
Rural Scotland and Socialism in the 21st Century



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Introduction

To paraphrase an old saying, when the city sneezes, the country catches a cold. Only this time it will be much worse - the economic downturn caused by the credit crunch greed of international bankers, is no few days discomfort. Recessions always have proportionally more impact in rural areas.

Within the present system, rural prosperity depends largely on urban spending power. Wealth is generally created by the mass of people who live in urbanised areas, and some of that is spent outside them. Beyond declining agriculture and some small scale wealth generation from other land use, mineral extraction, forestry and fishing, jobs in rural and remote Scotland often depend on tourism. Rural employment is threatened by recession and job loss will increase the trend of migration from the country to the city – it never happens the other way round although of course the wealthy have always sought the fresh air and benefits of rural life. John McLean's parents were forced to migrate from Skye to Glasgow in the 19th century just as Queen Victoria was building her estate in Balmoral and consolidating the romantic view of the Highlands and Islands. The public sector, a major secure employer outside urban areas, depends for its vibrancy on a stable economy and shrinks when things get wobbly. The present recession will impact hugely on Scotland's rural areas.

In the 19th and early 20th Centuries socialists in Scotland were involved in the struggles that were taking place in the Highlands and Islands around land ownership and use. Tenant crofters in the Highland and Islands fought back against dispossession and rent increases by the hereditary landlords: in Skye, Lewis and Tiree the military were called out to quell unrest in the 1880s. The Crofters Act of 1886, a typically Liberal piece of legislation which gave rights and protection to those who worked the land in some parts of Scotland, was a result of these struggles. However this was not the end of the matter and agitation and land grabs continued periodically until after World War Two - and this history has influenced recent developments in community ownership.

In broad terms left-wing ideas have made little lasting impact in the

countryside (although a lot of concentrated industry such as mining was located outside the cities in Central belt areas such as Fife, Ayrshire and Lanarkshire – areas associated with the growth of socialism and trade unionism). The socialist literature however, is rich in description of rural life and struggle: Marx himself offers a vibrant account of the Highland Clearances and the loss of common land in Capital Volume 1, and the wonderful trilogy “Scots Quair” by Lewis Grassie Gibbon describes the struggles of land workers in rural early 20th Century Scotland. Notable figures in Scottish labour history like Thomas Johnston have attacked the Scottish ruling class elite and ensured that the history of working class people outside the cities has been preserved, but in modern times there has been little link between the urban based labour and trade union movement and their associated political organisations, and the mass of workers who have worked on the land.

In 2009 the Land Wars of the 1880s might seem like a distant memory and the values and solidarity that drove the struggle, a thing of the past. However the arguments of the contemporary right wing Countryside Alliance have not made the impact that their leading supporters claim. This group and its allies in the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (the former Scottish Landowners Association - amazing what a name change and re-branding can achieve in terms of image!), argue that the interests of country people are all tied up with the prosperity of the traditional powerful and wealthy. Few who stop to think about it are taken in with such nonsense – do the landowning rich really use the rural post offices they claim to defend. These like most other “countryside” issues, are class ones, with cutbacks in services the inevitable consequence of falling profit levels. However, what the Countryside Alliance have arguably done is fill a vacuum created by an absence of credible alternative socialist argument: its easy to condemn fox-hunting and other extremes of rural privilege, but what is the socialist vision for Scotland’s remote and rural areas?

This pamphlet will explore such themes from the perspectives of rural based SSP activists, and describe the policies with a particular rural emphasis that we put forward in our manifestos at election time. The SSP is committed to helping establish an independent Scotland and some of our policies reflect the positions we would adopt in a situation

of self-government, whilst some reflect the present reality of partial devolvement of government.

This is very much a work in progress, and the debate about what policies are right for remote and rural areas will continue, involving as it must, those who live and work there. 22% of Scotland's population lives in rural and remote areas so rural issues are of interest to a sizeable number of people. The growth of the SSP over the past ten years, despite recent setbacks, has for the first time brought a small network of socialists into activity across the length and breadth of Scotland, including in remote and rural parts of our country. Socialism is now on the rural agenda.

