuming a very serious aspect'. The week before Christmas, the chief constable and ten of his men were billeted in the factor's house. Two of the policemen had already been assaulted and stoned: dykes had been torn down: and three days before Christmas the Seahorse arrived at Lochinver under cover of darkness. Forty marines helped serve interdicts relating to the seizure of the Clashmore farm; but 'nothing of Hugh Kerr's whereabouts are known, though the general impression is that he is in hiding not far from the township'. The Times, meanwhile, reported that fires at more than one of the Duke's farm-steadings 'had aroused suspicion of incendiarism'.

By the following week, the Glasgow Sutherlandshire Association was meeting in Glasgow to consider an appeal from the

people of Stoer 'narrating the grievances which caused the present rising in the Clashmore district, and appealing for funds in support of the families of the imprisoned crofters'. Among the speakers was Angus Sutherland, MP.

At the beginning of February, the trial of the Clashmore people opened in Edinburgh. Nine women had smashed open a gate to the farm, and assaulted the factor; and later a fifty-strong crowd had surrounded a valuer with the warning that no farmer would be allowed on the land - 'for the people were going to take it for themselves'. Three of the accused were found guilty, among them the wife of Hugh Kerr. He, however, remained at liberty. As one paper noted, he had for months evaded capture, police surveillance, midnight raids and military expedition.

Elsewhere in Assynt, meanwhile, 'a raid on the Canisp deer-forest was in contemplation', while the crofters around Scourie were 'making ready for another raid on part of the Reay forest'. The Duke of Sutherland's agents believed that if something was not done soon to protect the forests, 'very serious consequences may shortly follow'.

Kerr, meantime, remained free - a Land League organiser on the run, his wife in gaol in Edinburgh for anti-landlord agitation, her husband giving interviews from a cave to a sympathetic press! The authorities spent over £1,500 trying to capture him, but without success. And when he finally surrendered to them, he was given one month in gaol - a light sentence in comparison to the Lewis men that winter for raiding the deer-forests and farms of their own island.

In Lewis, of course, land hunger was acute, and the popular response to deer-forests equally acute. Along with the deer-forests went large-scale popular destitution. By the onset of winter in 1887-

1888, much of the crofter and cottar population was on the edge of starvation. And yet in the district of Lochs, Lady Matheson had let her 40,000-acre deer-forest to an Englishman called Platt. Popular demand for more land was intense; but for years the estate had refused to concede it. Six years earlier, when the lease of the land now occupied by deer was on the eve of expiry, Lady Matheson had refused a petition that at least some of it be given to the people. Two years later she had again refused a similar petition.

By 1882, Lady Matheson's tenant at Park was A. C. Sellar, of the Patrick Sellar family. Two years later his sheep-farming activities made way for deer, like another thirty or so sheep-farms during the decade. In January 1887, however, a new schoolmaster had come to the area. Donald MacRae (who was to be a delegate to the forthcoming Oban conference of the League) had been expelled from his teaching position at Rosskeen for involvement in the agitation there.

At the beginning of November, MacRae had convened a meeting at Balallan schoolhouse, where it was decided to occupy the Park deer-forest. And within the fortnight the raid had begun. Leaving their townships early in the morning, the crofters were 'supplied with guns. They had flags flying and a piper headed the Balallan contingent'.

How many deer were actually killed in the forest is open to question, but for the authorities, the fact of the raid alone was alarming enough. The local sheriff warned that there was 'civil war in Lochs'; the tenant of the forest put his yacht at the disposal of the authorities; and the police in Stornoway were followed through the town by a large, and unfriendly, contingent of crofters and their supporters.

Central to the awareness of the raiders was an 1881 petition to Lady Matheson for an apportionment of the lands occupied by the forest; it had taken her until 1883 to reject the petition. The formation of the forest, according to one report, had involved the destruction of forty or fifty crofting townships, and the land could now support two or three hundred of the raiders. According to the same report, 1,500 of the 6,000 people in Lochs had taken part in the raid and 200 deer had been killed (which was absolutely not the case), with some butchered and cooked at a raiders' camp in the forest.

