

## Western Isles Crofters Union

### Secretary's Report

Gentlemen, as those of us interested in crofting are aware; the Western Isles Crofters' Union fights cases on behalf of its fully paid-up members and also brings to light issues which affect crofting in general. I am pleased to report that the year under review was no exception.

During the year under review, the union has, as always, made representations to the Scottish Office for further increases in grant / loan assistance available for the erection and improvement of croft houses.

As you would have noticed in the press and by my own interview on B.B.C. Highland, our latest request has been noted by the D.A.F.S. but because of economic constraints no further assistance can be offered at the moment despite rising costs. I can assure you, gentlemen that the union will still continue to press this matter.

The union has also been in touch with the Scottish Office regarding a reduction in the period of grant conditions applicable to croft houses. As a result of sustained pressure from us, the D.A.F.S. now state that they are in a position to make some progress on the introduction of amending regulations and that it is hoped that a statutory instrument can be laid before Parliament later this year.

Recognition of the union's activities are noticed by various departments and last year we were asked by Comhairle nan Eilean to submit a report for inclusion in the first Western Isles Regional Report which was to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Scotland. The union prepared a first-class report and Comhairle Nan Eilean has thanked us for our contribution to the production of their first Western Isles Report. Our contribution, which was based on facts of importance to the crofting community, was fully published in an issue of the 'Stornoway Gazette'.

As you are aware, the Hill and Upland Sheep (Scotland) Scheme, 1972, has now been revoked and replaced by the Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances Scheme). Some of you will no doubt remember that there were delays in making payment under the new scheme and the union made representations on behalf of its members in order that claims would be cleared quickly. An assurance was received from the Department; this appeared in the 'Gazette' in order to make members fully aware of his situation.

I need not comment much on the Crofting Reform Act, which was introduced on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1976. During the Crofting Reform Bill's passage through Parliament, we were in close contact with Mr Stewart, M.P. and with the Scottish Office. Our views on the provisions of the Bill were forwarded to the Federation of Crofters' Unions and these views in the form of a full report appeared on the front page of the 'Stornoway Gazette'. Where were those who criticised the Union for not letting crofter members know the provisions of the Bill sleeping? Perhaps they were still in hibernation.

These are only a few of the matters which the union was involved in during the year and what better way to end any report than to quote some of the 'thank-you' letters received from a number of our members on whose behalf we fought cases.

1. A letter received from a member in Point for our support in receiving full compensation for the loss of a sheep, expressed his gratitude for our help in fighting his case.
2. As those of us who read the daily press are aware, from time to time we read of the 'poaching wars' in the Broadbay area. Mr Angus Macleod and his crew of 'M.B. Hope II' have once again thanked us for pressing their case for better protection.
3. A member from Cross, Ness, who had difficulty in obtaining Sheep Subsidy for the year 1974/75 took his case to the union. We successfully fought his case and the member involved has also thanked us for our help.
4. A member from the Tolsta area was very unhappy with workmanship, which had been carried out to her house, had been unsuccessful in her own claim against the contractor concerned. She reported the matter to the union and I am pleased to inform you that the member concerned, because of our intervention on her behalf, received a sum, which was considerably in excess of what she had unsuccessfully been claiming.

Despite our successes and achievements over the years, I still feel that the union can provide the same service to members in the future.

Thank you.