Written submission from St Andrews Land Reform Group

Comments on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill 2014.

There are many aspects of the Bill which are welcome but there are areas which are of concern to us.

1. The Bill fails to follow through on the proposal in the December 2014 Consultation to restrict corporate ownership of land to companies registered in the EU and this is regrettable. The original proposal provided a significant step towards greater transparency in the vexed question of who owns Scotland and who profits from that ownership.

2. Further to the question of land ownership the Bill lacks any measure to accelerate the process of completing a Land Register for Scotland. There needs to be a more proactive approach from the Government towards this end. The lack of a sufficiently comprehensive register is an impediment to the serious consideration of Land Value Tax as a viable alternative to existing forms of taxation.

3. When it is finally competed the Land Register should be regarded as public property and open for public consultation (preferably on-line) at no, or nominal, cost to the user.

4. Serious consideration should be given to restricting the amount of land owned by one individual or corporation.

5. The reintroduction of taxation on sporting estates is a welcome move, as its removal in the 1990s was illogical and unjust. However, it appears that the amount of taxation will be determined by the number of animals killed which seems a strange and anachronistic methodology. Taxation based on the nominal rental value of the land might make more sense.

6. One of the major problems in Scotland today is the dearth of affordable housing, and a move to address this through a programme of house building is also likely to provide a much needed stimulus to the economy and an important element of an anti-austerity agenda. Availability of land is a key factor in this approach and it is regrettable that the Bill does not address this in any meaningful way.

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