SSP policies are driven by a fundamental need to recognise the environmental crisis facing the planet, and the need to take urgent action. They are based on the need to shift the focus away from pure economic growth as measured by gross domestic product, in favour of a more balanced measurement of the quality of life. Big is no longer best, and our belief is that in a planned socialist economy the drive of the market should be replaced by decentralised localised decision making processes that determine what should be produced in order to meet need. As it said in our 2007 Scottish Parliamentary manifesto:

“The signs are everywhere. In the creeping rise of the oceans and the low lands that slip beneath them. In the monstrous hurricanes that lay waste to everything they touch. In the chunks of ice that break free from the evaporating ice fields. In the heat waves and howling storms, the flooding and famine. Our world is in turmoil and we, humankind are the architects of this destruction. Through massive over consumption, reckless industrialisation and chronic inability to face the truth, we have brought our planet to this impasse. Now we must act to save it.”

The World Food Crisis and Agriculture

Once upon a time and not really that long ago, most of the food we eat was produced on farms in our countryside. The countryside itself was luxuriant, supported a variety of wildlife, and labour intensive small scale diverse agricultural production. Of course it was not like this all the time and the past was no idyll – when the crops failed (often as today for reasons that were entirely man-made) people starved and were forced from the land into the towns and cities, feeding the needs of the industrial revolution for cheap labour in the factories. In World War Two food imports reduced by over half and the nation became almost self sufficient as farming was intensified.

Scotland is a long way from any kind of food self sufficiency in the early 21st Century. The giant supermarket chains who control food markets and account for most sales, maintain their colossal profit levels through a combination of exploitation of cheap food sources from other countries, agribusiness (intensive large scale and unsustainable land exploitation for whatever sells for maximum profit), and price fixing which drives small farms out of business. The carbon imprint of such practices, with foodstuffs that could be grown in Scotland, imported by the boat and planeload, makes no lasting sense. The nod in the direction of Fair Trade imported lines from the majority south of the world by even the rapacious Asda Walmart, does not compensate for the devastating consequences across the planet of such market driven madness.

As the population of the world increases, the market ensures that food productivity only expands at a rate which keeps agro-exports profitable: more than half of these come from the U.S., Brazil, Argentina, Canada and France, who together represent just 2% of the world's farmers. Although the trend has stalled, food prices rose dramatically between 2007 and 2008. Whilst we noticed this in prices on supermarket shelves, the runaway price of basics such as rice, grain and corn, pushed, according to some estimates, 100 million people into possible malnutrition – on top of the 900 million already in that position. This has not affected the profits of the world's largest agribusinesses – Monsanto and Syngenta AG both almost doubled

their profits between June 2007 and June 2008. Meanwhile food riots now regularly occur in the poorer parts of the world, some of them in areas such as Brazil where agribusinesses are turning land over to the production of profitable bio-fuels – increasing deforestation and adding to ecological imbalance. We have a responsibility to address all this and like most things, changes should start right at home – with the way we regard our land assets and produce from them. Food is a fundamental human right and like the air we breath, should not be a hostage to profit and loss account systems which condemn so many on our planet to starvation.

Scotland, as stated earlier, is not self sufficient under the present market led system, even though 75% of the landmass is theoretically agricultural. The Scottish NFU estimate that about 67,000 people are directly employed in agriculture, with a further three jobs for every one in farming, employed in a related setting – mainly agricultural supply or food and drink processing. However those who work directly on the land are increasingly doing so as a part time occupation, with fewer small farmers on fewer farms.

Those who remain working the land do so within a framework created by the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. The CAP is currently under review but presently accounts for a complicated and highly bureaucratic system of grants and subsidies (in 2005 there were over twenty types of available fund in Scotland), serving some 12 million farmers in 27 countries - including newer EC entrants such as Bulgaria with severe rural poverty. This system aims to keep farms in business but in reality makes little sense in terms of food production or land management, and discriminates against producers outside the EC in the poorer countries of the world. In Less Favoured Areas (LFAs - 87% of Scotland's agricultural land hosting 13,000 farms), subsidies are earned for keeping livestock that have negligible saleable value – thanks to the domination of the supermarkets and the agribusinesses who control fertiliser and animal feed production. Similarly milk producers make no more than a few pence on each pint of milk produced – unlike the eventual retailers. Inevitably this results in reduced and more concentrated livestock and agricultural production, with the subsidies designed to keep small farms viable, actually going to increase the profits of larger producers (despite

reforms in 2003 which limited the worst excesses of this trend).

