LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

CALL FOR VIEWS ON THE NON-DOMESTIC RATES (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM COMMON WEAL DUNDEE

Our Group is made up of citizens from Dundee and places round about, for example, St Andrews, Fife. We are one of a number of groups throughout Scotland, affiliated to the Common Weal movement, which has its head office in Glasgow. We meet fortnightly to discuss matters of import to Scotland.

Our local Councils are Dundee and Fife Councils.

Our discussions range widely, but recently we have focussed our attention on the number of empty properties in the centre of Dundee, and have sought to investigate what can be done about this. We have also spoken about the unfair advantages private schools can command through the tax system in Scotland, and in fact we have been in contact with the “Courier” about this very point.

Thus, we feel that we are qualified to comment on both these aspects of the the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill, namely, in Section 10 (Private Schools) and Section 12 (Unoccupied Properties).

SECTION 10 - PRIVATE SCHOOLS

We agree with our local councils that independent schools should be treated in the same way as state schools. At a time when Fife Council is struggling to provide music tuition in its schools we find it unacceptable that independent schools should be given relief to provide services which state schools are finding it difficult to provide. For similar reasons we would not favour the idea that special needs schools can avoid non-domestic rates.

SECTION 12 – UNOCCUPIED PROPERTIES

Like Dundee and Fife Councils we would contend that any action taken to limit the abuse of empty property relief is to be welcomed.

In conclusion, although we are pleased to see that some of the anomalies of Scotland’s tax system have been addressed, the touch has been so light that it is difficult to see how ordinary people like ourselves will benefit. A much more radical and brave approach will be needed to achieve a better Scotland, not just for the business community but for her other citizens too. For example, Land Reform was rejected by the Barclay Review, on the justification that it would challenge the status quo too much. Thus nothing really changes. We can assure the members of the Review committee and the Government that Common Weal Groups the length and

1
breadth of Scotland have scrutinised Land Reform, and think that it deserves much more attention than the committee was willing to give. But then the narrow remit given to the committee and the lack of representation from civil society on the committee perhaps militated against such an exploration of fresher ideas.