

Emigration Committee

Evidence of Alex. Hunter, Esq. W.S. of Edinburgh

Extracted from *The Morning Chronicle* (London) of Wednesday 10th October 1827 by Fionnadh
and transcribed by Keith Dash

Question by the Committee	Answer by Mr Alex. Hunter Esq.
You were employed in superintending an emigration?	From the island of Rum; the estate of Maclean, of Coll.
At what period did that emigration take place	Last year; in the month of July last year.
Of how many persons did it consist?	The last emigration about 300.
Were they embarked in one ship?	There were two ships.
State to the Committee the terms upon which those persons were freighted out, together with all the particulars relative to the expence of their nourishment, and so on?	The expences came to £5.14s. per head of each adult person, upon the average.
What was the expence of those who were not adults?	Two children, from seven to fourteen years of age, are reckoned as an adult, and three under seven.
What was the duration of their passage?	About 37 days.
Will you have the goodness to state to the Committee the particulars of their allowance of provisions; does the £5.14s. include all the expences?	Every expence.
Passage and all?	Every thing.
Will you have the goodness to state the particulars?	The allowance I shall state to the Committee; the Committee are aware there is an Act of Parliament with regard to allowances; but in this case, upon application to Government, they dispensed with the allowance, and oatmeal instead of beef was substituted, only a very small proportion of beef. The weekly allowance to an adult was, eleven pounds of oatmeal, three and a half pounds of bread or biscuit, one and a half pound of beef, half a pound of molasses, half a pound of pease or barley (either), a quarter of a pound of butter, and the allowance of water – of course that cost nothing – but it is 35 pints.
What portion of that quantity of provision did they consume during the voyage?	The allowances were laid in for twelve weeks, that is according to Act of Parliament; but they were told when they went on board, that whatever was over, they were to get for themselves, and of course they were very sparing, and they had provisions when they arrived equal to serve them for two or three months. They were on board 37 days. But I must explain, that a number of them had salt mutton of their own, and potatoes, exclusive of the ship's allowances.

Of what class of persons were these emigrants generally?	What we call the Crofters, in the islands, and some of them were farmers; some of these people had money, a good deal of money.
What is a Crofter?	A man who pays rent from 30s. to £5.
A man who has a small bit of land?	Exactly so, a small bit of land.
Where were they taken to?	To Cape Breton.
But not located there?	Not located certainly, but merely landed there.
The expence that you have named is merely the expence of their landing?	Merely the expence of their landing.
Are these individuals satisfied in their situation at Cape Breton; have you any evidence of that kind of any satisfaction that there is?	I have only one letter from those who went last out; I have one letter, declaring themselves perfectly satisfied; but I have some letters from those who went some years ago, which perhaps may throw some light on the satisfaction they felt.
Have you any particulars relative to the other emigrants you also superintended?	I did not superintend the first.
It appears, then that these people were amply supplied with provisions, and that part of that expence might have been spared?	Certainly.
Can you form any judgment at all how much might have been spared; as, for example, do you think they might have been shipped and landed at Cape Breton for 30s. less per head, or how much less in your judgment?	Why they might; there is a risk, however, because instead of 37 days, they might have been 47 or 57 days in the passage; by the average of passages, certainly one half might have been saved.
How was this £5.14s. paid; was it paid by the people themselves?	No; by the proprietor, who gave a sum of money to assist them.
Are you not of opinion, that the highland proprietor has consulted his own interest by that arrangement?	He certainly has.
Because in seasons of scarcity, I presume they feel themselves bound by custom to support the population?	By humanity.
And somewhat also by usage?	Why, a man cannot allow his population to starve.
Was it in consequence of the introduction of sheep-farming, the improvement of farming into that district, that it became desirable for these people to emigrate?	In the Island of Rum it is all sheep-farming; it never was any thing else, nor is it adapted for raising crops.
Then that emigration did not take place in consequence of any act of the landlord in the improvement of his estate?	Certainly not.