Some critics have argued that a centralised subsidy system should be ended and a more localised approach taken to agricultural production based on local distribution, sustainability and need. The suggestion made is that a single system of land taxation should replace the various complicated tax systems that blight our lives on the basis that the land, like the air we breath, belongs to everyone and that its use should benefit not just those who directly exploit it and claim (on whatever basis) “ownership”. These ideas were developed by Henry George in the nineteenth century but have resonance today. Although SSP policy only applies this to the largest land holdings, its premise should inform a vision of the future.

It would mean little in reality if we were to argue for complete self-sufficiency in food production as an immediate demand. However this should be our eventual aim. In Cuba, such a movement has been forced on the people by years of US led economic embargo. “Peak Oil” – a nightmare for consumer based economies of the richest third of the world, has already been effectively passed in Cuba, and for the first time perhaps, there is some popular appeal to looking at how things are done there.

The Scottish Socialist Party believes that farming should be re-generated to meet the food needs of Scotland’s people. Our 2007 manifesto for the Scottish parliament resolved that in an SSP led parliament:

- * Grants should be provided to help establish farming co-operatives, where prices can be agreed for produce, that resists the power of the supermarket chains to drive down prices.
- * Supply should be encouraged through the grant funding of local food co-operatives that sell local produce in town centres, villages and housing schemes at reasonable prices.
- * The rural economy should be geared towards providing quality local foods for regional markets rather than exports.
- * Encouragement should be given to conversion to organic production.
- * Free school meals for school children should be based on ingredients purchased from local farmers.

- * Intensive farming methods, including battery and factory farming have no place in the production of healthy foodstuffs, and should be ended.
- * Public ownership of corporate farms.
- * Genetically Modified crops should continue to be banned from production in Scotland, and imports based on their production barred from sale.
- * Biofuels should only be produced if they meet sustainability criteria and have greenhouse gas certification.
- * Farm workers, including seasonal workers, should enjoy full trade union rights and protection, and their wages enjoy regulation where this is not already in place.
- * Financial support for co-operatively owned local abattoirs to avoid the transport of live animals over long distances.

Scotland's Natural Assets – Forestry, Fishing and Energy Production

Scotland has a natural environment that should be exploited for the benefit of its entire people, and looked after for future generations. Harvesting the benefits of our countryside and coasts should involve science and conservation and be based on the present and future needs of everyone.

Forestry covers 17% of the landmass and employs approximately 12,000 people, either directly or indirectly. Jobs are provided through forestry harvesting and wood products (including large-scale industrial processes like pulp and paper making), to ranger services and footpath maintenance. Much of this remains state owned but this is presently under threat from the SNP government: 25% of the most profitable forests owned by the state might be leased for 75 years to private companies on the basis that the income from this can be used to tackle climate change. This is meeting opposition from the trade unions who represent Forestry Enterprise workers, and the communities where this might impact. Privatisation is privatisation whatever the SNP spin might be, and again they expose themselves for the opportunists (if arguably well intentioned ones) they really are.

In the 1980s fast-growing conifers were planted on private land in Scotland as a tax dodge for millionaire celebrities and other wealthy investors. The wood from these is of little use for anything other than pulping and biomass (burning for fuel) and is very easily damaged by storms. Its growth and production is a perfect example of crazy capitalism. Sadly our own state owned forests have also been dedicated since their growth in the 1950s, to similar fast growing conifer production creating a monoculture in our forests that was neither environmentally friendly nor sustainable. Such forests admittedly are no longer in favour: they make no economic sense any more because of the availability of cheap imports from abroad – particularly from countries enjoying economic freedom after the collapse of the soviet bloc in the early 1990s. As they are cut down and their products pulped (often at a significant loss) they are increasingly being replaced by mixed woodland aimed at increasing leisure interests. This is good

and requires continued government funding but there is also a need for longer term investment in slower growing but more useable hard wood – this will pay off for future generations and make a better contribution to the carbon capture our environment so badly needs.

The 2007 SSP manifesto called for:

- * Stronger regulation of timber imports in order to prevent unsustainably and illegally logged timber entering the country.
- * The protection by law of ancient forests.

In some areas, forests were planted on former settlements and there is now interest in rebuilding small communities with eco-friendly housing using energy created on a small scale from local biomass resources. This would certainly help the chronic shortage of affordable housing in rural areas (see below).

Our seas and coasts are under severe threat: our waters and beaches are polluted with the detritus of global consumerism and our seas over fished to the point where some species, like cod, which have in the past been commonly available, are fast disappearing. We support the promise of the Scottish Marine Conservation Bill, currently under consideration, to address some of these issues and establish effective controls over what happens in our waters.