Within a day or two of entry to the forest, men from Harris had arrived. Great excitement, it was reported, prevailed in Balallan, with 'sentries posted at various points commanding views of the district'. As a result, eighty-two men and five officers of the Royal Scots were despatched from Glasgow for Lewis, and three carriages were made ready for them at Inverness station so that they and their equipment might be conveyed with delay to Strome and thence to Stornoway. It was also reported that, 'the crofters all over the island are unanimous in approval of the course adopted by the Lochs people. Large meetings are being held all over the west side of Lewis at which the new plan of campaign is warmly discussed'.

On arrival in Dingwall, the Royal Scots (who before dawn that morning had marched down from their barracks in Maryhill to Glasgow's Queen Street Station, doubtless observed closely by the crofters' friends in the city as they did so), were greeted by an angry crowd. And when the Ajax left the Clyde with 400 marines on board, bound towards Stornoway, her departure and destination were urgently telegraphed ahead. In the event, she was disabled and nearly wrecked on the trip north - a symbolism that would scarcely have gone unappreciated in Lewis and the wider Highlands.

Confronted with this major demonstration of force, however, the raiders promptly withdrew from the forest: and it quickly transpired that the raid had been a highly-organised tactic to draw national attention to the question of Lady Matheson's Park, and Lady Matheson's hungry tenants. The authorities had been informed beforehand of the raid and its leading participants were ready to co-operate fully, having themselves arrested and brought to court: 'The leader of the movement in the Lochs parish is the schoolmaster of Balallan, Donald MacRae'.

Thus nine men soon afterwards surrendered themselves to the authorities at Stornoway and were charged with incitement and intimidation. They included MacRae, of whom one report said, 'It is clear that the officials of the castle are determined to crush him. He is a dangerous man on an estate such as Lady Matheson's, where the people are starving'.

In the face of this destitution, however, the landlords had nothing better to offer their tenants than the traditional remedy of emigration. A colonial agent was at this time in London, 'prosecuting a scheme for the assisted emigration of Highland crofters'. These putative emigrants would be expected to re-pay 'on easy terms' the sum necessary to 'set them up in their new allotments'. The Marquis of Lorne had already expressed 'keen support for the whole idea'. Further enthusiasm was 'eagerly anticipated' from the Duke of Argyll - and Lady Matheson.

In Lewis, consequently, the Park example was soon being copied. On the last day of November, cottars from Ness and Barvas marched on the sheep farm at Galston, and warned the tenant there that when his lease had expired they were going to take forcible possession of the place - which 'measured eight miles by six, all of

which was formerly cultivated by crofters who were evicted. They gave the tenant warning to sell off his stock and prepare to emigrate'.

Shortly afterwards, the last of the men wanted in connection with the Park raid surrendered; but at the same time the Land Leaguers of Lochs met to consider their next move. The meeting began with the expulsion of suspected informers, continued with congratulations to the men charged as a result of the raid, and concluded with a threat to re-occupy the Park forest.

So at the end of that week, a detachment of marines was again bound towards Lewis. These came from Plymouth aboard the Seahorse, with 100 rounds of ball and cartridge per man. The Jackal, meantime, was under recreational orders for Loch Shell, as the officers had been invited to a few days' shooting of such deer as were left in Park by Mrs. Platt, wife of the shooting-tenant.

While the results of the Crofters' Commission in North Uist were reported, and a rent reduction of 28 per cent ordered, the Seahorse was arriving at Stornoway; the Jackal was lying at Eishken; and the Marquis of Lothian was arguing that 'people were so desperately poor in Lewis that they could be nothing but better off if they would only emigrate'.