But it enabled him to do it?	In an island for sheep alone you could hardly suppose it possible that they could raise as much grain as would feed so large a population, therefore the proprietors got little or no rent, the tenants were obliged to lay out the price of their sheep in supporting themselves.
Then I suppose they drew their rent from the kelp?	There is no kelp on that island.
What has been the effect of these persons; what is the present situation of the island, compared to its former situation?	Instead of a population of 350 people, there is a population now of 50, and one person has taken the whole island as a farm, and of course he is enabled to pay a higher rent, as he has not to maintain so many people.
Could you give the Committee any idea of what would have been the state of that island, if that population had not emigrated?	Certainly.
Will you be good enough to do so?	The population would have gone on increasing, and, of course, as the population increased, the rents would diminish.
Can you furnish the Committee at all, with any data of the number of individuals it would be expedient, if it were possible (and I will suppose for a moment it is possible) to send from the western isles of Scotland, from the western coast of Scotland?	I think they could spare one-third of their population very easily.
Do you mean in the islands?	In the western highlands and islands.
Was the whole of that expence born by the landlord, or only a part?	The landlord paid the whole of that expence.
Of £5.14s. per head?	Yes.
Have you stated how many went?	I think about 300.
Have there been many people settled in the island since?	No person can settle there without the leave of the proprietor
Of this number (300) that went, how many were children?	I believe I have an account of that at home; if I had it here, I could tell you exactly.
Can you state the whole amount of the expence in a round sum?	About £2,000; I think somewhere thereabouts.
For removing this number?	Yes; the way it was done was this: these people owed a great deal of arrears in rent, and Maclean, of Coll, agreed to give them their arrears of rent, and to advance a certain sum of money in order to assist them out, and to give them a little money in their pockets when they arrived there.
What was the usual extent of the possessions of the persons that were removed?	Why, they possessed land, perhaps from £4 to £100, and about £100 I think the highest was.
There could not be many paid £100?	Not many, one or two.

Be so good as to state the extent of the general class of the property farmed by the smaller class of farmers?	It is impossible to say; the land there is rented at £800 a year, and it contains 30,000 English acres; it is impossible to say what extent any one person possessed.
Did you go with these emigrants?	I did not.
Were they willing to go?	Some of them were, others were not very willing; they did not like to leave the land of their ancestors.
You stated there had been a letter from them?	I have one letter only; there have been several.
What account does he give?	A very good one.
When did this emigration take place from Rum?	In the month of July last. There was an emigration partially, but not at the landlord's expence, 4 or 5 years ago, from Coll and Rum.
How is the contract made with the shipowner for the removal?	At so much per head; and he is bound to give them certain provisions, according to the scale that I have stated.
Was the contract made by a person well acquainted with shipping?	Why, we know the average rate per ton; we made inquiry of the different ship-owners, and we knew the rate per ton of the ship, and how many passengers she would carry, and in that way we came pretty nearly to know the expence; we knew the expence of meal and biscuits, and therefore we were pretty well aware of whether it was a fair contract.
What became of them when they got to Cape Breton?	They landed there, where they met with a great number of friends, who had gone from the neighbouring islands a few years ago.
Did they get land?	They got land; a number of them had a little money with them; the friends of those who had no money assisted them, and they became labourers to their friends, and those who had money got grants of land.
State to the Committee your views with regard to the excess of the population in some parts of Scotland?	To give the Committee an idea of the population in some of the islands, I shall mention the island of Tiree, belonging to the Duke of Argyle. The island contains about 15,000 English acres, including lakes, rocks, &c. The population is about six thousand. There are 431 tenants or crofters, whose rents are from £1.1d. to £40, averaging £7.5s.6d.; and there are four large tenants, whose rents are from £102 to £150, averaging £123; and under these large tenants are a great number of small crofters. In this island there is a good deal of kelp made; about 350 tons. The Duke is bound by the leases to take the kelp from the tenants at £7 per ton, by giving credit for which sum the rental of the small tenants is discharged; in fact it is paid in full; what they promise to pay as rent, he receives in kelp, and they pay no rent. This year, I believe, he got about £4 per ton for the kelp, so I understood. If you take the average of each family, they average very high in the Highlands; but if you take them at seven, it will give 3,045 souls living on crofts, and paying rent, that is, including children; but then one half of the people have no crofts at all, they are living upon the bounty of their friends.
Do they fish?	Very little: there are about ten boats, five men to each.