However we believe local ownership and control to be more effective than legislative edict. On the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde, a small marine conservation area including a “no take” fishing zone was recently established. This came after lobbying and campaigning by a strongly supported local group COAST, who managed to get the agreement of local fishermen, whose scallop fishing practices were known to be destructive and unsustainable. This “no take zone” will help regenerate fish stocks to everyone’s benefit and serves as a model to be followed by other coastal communities. SSP MSPs were amongst its earliest supporters in the last Scottish parliament.

We do believe that fishing has a future, but this has to be on a more localised basis for local markets – the industrial plundering of the

seas by giant trawlers has no place in the sustainable harvesting of the world's oceans. The wasteful practice of throwing back catches because of EU regulations and limits should go.

The 2007 SSP manifesto called for:

- * The immediate withdrawal from the EU Common Fisheries Policy with a 25 mile offshore limit within which only Scottish crewed boats can fish.
- * Local management of sea fisheries based on the Finnish model, where environmental sustainability is a key priority alongside community sustainability.
- * Diversification and alternative employment opportunities for fishing communities.

With an abundance of natural wind, tidal and hydro resources, Energy production should be an area in which Scotland can excel. Instead the development and exploitation of these resources is driven by the market and the availability of government grants (in a bid to meet Kyoto and EU targets) for private profit making entrepreneurs – in some cases a licence to print money. Given the losses of energy which occur through cable transmission, energy production should be as local as possible, with a move to turn homes and workplaces into self-sustainability through wind turbines, solar and ground energy sources. On the Isle of Gigha three second hand wind turbines have been purchased through a government loan by the community – these provide enough power for the island's energy needs and provide surplus enough for an income of £80,000 a year from sales to the national grid. In Southern Brazil one poor community with six thousand families have appropriated the local hydro-electric energy systems and now run their own energy production based on a system of mass involvement, co-operation and trust. These are models that can be used across Scotland in both urban and rural settings.

The 2007 SSP manifesto called for:

- * Within a devolved Scotland, responsibility for energy to be transferred from Westminster to the Scottish parliament.
- * Investment in alternative energy technologies, including community-owned windfarms, tidal power and clean coal technology.
- * Public and community ownership of energy, including oil, windfarms,

electricity, coal and gas, with a proportion of all profits ring-fenced for investment in alternative energy.

* The establishment of elected anti-pollution boards at national and local level to monitor and enforce pollution controls, and for these boards to have the power to impose penalties.

* The replacement of overhead pylons with underground cables where environmentally beneficial.

Land Ownership Issues

Scotland is unique in the world for the proportion of land that lies in the ownership of a relative few.

It is only in the last three decades, thanks to the work of the late John McEwan, and the continued efforts since of Andy Wightman (whose contemporary work is heavily drawn upon below) and others, that this is now documented owing to the secrecy that had always enveloped the question. Until the reforms of only a few years ago, the landed gentry of Scotland still enjoyed peripheral but nonetheless financially remunerative feudal privileges. Their removal was resisted by only a few landowners – almost certainly because the majority took the view that if they showed support for such modernisation, the real benefits of their enormous and powerful ownership of the land might continue unchallenged.

At one time, and later than the enclosure process in rural England in the middle ages, the land in Scotland was held in common ownership. In the towns vast tracts were also held as Commons under the guardianship of the burghers and merchants who provided the administration. In the countryside the clan system of land use gave no entitlement of actual ownership to the chieftains. This changed with the breakup of the Clan system in the 17th and 18th centuries with the Clan Chiefs effectively appropriating the land for themselves, and regarding their people as tenants without rights, to use and abuse as required. In the towns and cities the Common lands were mostly quite simply lost to private development; the description of this robbery by Tom Johnston in the early 20th century, and more recent attention by Andy Wightman, remains a source of little known but potential contest.

In 1999 one quarter of privately owned rural land in Scotland was owned by 66 landowners, a third by just 120, half by 343, and two thirds by 1242 individuals. This is staggering when you consider that we live in a country of 19 million acres and five million people.

Andy Wightman writes in *Scotland, Land and Power, the Agenda for Reform* (1999):

“Such a pattern is remarkable in itself, but what is even more astonishing is the way in which the landowning establishment itself is not merely a collection of random individuals but a tightly-knit network of power

and influence extending into the fields of politics and finance. The small numbers involved facilitate the operation of this network and its effectiveness which extends to the highest levels of British society.” Wightman’s book then goes on to show the inter-relations between these landowners (most of them with double-barrelled names), their positions in high finance and their royal family connections. This really is the ruling class laid bare and anyone who thinks that all this is a thing of the past should look at the facts.