His counsel, unsurprisingly, went unheeded in Lewis. On the shortest day of the year 4,300 cottars from Borge, Shader and Barvas marched to Galston sheep farm, surveyed the lands, and warned the tenant to leave as soon as his lease expired the following March. The contingents were 'headed by pipers and flags in military order'; while in Skye, land leaguers were meeting outdoors in a snowstorm to express sympathy with the raiders in Lewis.

The following Saturday, Christmas Eve, on the other side of the island, 1,000 crofters and cottars of Point marched on the Aignish sheep-farm, yet again with flags and pipers, to warn the farmer to get out within fourteen days. They then marched on to the Melbost sheep-farm, tenanted by a relation of the Aignish farmer, with a similar threat. On 29 December, a Land League meeting drew crofters and cottars from throughout the district; and it was agreed that, a week or so later, the stock of the farmers would be driven away, and replaced by crofters' stock.

Four days later a proclamation under the terms of the Riot Act was posted widely throughout the neighbourhood prohibiting such a raid. Unperturbed, a 300-strong deputation presented itself on the steps of Lady Matheson's castle to demand the farms. She refused, and suggested emigration. At a mass-meeting later that day in Stornoway, 'strong and passionate language was freely used'.

In Edinburgh, the trial of the Park raiders was scheduled for the opening weeks of the New Year. Donald MacRae announced that he would be calling as a witness Lady Matheson. The island was by now 'in a seriously disturbed condition, and the reply which the people got from the proprietrix will not tend in any way to allay the turbulent feeling that is abroad'.

The following Monday, therefore, the raid on Aignish took place, with a party of Royal Scots in reserve and thirty-six marines from the Seahorse stationed at the farmhouse. Soon after dawn, a police scout observed by telescope that 'there was great excitement and stir among the townships', and that people were moving to a nearby hill, where a standard was already flying. By noon, the brow of this hill 'was gradually blackening'; and then the crowd rushed down, spreading across the farm, and driving the farmer's stock

before it. Bayonets were fixed; the Riot Act read; the Royal Scots summoned; and thirteen crofters arrested. That night, thirty-three marines and twelve police guarded the farmhouse.

On the following Tuesday, the rifles in the Stornoway premises of the local Volunteer company were disabled and the ammunition taken aboard the Seahorse; while it was reported that the farm of Galson, on the west side of Lewis, would shortly be raided too. Mass deputations to the Matheson castle were now almost a daily affair; one 150-strong group of Coll crofters was turned away with the suggestion that its members should emigrate. As a result, the Forester was provisioning on the Clyde, and embarking marines for Lewis. The Aignish people, however, were entirely unrepentent, and gave notice that in five weeks 1,000 men would begin cultivation of Aignish farm. There were also fears of raiding at Carloway and Shawbost; and from Uig it was reported that raids were also being planned.

In the middle of January, the thirteen arrested Aignish raiders were taken aboard the Jackal bound for the gaol in Dingwall, under escort of marines and police. Amid rumours the previous evening of a rescue bid, the men were embarked at two in the morning. That same day the raiders from Park were on their way to trial in Edinburgh; 400 yards of dyke were discovered destroyed at Galston; and at Dalbeg farm, in Barvas, there had been threats made and police were sent for.

There had also been some destruction of fences at Dell. And at Linshader, in the parish of Uig, 500 people had marched from Tolsta, Dun, Carloway, Breasclete and Callernish. At Garrynahine, they warned the tenant of the sheep-farm there to clear out at once,

and then proceeded to deliver the same message to the farmer at Linshadder.

On the Monday, the trial of the Park raiders began in Edinburgh. The jury heard how around 150 men had marched from Gravir behind a red flag; how in the crowd there were perhaps fifty firearms (mostly old single-barrelled muzzle-loading shotguns and rifles); how the raiders established their camp in the forest, and how they then began the alleged destruction of the deer.

