



LABOUR LAND CAMPAIGN PRESS RELEASE – 4 NOVEMBER 2020

## Private ownership versus community stewardship?

The local community is taking back part of Langholm Moor in Scotland from Richard Scott, the Duke of Buccleuch (or rather from a company called Buccleuch Estates whose true ownership is typically obscured in a chain of on-shore and off-shore companies).

Much of the land that this Duke inherited was “given” to a 15<sup>th</sup> century ancestor of his by James II of Scotland in return for material aid, i.e. providing fighting peasants. Centuries after the decline of the feudal system, land reforms in Scotland are now empowering the modern descendants of the peasants to take back possession of this land although they have to pay for it: through taxpayer-funded grants and a crowdfunding campaign, the Langholm Initiative has raised £3.8 million to buy about half of the 4,200 hectares they would like to be able to look after.

Currently, this moorland is used for grouse shooting. Although clients may pay £3,000 a day to kill birds and Buccleuch Group companies received £2 million in Common Agricultural Policy payments in 2017-2018, maintaining land for grouse shooting is environmentally disastrous: wildlife is killed as a result of the regular burning required to promote new-growth heather (which is what grouse eat); and mammals and birds not conducive to grouse farming have to be exterminated, including (illegally) already-endangered birds of prey as well as stoats and weasels.

The villagers’ declared goal is to create “a community-owned nature reserve promoting positive climate action, community regeneration and small-scale renewable energy”. This suggests that the peasants will not only at last be able to benefit from their community’s most precious resource but also that they are going to be more successful stewards of this land than their noble betters.

Chair of the Labour Land Campaign (LLC), Heather Wetzel, says “If all UK land were returned to the stewardship of the community, it would break the cycle of speculation that makes landowners rich at the expense of those who create land wealth in the first place, namely us.”

Moreover, if some part of land wealth were returned to the public purse through an annual levy – a land value tax (LVT) - there would be no need for distortive and avoidable/evadable taxes that drive inequality and undermine the economy. Zero-rating land managed for public benefit would optimise land use in general, e.g. in the case of the Langholm Initiative , it would enhance local community life and improve the environment. LLC Secretary Carol Wilcox notes “It is aberrant that those who live and work somewhere have to pay money to the biggest British landlord to ensure that the land is looked after properly. If we had LVT, the Duke would be begging them to take it back for free.”” ENDS

***The Labour Land Campaign is a voluntary organisation working for land reform.  
It advocates a fairer distribution of land wealth through a Land Value Tax.***

For more information see [www.labourland.org](http://www.labourland.org)

URL for posting on Twitter:  
[http://www.labourland.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Labour-Land-Campaign-Press-Release\\_12-03-2020.pdf](http://www.labourland.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Labour-Land-Campaign-Press-Release_12-03-2020.pdf)

**Contact details**

Press Officer: Anthony Molloy  
Email: [anthony1molloy@gmail.com](mailto:anthony1molloy@gmail.com)  
Telephone: +44 (0)7704 116 238