Some New Labour stalwarts like former MP Brian Wilson have seen themselves as crusaders on land reform issues, but their policies in practice have done little to challenge the real hegemony of the Scottish landowning class. These people have used the issue as a convenient left cover – in reality of course New Labour policies have continued social divisions and widened the gap between rich and poor. Neither have the SNP shown much gumption on the issue: their support in 2008 for the plans of US millionaire Donald Trump to destroy a valued conservation site in Aberdeenshire, in order to create a golf course and expensive housing development, has exposed them for the opportunists they really are. In this they have shown neither environmental sensitivity nor imagination when it comes to the creation of jobs in rural areas.

The main reform within New Labour’s agenda, supported by the SNP, and the focus of most attention, has involved community buyouts of land. This reform was ostensibly designed to help communities avoid the uncertainties that have surrounded the sale of assets important to their future – in theory this might be a small piece of land for a play park, or it could be the vast “sporting” estate within which the community lies. However the parameters of the legislation (Land Reform Act 2003) impose limits on this: unless on crofting land, the land must be available for sale and subject to a registered interest by the community, and then approved by a government minister. Whilst government grants are said to be available (presumably subject to other budget pressures - which might be problematic during a recession), the community have to raise at least some of their own funds and experience to date suggests a dependency upon rich benefactors. Despite this there have been some notable successes in securing estates for the use of the people who live and work on them after years of abuse by absentee landlords. These range from the Knoydart and Assynt estates (purchased prior to the present

legislation) to the community buyout of nine estates comprising most of the land in South Uist (92,000 acres) in 2006. The landlords have of course profited from their previous prolificacy, having received a market price for the sale of their lands. No one other than socialists have argued that perhaps they had long ago forfeited the right to recompense or compensation.

However the results have shown that when people have ownership and interest in their communities, things can change in spectacular fashion: anyone who has visited Gigha in recent years can see this: there is a vibrancy and sense of re-generation that was entirely absent when the island was nothing more than a playground for a succession of largely absent landlords.

The 2007 SSP manifesto called for:

- * Public and community ownership of Scotland's vast landed estates.

The question of how to use the land on Scotland's vast "sporting" estates has been a contentious one amongst socialists. The vast majority of Scottish people who have always been excluded from the privileges and pastimes of the wealthy, have every right to scorn the motives and character of those traditionally involved in hunting, shooting and fishing. However it is too simplistic to simply wish this issue away: sporting estates account for about 50% of land in the Highlands and Islands area – some 2.1 million hectares of land divided amongst 340 properties. These are areas that were deliberately denuded of their human activity in the 19th century in order to provide Victorian industrialists and titled nobility, areas to hunt play and act the laird in their castles, shooting lodges and big houses. Andy Wightman quotes sources which show that from a sample of 218 estates taken in 2001, 39 of these were owned by individuals, and the remainder by trusts and companies registered in the UK and abroad. 39% of these estates were obtained by inheritance and the remainder purchased. Half had changed hands in the last 25 years, and 66% were in the hands of absentee landlords. So whilst these vast tracts of land were artificially created and remain in the hands of a few people, their uses for other forms of economic activity are perhaps limited, and they will not always be the areas communities might want to purchase for themselves. Of course many of these areas are regarded as areas which should be

conserved for the enjoyment of walkers, climbers and those who like wild places, and an accommodation between these groups and those who want to shoot grouse or deer, has usually (but not always) been found. Wightman suggests solutions to these issues which should be of interest to socialists:

- That the land need not be in private ownership for core economic activities including hunting to continue.
- Ecological restoration and management of the wild nature experience for hillwalkers and hunters (wildness is currently part of the hillwalking experience but has been eroded for hunters by bulldozed tracks and the use of mechanized vehicles.
- Pro-active management of hillwalking economy in terms of huts, lodges and trails (as in countries like Norway) designed to attract more participants and achieve dispersal of impacts throughout the Highlands and Islands.
- The availability of lodges and lease hunting as part of the wider distribution of hunting opportunities.
- Self-employment of gamekeepers who also act as guides and nature wardens.
- Improved game management, particularly of red deer through licensing schemes.

These questions are now a reality for some of the community owned estates, and moral arguments about blood sports will cut little ice with those trying to make a living from poor and unproductive upland areas.