The agent for the defence noted that the forest extended to 150 square miles; wondered how 150 men could mob and riot over as many square miles; and secured a not-guilty verdict. By that evening news of the result had reached even the most remote corners of Lochs. Elsewhere in the island, there had been further raiding that same day, with fifty men from Borge destroying a mile of boundary fence at Galston farm, in the process overpowering a dozen police sent there to guard it.

The Seahorse was sent towards Galston with sixty marines, and a contingent of the Royal Scots set off to march to the farm. Even as the jury was re-entering the court in Edinburgh, the Seahorse was landing her marines at Port of Ness. The next day, at dawn, eighty marines and Royal Scots, along with forty police, raided Borge, where 'Land League doctrines have a firm hold'. They arrested six men who had been identified by the local farmer as League activists.

That same week, the example of Lewis was being followed elsewhere. In Skye, the Braes Land League met to demand the division among them of Lord MacDonald's Glennargilt farm. In Glendale, the people were demanding the division of Bracadale and Minginish. And in Ross-shire, 'an attempt may be made on the

deer-forest of Kildermorie, on the estate of Munro-Ferguson of Novar; the authorities have been warned of the affair’.

In Lewis, meantime, the Park raiders returned to a triumphant welcome, with bonfires on every hilltop in Lochs. The Borge men were released from custody on grounds of insufficient identification; and a deputation from Back called on Lady Matheson to demand the division among them of the farm at Gress, reading aloud to her a letter with the pointed conclusion, ‘in the case of a refusal it is hard to say what the result will be’.

Donald MacRae was in London, on Land League business, and was interviewed by the city’s Evening Star at length. ‘The schoolmaster of Balallan is in town. He is a famous man in Lewis and not unknown here. In his own island and parish he is the guide and inspirer of the land war, and the leading spirit of that powerful and active body, the Highland Land League. The land for the people, not for the landlords or the deer, and room on it for those who cling to their native soil, is the programme’.

By the end of the month, crofters and cottars in Breasclete and Tolsta were demanding the restoration of the sheep farms at Linshadder and Garynahine. At Coll, fences were being destroyed: while to the south, in Barra, a mass-meeting at Castlebay was demanding more land. In Skye, Lord MacDonald was taking court action against yet more crofters for non-payment of rent. And on the mainland, a meeting in Brora protested against the recent increase in the county police force, ‘as it is only fitted to augment the agitation which is its cause’. In Beaully an enthusiastic meeting of crofters and cottars was held, ‘in connection with the Highland Land League, and had reason to rejoice at the recent acquittal of their Lewis brethren, the Park deer raiders’. At Ullapool a similar meeting

agreed 'not to rest satisfied until the land which lay in close proximity to them was restored'. The six deer-forests in the parish of Lochbroom ran to 25,000 acres and, 'It was agreed to continue the agitation until they secured some of the land in the six neighbouring forests'.

Still the landlords urged the tenants to emigrate. Hugh Matheson, nephew of the late Sir James, wrote to the Times claiming that the poverty of the people was their own fault, as a result of having overcrowded themselves on the land left over from the deer-forests and sheep-farms.

In Lochcarron, however, the local League met to collect money for Lewis, and hear a speaker remind them that 'they had been agitating constitutionally for too long a period. The only remedy for a redress of their grievances lay in their taking possession of the land at an early date'. This meeting, one of the largest ever in the district, also agreed to prepare for raids in two neighbouring deer-forests. In Skye, the tenants at Sconser warned that unless they were granted 'lands now under deer', they would simply take them; while in Kilmuir the tenants of six townships met to discuss similar action. In Greenock, 2,000 people met to advise 'every crofter and cottar to set their face firmly against any scheme of emigration while an acre of fertile land remains out of cultivation and devoted to sporting purposes'.