Then one half of the population is a burthen on the other half?	Yes, or upon the proprietor ultimately.
Are there many horses?	I believe there were about 2,000 horses at one time, but they are very greatly reduced. The system in the Highlands is very much like the Irish: the son or the daughter of one of the crofters marries, and the father allows him to build a hut at the end of his hut, and gives them a cow, &c.; he is not a tenant or a crofter at all, he is living on the bounty of others.
Do you think that money might be well expended in removing this population?	I think it might very well indeed; I don't know that it would put much money into the landlord's pocket to be at the expence, because the farms would then become much larger, and any person who had money to stock a large farm, would expect to live a little better; he would eat up the spare produce, and indulge in a few luxuries.
Don't you think the increased rent that would be derived from the land, would more than pay the interest of the money required?	I mentioned that the rent would not increase much, because there would be introduced a different class of tenants, who would have a little capital, and who would live on luxuries compared with the present crofters, who live on potatoes and a little oatmeal.
Is there any other estate you can mention?	There is Macdonald, of Clanronald, the Islands of South Uist and Benbicula. This is a large island; I do not know the extent of it. The population is about 6,000. There are 489 small tenants or crofters, who pay rents from £1 to £21, averaging £6.17s.4d.; fourteen large tenants, who pay rents from £32 to £400; there is one man pays £400; these average £86.15s. Under these 14 large tenants there are 207 sub-tenants. There are annually manufactured about 1,200 tons of kelp on Clanronald's estate at Uist.
In this island?	Yes, of Uist, which belongs principally to Clanronald; the kelp does not belong to the tenants, as in the Duke of Argyle's case, for the manufacturing of which they receive from 50s. to 60s. per ton, which as nearly as possible discharges their rent. On this estate about one-third of the population possess no lands.
Are the people upon this property of Clanronald's, and upon the estate of the island of Tiree, are there many of them in a state of apparent misery and destitution?	Very great indeed.
Have they shown any disposition to emigrate?	They would be highly delighted to emigrate.
Has that disposition been encouraged or discouraged by the great tenants and the proprietors?	They have been encouraged very much of late.
Has any emigration taken place from either of those islands?	None; at least to a very limited extent; merely a voluntary emigration; it has not been paid for by the proprietors, but at their own expence.
Are the number of people diminishing or increasing in those islands?	They are increasing; in the Island of Tiree, I fancy the population is trebled in the last forty years.

In the circumstances in which these people are placed, are they ever exposed to great suffering, from the want of provisions?	Very frequently. I can state with regard to that, the sums of money that have been expended by the proprietors in several years, for keeping them alive. In 1812, Clanronald expended £3,353 in purchasing meal for these poor people; in 1815, £111.11s.3d.; in 1816 £242.8s.3d; in 1817, £4,565.18s.5d; in 1818, £1,136.19s.8d.
And received no rent or kelp in exchange?	Of course, the kelp belonged to him at that time; the kelp always belonged to the proprietor, except when there was a bargain to the contrary.
Then this expenditure does not appear to have been lost to the proprietor?	There was a diminution of the rental to that extent.
Then do you see no chance of any industry arising in those islands, which is to prevent a recurrence of those periods of difficulty when the assistance of the landlord is necessary, if the people are allowed to continue there in the same number as they are now in?	Certainly not.
Do you find that marriages are less prevalent among the people when they get very poor?	During the war, they all married very early, in order to have the number of children requisite to exempt them from the militia; boys of 16 and 17 married, which is the cause of the great increase in the population.
Do you think since the peace it has become so prevalent?	I think it has not.
Do you think the habits of the people have become deteriorated as their numbers have increased?	No; they are a very good class of people, very well behaved in general; perfectly so.
Have they no employment, the greater part of them?	One half – at all events one-third – have not employment.
Can you give any account of any of the other Islands?	The Island of Coll I can. The Island of Coll contains about 15,000 English acres; the soil is very sandy, and a very considerable portion of rock and moss; the land more adapted for pasturage than cropping; the population about 1,300, possessed by the tenants as follows: - six tenants who pay rents from £43.10s. to £250, averaging £100.9s.8d. each; 71 crofters, who pay rents from £5 to £17.10s., averaging £9.18s.9d.; 24 crofters, who pay rents from £2 to £3, averaging 50s.; and about 60 families who have no lands at all. About 80 tons of kelp annually manufactured on the island, principally belonging to the tenants themselves.
Do the same circumstances of difficulty attend the population of Coll as the islands of Tiree and Uist?	Certainly not, because the proprietor of Coll, having lived very much upon the island, has kept down the population. I believe, at one time, about forty years ago, that the population of Coll and Tiree was very nearly the same.
Has the population of Coll materially diminished by emigration?	Not materially.