It should be noted that the argument here is a different one from those surrounding fox-hunting in Scotland's lowlands – this is a particularly cruel and contrived sport that has become a rallying cry against urban interference for the right wing and Countryside Alliance lobby. Whatever stance might be taken on hunting per se, there is a difference between the shooting of a moving target and the pursuance of a wild animal to the point of exhaustion by packs of dogs and redcoat-mounted horses.

In relation to “game” river fishing the 2007 SSP manifesto called for:

- Elected and accountable River Boards to remove fishing rights in rivers and lochs from the control of private landowners, and bring them under public control, thus allowing the relevant authorities to keep control of fish stocks.

Combating Poverty: Housing, Transport and Jobs

Scotland's rural areas might be the desired place for a holiday or an idyll move for those worn out by the pace of urban life, but behind the scenery the reality for many is poverty and despair. Official poverty figures show that low pay is worst in rural Dumfries and Galloway, and that other indicators of poverty and inequality feature commonly in rural areas: low income and chronic ill-health for pensioners, and mortality rates for under 65s. Highland Council area has been described as the suicide capital of Europe. The population is ageing, a trend likely to increase with the onset of recession and the hemorrhaging of younger people to the cities, and health and social services for older people are being slashed because of never ending rounds of public spending cuts.

Shelter, the housing charity concerned with homelessness have described the lack of council, social and affordable housing in rural areas as "likely to end rural life as we know it." On the Isle of Arran (population 5,500) a recent Council report identified that a household income of £70,000 was required to get a mortgage in order purchase a modest family sized home; at the same time the average household income was £27,500 and the waiting list for the local Housing Association, the only social housing provider, had 250 names. Housing in rural areas has been commodified to become in recent years a speculative investment opportunity for the well-off rather than a right for those who already live and who work in such places.

Women become trapped in situations of domestic violence because of the implications of homelessness in rural areas – uprooting children from school and friends and moving to areas where they will have none of their own family and social support.

Drastic action is needed to bring life back into rural communities. This has to involve compulsory land purchase if not appropriation, and investment in building houses for ordinary people. The spin offs in terms of the creation of jobs would be enormous.

The 2007 SSP manifesto called for:

- * The cancellation of Scotland's local authority housing debt.
- * The building of 20,000 fully accessible new homes for rent over four years across rural Scotland, for low cost rent to local people.
- * The reinstatement of the Housing Support Grant from central government back to local government, based on pre-11980 levels, increased in line with the retail price index. This would provide Scotland's councils with sufficient funding to carry out repairs and house building.
- * Construction companies would have to build one new home for rent for every five new homes built for sale. These new homes for rent would be owned and managed by the relevant local authority or community based housing association.
- * Eventual public ownership and democratic management of the construction industry.
- * The right of local authorities to impose a land value tax on land and property worth over £1million to help finance the building of social housing for rent.
- * A new minimum housing standard for in both the public and private rented sectors, with central heating, double-glazing and high standards of insulation.
- * The replacement of the "right to buy" (already ditched by a number of rural councils because of the housing shortage) with a graduated rent discount set at the same level as the discount available for tenants to buy their own homes. After 25 years, tenants would pay zero rent until their tenancy is terminated or transferred to another member of the family.
- * An end to wholesale housing stock transfers and a reversal of those which have taken place.
- * Council and housing association tenants to be involved in all strategic planning decisions.
- * All homes identified as "below tolerable standard" in the private sector to be brought into public ownership if the landlord fails to bring them up to standard within a six month period.
- * Safe housing for women/families who have suffered domestic violence or other forms of abuse.
- * Legislation to give local councils the power to ban holiday homes in their area where they believe there is a local housing shortage.
- * Local councils to be allowed to set special local taxes on second

homes.

Other measures are necessary to make rural communities more than just dormitories and second-home locations. SSP strategies for immediate implementation, such as our policies that are being implemented by the present SNP government for free prescriptions and free school meals, are real practical solutions to the issue of inequality in society. That is why we call for public transport to be free, an idea whose time will also come. Public transport has to be brought back into rural areas to end isolation and dependency on cars. The practice of charging more for petrol in various rural locations should be ended by regulation of the petrol retail sector and the establishment of price controls. At the same time, as we approach “peak oil” efforts should be made to ensure that alternative fuels for private vehicles are cheaply available. The current experiment with road equivalent tariff on ferries to the Western Isles (in theory this should mean that a ferry journey to and from an island should cost no more than the equivalent land journey) is to be welcomed, and should be extended to all island communities.