And from the New Zealand Gaelic Society money was despatched to Charles Cameron, owner of the North British Daily Mail, 'conveying to you the thanks of the Highlanders of this part of the world for your powerful advocacy of the crofter cause'. Those who had subscribed to the appeal identified their origins as: Orkney, Shetland, Lewis, Argyll, Iona, Arran, Lochalsh, Arisaig, Applecross,

Tiree, North Uist, Barra, Aberfeldy, Kerrera, Bonar Bridge, Dingwall, Fort William and Mull.

By then, the Aignish men were appearing in Edinburgh on trial. The Stornoway police superintendent told of how the Royal Scots had bayonet-charged the crowd, of how the authorities' warning-posters distributed prior to the raid had been removed, and of how a Stornoway shopkeeper, who was displaying one, had had his windows smashed. Newall, the tenant, told of how the day before Christmas he had met a mob, hundreds strong, carrying a red flag, and of how he was warned that he had fourteen days to get off his farm.

The trial went to a second day. Lord Craighill summed up strongly against the prisoners. The jury found them guilty but recommended leniency; the gallery cheered; and Craighill warned them that if they persisted, he would have them thrown out. Having already demonstrated a dislike of Gaelic in his court, Craighill lost no time in imposing sentences of between six and fifteen months - at which the gallery duly hissed. As the North British Daily Mail noted, 'the hissing begun there has already spread over the whole of Scotland. Unless something better than gunboats and soldiers and gaols can be offered to the crofters very quickly, the government will find that they have heavy work before them in the Highlands'.

Certainly, the sentences passed in Edinburgh did not dissuade further agitation. The Land League again planned to send fundraising delegates to the colonies and north America. Among these were to be Donald MacRae, John Murdoch, Angus Sutherland, John MacPherson and Alexander MacKenzie.

In Skye, crofters at Valtos agreed that 'the time for asking was past, the time for taking had come'. In Portree the Land League met

to denounce 'with horror and indignation the sentences passed on the Lewis crofters and the manner in which non-English speaking witnesses for the defence in the recent trials were terrorised and browbeaten in court'. Staffin and Valtos tenants met on the sheep farm at Duntulm - 'chiefly made up of crofter townships cleared in the last thirty years' - and warned that they would soon take direct action too.

In Lewis Lady Matheson received a threatening letter. She sent it to the post office, with the instruction that it be displayed on public view. Meetings in Skye and Sutherland were denouncing the Aignish sentences. Thirty yards of boundary dyke between the farms of Dalmore, Carloway and the township of Garinen were torn down. Lady Matheson received another threatening letter, of 'abominable and scandalous content'. The Land League executive met in Dingwall, to denounce the sentences on the Aignish raiders. Two constables were now patrolling the grounds of Stornoway Castle at night: and incoming boats to the harbour watched, for fear of secret 'agitators' arriving in connection with the issue that had required police protection for her ladyship'.

The Mull Land League denounced the Aignish sentences. In Ross-shire, a mass meeting agreed unanimously in favour of a popular invasion of deer-forests in the county on 12 August, to shoot the deer, 'in presence of the sportsmen'. The Alness Land League presented Donald MacRae with a purse of money in connection with his services to the movement. And towards the end of February, the Seahorse was sent towards Bayble to assist in the arrest of two men wanted in connection with the recent riot at Aignish.

The Crofters' Act, therefore, and the work of the Crofters' Commission, had not stilled agitation. But they had acted, if

anything, as a spur to further popular effort to reclaim the land of the Highlands for the common, native, people of those Highlands. And at the back of it all - the popular demonstrations led by defiant pipers, the red flags, the hilltop bonfires, the speeches at conference and cornstack - ran one swift and central undercurrent: the repudiation of landlordism, in its various dimensions, both in the Highlands and throughout Scotland.

In the words of one editorial on events in the Hebrides: 'We thus have a Scotch vote of 37 against 11 (Scots) Tories, but the voice of Scotland is silenced and overpowered by an English Tory majority, which treats the grave crisis in Lewis with indifference and contempt.

'Who shall say after this that Scotland receives justice at the hands of the Imperial Parliament?'