<p>Why has the population of Coll not increased in proportion to other islands?</p>	<p>The proprietor has lived upon the island, and saw the difficulties from an increasing population, and there fore used every means in his power to keep the population down. The means he used were, that he would not allow a young man, a son of one of the crofters, to be married without his consent; he said, if you marry without my consent, you must leave the island.</p>
<p>They are not Roman Catholics?</p>	<p>No, they are all Protestants in Coll.</p>
<p>Understanding what the object of this Committee is, have you any further observations to make, or any further information to give, that you think will be conducive to the object they have in view?</p>	<p>If the Government think seriously of being at any expence in sending out emigrants, I think it can be done a great deal cheaper than it has hitherto been done to Government. If the Government was to allow the proprietors to fix upon what emigrants should go from their different estates, and allow them to make the contracts for sending the people out, I am quite convinced they could do it a great deal cheaper than it has been done by Government; and I shall give you a statement of the expences, of which I have made a calculation. According to the present rate of freight to Cape Breton, or any of these places, New Brunswick or Nova Scotia, a ship could be freighted for 25s. per ton; at present two tons are allowed for every adult passenger, and the crew are included; but if Government, for so short a voyage, would allow the crew not to be included, but let them go extra, it would be a very considerable saving of expence. Then there are the provisions according to the Act of Parliament, a certain quantity of beef; now by substituting what the Rum people were allowed by Government, oatmeal instead of beef, the expence would be greatly reduced, and they are not accustomed to beef, they live altogether on oatmeal; in fact, on potatoes principally. In this way I make the expences per adult £4.14s.6d. I am allowing the twelve weeks' provision in this calculation, because when they land they must have some provisions to maintain them until they raise a crop.</p>
<p>The captain finds them provision for that money?</p>	<p>Yes. There is another thing which I beg leave to mention, and that is, that if they were sent out earlier in the season, so as to arrive at Cape Breton early in June, they would be in very good time to raise a crop of potatoes that year, and then there would be no expence of feeding them for the first twelve months, because with the three months provision they would carry out, and what they would save from that, and the crop of potatoes they would raise the same year, there would be no occasion to lay out any money in supporting them for the first year.</p>
<p>Do they carry their seed potatoes with them?</p>	<p>They have carried potatoes with them, but they don't carry well; they don't keep.</p>
<p>Well, then, how do they get their seed?</p>	<p>They had a number of friends there, who went from Rum and Coll; they found all their acquaintances there; a great number had gone before at their own expence.</p>

Generally speaking, do you think that doing away with all regulations whatever, or a material modification of the present regulations, would be preferable?	I think it would not be proper to do away with all regulations – certainly not; but I would modify them very much.
State what modification you would recommend; in addition to what you have already stated, are there any other modifications that your experience will enable you to offer?	Instead of provisions for twelve weeks, I do not think it necessary to have provisions for more than eight, if you barely wish to land them there; but I see no objections to twelve weeks' provisions when they get the provisions that remain for themselves on landing.
Taking an over quantity of provisions on the principle you state, might suit very well to Upper Canada, but it would not do to emigrate those going a greater distance than Upper Canada, because they could not carry them with them?	No.
Have you any experience of Canada?	No, I have not.
When you state that ships might be freighted to carry emigrants out at 25s. per ton, do not you consider that rather a high freight, as vessels going to those parts generally go without any cargo?	I have made several applications to Captains of vessels, lately, to know at what rate they would do it, and this was about the average rate, 25s.; but this includes the expence of fitting up the sleeping berths and the cooking apparatus, &c. for the voyage; and then there is another expence – you would require a ship-broker to charter the vessels, superintend the outfit, and lay in the provisions; this would increase the cost five shillings and four-pence per head, which would make the whole expence £4.19s.10d.
What tonnage would you recommend that the vessels should be?	About 300 tons.
To convey 150 passengers?	Yes.
That is, two tons for each passenger?	Yes, but that is meant to be exclusive of the crew.
You are calculating, then, on 150 adults?	Yes, of course.
But, supposing the usual proportion to be children, that would, of course, diminish the necessary amount of tonnage?	Yes; because I calculate two children from seven to fourteen years of age the same as an adult, and three under seven.
Then you mean, of course, taking 150 adults so composed?	Exactly; instead of 150 there may be 300 souls, but the greater portion of them children.

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