

Extract from

THE DEMOCRAT

A Weekly Journal for Men and Women

12 December 1885

(Contributed by Darryl Stout, transcribed by Keith Dash)¹

THE VICTORY IN ARGYLLSHIRE

Our Bunessan correspondent (says the *North British Daily Mail*) writes that the polling for the southern portion of Mull, Iona, Tiree, and Inch Kenneth took place in the School-house, Bunessan. The work of polling was performed in a quiet and orderly manner throughout the whole day. Owing to the strong gale of wind, accompanied with heavy rainfalls, which prevailed, hopes of seeing the insular voters on the scene was given up by many, as the work of embarkation at Tiree would be attended with difficulty and danger. From early morn the Iona voters were kept in readiness, awaiting abatement of the wind to get shipping across the dangerous Sound of Iona to Mull. Twenty-one of the more stalwart and venturesome Ionians managed to reach the polling-place just in time to record their votes before the Tiree voters arrived about three o'clock. The Hebridean, after encountering a stormy passage, made her appearance shortly before 3 p.m., with a detachment of about seventy voters. Their arrival was a great relief, which manifested itself in loud enthusiastic cheering. A procession, headed by pipers, was formed, and amid much cheering and waving of handkerchiefs passed through the village of Bunessan to the poll, with a banner borne before them on which was inscribed in red letters, "Vote for Macfarlane, the People's Friend". The Hebridean returned to convey them to their island homes on the next morning at about 10 a.m. A telegram to Bunessan at 1.40 p.m. announcing the result of the poll was enthusiastically received by the people on Saturday, and preparations were made to publish news of the victory of the people to the inhabitants of Tiree by piles of combustible materials on various hilltops to be lit at nightfall.

A Ross of Mull correspondent writes, saying: ... Never, perhaps, in the history of Argyllshire has the general election caused such a hubbub and turmoil, and never have the electors, generally, been so loyal and devoted as on this remarkable occasion. It seems the old Highland spirit, the ancient Celtic fire, has been once more kindled, and the smouldering fire of Highland patriotism fanned by the oratorical storms of the gallant and intrepid reformers.

Highland enthusiasm and patriotism were lucidly revealed in the ardent manner in which voters appeared at the poll here on Wednesday last, although the day was one of the wildest of the

¹ *The Democrat*, a now defunct weekly journal owned by newspaper publisher William Saunders and British Liberal politician William George, was first published in 1883 or 1884. Donald Horne Macfarlane, representing the Home Rule League, was elected to the British parliament in 1880 as a member for Carlow County, Ireland. He was a champion for crofters in their dispute with proprietors about rents and security of land tenure, and in the letters to the editor pages of *The Times* in the 1880s he engaged in a long-running heated debate with the Duke of Argyll about the Duke's policy of abolishing small crofts in Tiree ([see here](#)). In the 1885 election, representing the Crofters' Party, the political arm of the Highland Land League, he was elected as the member for Argyllshire. He was defeated in the 1886 election, re-elected in 1892 and defeated again in 1895. The only eligible voters at these elections were adult men who were property owners or rate payers, i.e. male tenants and crofters were eligible to vote but cottars and women of all classes were not. Full male suffrage and limited female suffrage was introduced in Britain in 1918 and full female suffrage in 1928.

season, the wind, accompanied by torrents of rain, blowing pretty strongly from the south-west. Certainly many were detained, even on the mainland, but others, amid drenching rain, came on foot a distance of eighteen or twenty miles. The Tìree people suffered considerably, the Hebridean, which was due at 10 a.m., not arriving till 3 p.m., having been detained by stress of weather. Canvassing went on briskly during the day, the majority of votes going, of course, to Mr. Macfarlane, the political star of our young constituency.

The result of the election was delayed till Saturday morning, but when the news of Mr. Macfarlane's success spread throughout the various districts the crofters demonstrated in the most enthusiastic manner. At night every hilltop was literally ablaze, bonfires having been kindled on all the highest peaks. Thus the joyful news was transmitted to every out-of-the-way and outlandish district, and received with shouts of acclamation and "cheers for Macfarlane."

In the district of Creich the crofters, headed by a piper, proceeded amid the darkness of night to Dormore Hill, where they kindled an extraordinary bonfire. The enormous conflagration was seen miles away, and responded to in Iona and over in distant Giebune. The cheers of the people, who gathered in numbers, and the shrill strains of "that pipe of a hundred battlefields", could be heard far off.

Never were people so much elated as our crofters have been at their victory over the landed aristocracy, and what renders the triumphant return of their candidate doubly agreeable is the fact that all the forces of landlordism were arrayed against them. The haughty aristocrats – the shadow of whose lordly mansions used to frown so truculently upon the humble and long-suffering peasantry who have been reduced to the lowest stratum of social existence – have been for once triumphed over. Their flags have been lowered, while those of the crofters float gaily in every glen and clachan and corrie.

Now that the different elections are about over the agitation for reform will be resumed with increased vigour, and in the most constitutional manner, despite the attempts of landlordism to allure the crofters into lawlessness. But our people are too well-informed on matters of this sort, and are well aware of the fact that any violation of the law of the land will only tend to ruin their cause.

end of transcript