The SSP recognises that in many areas of rural Scotland young people have become disenfranchised and marginalised by a culture determined by those unsympathetic to their needs and aspirations. Often they are seen as nothing more than a nuisance when they are not working or at school. We want young people to take ownership of their communities and feel that they have a stake and a future in their home areas. We are for measures that include them, meet their needs for recreation and leisure, and involve them in decision making.

Villages and rural communities have become bereft of shops, local hospitals, post offices and other amenities, and small schools have been closed. This must be reversed as part of a general move back to regeneration and localisation of the rural economy. As socialists we are for public ownership of the utilities and large corporations but we want to support and revitalise the small local businesses that serve rural communities. The environmental and cultural neglect of many of our villages could be transformed by a programme of public works, again creating worthwhile jobs for young people.

The trend of urban shopping to move away from the High Street and into large out of town supermarket and retail developments has been felt in Scotland's rural areas. This must be resisted as its inevitable result is to close rural shops. The Co-op have a long tradition of providing shops, including some large ones, in Scotland's rural and remoter communities. The idea of using their distribution networks to supply and support smaller privately owned shops should be investigated. This could have mutual benefit; both are often under attack from the predatory big supermarket chains. We are also totally opposed to the privatisation of the post office: this would be followed by the removal of services to rural and remote areas.

The SSP 2007 manifesto called for:

- * Free rail, bus and ferry travel within four years of assuming government.
- * The re-regulation of Scotland's buses and the establishment of a National Bus Corporation, publicly owned and democratically run by Regional Boards.
- * A system of ferry pricing based on the Road Equivalent Tariff.
- * The cancellation of all out of town retail developments and the promotion of a system of local production and retail.
- * Extra funding for public amenities and public transport in sparsely populated areas that lack social facilities.
- * The shop in single shop villages to be exempt from business rates.
- * Increased funding to the Rural Transport Community Initiative to allow people living in remote and isolated areas access to social, leisure, shopping, health and other services.
- * The setting up of a network of community post offices to replace those lost through UK government cuts.
- * A halt to the closure of small rural schools.
- * Community youth forums across Scotland to identify what amenities are needed in each local area.
- * Local youth facilities in every community, run by young people.
- * The release of funds to increase the numbers of mobile and small cinemas serving isolated areas.
- * Local and regional initiatives to bring artists and productions to rural areas, and encourage the development of sport, drama, live music and the performing arts.

* The confiscation of all assets and taking into public ownership under democratic workers control, of companies which shift production from Scotland to low wage economies elsewhere.

Scottish Culture and The Rights of Minorities

Scotland in the 21st Century should have no place for racism and discrimination of minorities. It is shameful that our oldest ethnic minority, Scottish Gypsy Travellers, find themselves struggling for basic recognition and acceptance of their identity and differences in their lifestyle. Against a background of long standing discrimination, many Gypsy Travellers have given up the unequal struggle and allowed themselves to be assimilated into the life of the settled community in the hope that this might give them access to the opportunities available by right to others. Other have chosen to battle on and they deserve our active support. Over recent years Scottish Gypsy Travellers have lost their traditional stopping places, been herded into a decreasing number of public permanent sites, lost their traditional seasonal occupations, and suffered harassment at every level. The official message is very much “conform or suffer the consequences”.

To its credit the Scottish parliament took up this matter after its establishment in 1999. In 2001 the Equal Opportunities Committee, published a report, subsequently endorsed by the Government, that made 37 recommendations concerning the treatment of Gypsy Travellers by legal and public bodies. This included basic considerations like recognising separate identity and respecting their title as “Scottish Gypsy Travellers”, to a call for the need for full legal recognition under the terms of the Race Relations Act and associated legislation. Because this legal aspect remains to be confirmed in a Scottish Court, Scottish Gypsy Traveller status remains open to regular challenge by reactionary elements including public bodies. Sadly the current SNP administration have shown little more than very token interest in continuing the momentum of the previous parliaments.

The SSP have shown strong support to Scottish Gypsy Traveller activists, and are proud to assist the Scottish Gypsy Traveller Law Reform Coalition in their continued campaign. We are determined that Gypsy Travellers, who have enriched Scottish life and culture over generations, should not be allowed to pass into history. As internationalists we condemn the discrimination their brothers and

sisters of the Roma people are suffering in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. We recognize that the difference between state sponsored assaults on the Roma people in Italy is only different from the treatment of Scottish Gypsy Travellers by a question of degree.

