

Why young people need a fairer land system

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As a young person raised in the countryside, now living in the city, I have been able to experience both a rural and urban lifestyle. As a result, land reform is an issue very close to my heart and the hearts of my constituents through my role as MSYP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. While significant progress has been made, we must work together, regardless of age, background or location to forge a path forward in the name of land reform.

Following the Highland clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries, the way land ownership has been so concentrated among such an exclusive group of individuals, families and corporations remains a fundamental challenge to achieving true land equality in Scotland. In order to push for real reform, the movement must unite to empower communities by enshrining their right to communal land in law. The Land Reform Act (2016) came a long way in promoting this right but more needs to be done. For a start, the complicated system that exists currently to allow communities to register interest in land must be simplified and information made more widely available so as the wider community become aware of their rights and the options available to them.

Land rights do not only extend to communities, however. Agriculture is a cornerstone of the Scottish economy, so the future of land reform in Scotland would look to promote the rights of small farmers, not just the large corporations who own such a large share of Scottish farmland, with 3.2 million hectares of Scottish land being owned by just 433 people and companies according to former MSP Andy Wightman. While some corporations or families may argue they act as environmental protectors, or that ultimately their ownership benefits those who live on or work the land, I am a firm believer that there should be more support and financial assistance in place to allow communities and small farmers to have more say over their land.

Among other issues faced by young people, skyrocketing rent rates is something that affects or will soon affect a number of my constituents. Which is why it is an issue I am dedicated to solving. There is such an imbalance of private land ownership that we risk creating a monopoly where a few businesses own the majority of developments both agricultural and for housing, meaning they may be able to demand high rates of rent with no competition. In my opinion, rent controls go hand in hand with land reform – we must regulate to create and monitor competition and lower the rates of rent for the people of Scotland.

Overall, the fight for land reform has been a long one but it is not over yet. Significant progress has been made but we must continue to work together, cross-party, cross-organisation and cross-community to demand better rights for all, in the name of Scottish land – we must find common-ground.