The SSP are opposed to racism in all its forms and we stand proudly in the tradition of welcoming those from other countries who choose, or are forced through circumstance because of oppression elsewhere, to come and live in this country. Scotland has plenty of space and its rural and remote areas have the capacity to support more people than they presently do. We want to see an end to the situation where rural life is restricted to those who can afford it, and we welcome the integration and recognition of other cultures and languages that this involves. We have no wish, as we have stated in relation to Gypsy Travellers, to create a monoculture, and we welcome efforts to preserve Gaelic language and culture, and the recognition of lowland Scots "Lallans" as a language in its own right.

The 2007 SSP manifesto called for:

- * A commitment to revitalize the Gaelic language, including setting a four year target of making available Gaelic language lessons to all children and adults who wish to learn the language with Gaelic and Scots to be given equal legal status with English.
- * Support for the Gaelic Digital Service, and for the necessary infrastructure and coverage to make the service available on all media platforms including the internet.
- * Encouragement of the various ethnic cultures that have enriched Scotland over the last half century.
- * Recognition of Scottish Gypsy Travellers as an ethnic group.
- * A nationwide anti-racist roadshow to go into schools and community centres throughout Scotland. This would aim to involve well known actors, footballers and musicians in an ongoing project designed to ridicule racism.

Socialism in Rural and Remote Scotland

This pamphlet has grown from the debates, campaigns and experiences socialists in rural Scotland have been involved in as SSP members. As the credit crunch bites and we sink into recession, it is worth recounting that socialists in the Marxist tradition have long talked of the ebbs and flows of capitalism and the market system. Even though capitalism has adapted and survived in a way that the socialist pioneers could not have predicted, there is little new in the collapse of the financial system. The basic socialist critique of capitalism has stood the test of time. Our other strength lies in the international experience of the socialist movement and our active involvement in the day to day struggles of people in their workplaces, through the trade unions, and their communities through local campaigns and forums. This is what makes us different from the other parties and forthright in our determination to create a society where people are freed from the worries and inequalities inherent within the present system. Socialism in the 21st century has moved on considerably from the work of the pioneers and revolutionaries of 100 years ago and the ideal societies they tried and failed to create in Russia and elsewhere.

This deliberately short pamphlet contains little that is original (although we believe this is the first attempt to bring together such arguments on a Scotland wide basis for some time): its aim is to introduce supporters and those interested in our arguments, to some of the perspectives the SSP has on the challenges that confront people who live and work in rural and remote areas and want to see a better future. If you agree with what we are trying to do and want to join with us we welcome you into our ranks as we strive to build a strong socialist current across Scotland.

FURTHER READING:

The information and statistics in this pamphlet have been drawn from government and other public sources on the World Wide Web. Some of the history and ideas have been taken from those books listed below, whilst others have come from the Scottish Socialist Voice newspaper and other publications such as New Internationalist:

Glover, Charles (2004), *The End of the Line – How overfishing is changing the world and what we eat*, London: Ebury. (This book takes a detailed look at the global fishing situation but has a Scottish perspective.)

Johnson, Thomas (1913), *Our Scots Noble Families*, Glasgow: Forward

Johnson, Thomas (1923), *A History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, Glasgow: Forward

Marx, Karl (1867), *Capital Volume 1* chapter 27.

www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-cl/ch27 (Marx's description of the loss of the Common lands and the Highland Clearances.)

MacPhail, I.M.M. (1989), *The Crofters' War*, Stornoway: Acair. (A detailed account of the Highland Land League and the Crofters' War in the aftermath of the Clearances.)

Pickard, Duncan (2004), *Lie of the Land – a study in the culture of deception*, London: Shephard-Walwyn. (This short book by a Scottish farmer is critical of the CAP and EU subsidies, arguing instead for a land taxation system.)

Prebble, John (1963), *The Highland Clearances*, London: Secker & Warburg

Wightman, Andy (1999), *Scotland, Land and Power, the Agenda for Reform*. Edinburgh: Luath Press.

Wightman, Andy : <http://www.andywightman.com/> (Andy Wightman's website which contains very useful writings, downloads and links on the land question in Scotland.)

Scottish Socialist Party



Socialism Independence Internationalism



The SSP is Scotland's socialist party that stands for the transformation of society.

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