



S.L.I.D.
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FACTS
No. 4

THE QUIET REVOLUTION

A STUDY of the
ANTAGONISTIC MOVEMENT

HAROLD LEWACK

Student League for Industrial Democracy

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(continued on inside page of back cover)

HAROLD LEWACK

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THE QUIET REVOLUTION

A Study of the Antigish Movement

THE STUDENT LEAGUE FOR
INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

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The Quiet Revolution, A Study of the Antigonish Movement, like all S.L.I.D. Research Tracts is published by the Student League for Industrial Democracy as part of its program of education for increasing democracy in our economic, political and social life. The author alone is responsible for the material in this Tract which does not necessarily represent the opinions of the Student League for Industrial Democracy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harold Lewack, past president of the S.L.I.D., studied for several months at St. Francis Xavier, and thus participated, to some extent, in the experiment. Presently working with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, Lewack is also continuing his studies at Columbia University where he is doing graduate work in adult education. He is the author of numerous articles and of the pamphlet Campus Rebels, a History of the Student League for Industrial Democracy which was recently published by S.L.I.D.

In a remote corner of Eastern Canada where the waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence meet those of the Canso Strait, there is a small Catholic University, with a student population of under 1,000, one-third of whom are co-eds. In outward appearance, St. Francis Xavier University, a Diocese Institution, is not distinguished in any way, except that one notices the many new buildings and the presence of numerous foreign visitors and students from all corners of the globe. The University gives the appearance of a richly endowed institution controlled by wealthy alumni. The fact is, however, that St. F. X., as its friends call it, derives its principal financial support from the small individual contributions of many grateful people, most of whom have never been inside a college classroom.

The story of this University is really the story of two remarkable men who were responsible for the development of a unique adult education movement and an equally unique form of Catholic Action which has become known the world over by the name of the town where the University is located. The Antigonish Movement began after World War I, when, under the prompting of its energetic Vice-President, Father Jimmy Tompkins, St. F. X. set up a Peoples School to make available to the mass of people the intellectual resources of the University.¹

Concurrently with the establishment of this school, the University was sponsoring a series of rural and industrial conferences in the hope of finding a solution to the poverty and stagnation which were forcing the young people of Nova Scotia to

1. Boyle, George, Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia, 1953.

emigrate elsewhere.² As a result of these experiences, and of the friendly prompting of the Scottish-Catholic Society, an Extension Department was established in the Fall of 1928.

EDUCATION THROUGH ORGANIZATION

The first Director of the Department was Dr. M. M. Coady, a graduate of the Catholic University of America and a close friend of Father Tompkins. In the first year, Dr. Coady made a tour of the United States and Canada to study the Extension programs of other universities. It happened that, in the same year in which the Extension Department was organized, a Royal Commission had been studying the plight of the Maritime Fishermen. The work of the Rural and Industrial Conferences had focused attention on this problem and had suggested some solutions. It was not surprising, therefore, that one of the Commission's final recommendations was that an organizer be appointed by the government to organize the fishermen. Shortly thereafter, in 1929, the Dominion Department of Fisheries designated Dr. Coady to be the organizer, and agreed to pay his salary.

Dr. Coady, a tall, powerfully built Scotsman, and a priest, toured the fishing villages and urged the fishermen to organize in order to be "masters of their own destiny." As a result of his efforts, in 1930 the United Maritime Fishermen came into being. At

2. Glasgow, J. F., The Role of Educational and Rural Conferences in the Development of the Extension Department, an unpublished bachelor's thesis.

first, it functioned as a trade union, but by 1938 it had reconstituted itself as a co-operative in order to better serve the 40,000 Maritime fishermen.

Next, the Extension Department turned its attention to Credit Unions. It arranged for the late Roy F. Bergengren, the Director of United States Credit Unions, to go to Nova Scotia and help draft appropriate legislation. Assisted in this work by a grant in 1932 of \$32,000 from the Carnegie Corporation, the Extension Department started with small study groups, which soon mushroomed into powerful Credit Unions with assets running into the millions. In the process, they developed the techniques that are described in a later chapter.

From Credit Unions, the Extension Department began to concern itself with Farmers co-operatives and consumer stores. A successful nine-store Consumers Co-operative chain had been started years before by immigrant British miners, but it had not spread beyond the industrial area of Sidney Mines.³ Through the device of organized study clubs, the Extension Department soon organized and operated co-operative stores in new, out-of-the-way places. Very often these stores started with insufficient capital, but they wisely urged their members to return their patronage refunds to capital.⁴ A Farmers co-operative which had been concerned primarily with the marketing of cattle, became the nucleus of a new Wholesale Society, and this was soon followed by the establishment of a sub-regional Wholesales.

3. The British-Canadian Co-operative Society.

4. Thomson, Kay, Maritime Techniques of Consumer Co-operation, Extension Department.

Creameries and baking plants were built, and the co-ops started producing their own feed.

And so the movement spread. The small mimeographed Extension Bulletin became a printed, bi-monthly newspaper called the Maritime Co-operator. A radio station, CJFX, was started, and out of it grew the "Peoples School" program, a radio forum designed for organized listening groups in industrial areas and "Life in These Maritimes" for people in rural areas. Subjects ranged from the need for cheap public power to prison reforms.

A Credit Union League and a Co-operative Union were formed to take over some of the educational work started by the University. An additional grant of \$30,000 in 1936 from the Carnegie Corporation made possible the establishment of an Extension Library, which circulated books through the mails. In 1933, an annual, month-long leadership training institute was launched, which has since sent forth hundreds of leaders into the co-operative and trade union movements. Courses included the co-operative philosophy, credit union and co-operative bookkeeping, English, Economics and Recreation Techniques.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES

Before listing some of the results of the Antigonish Movement, it would be well to examine its long range goals and basic principles, as defined by Alex Laidlaw, a Catholic layman and the Assistant Director of the Extension Department. In a brief presented to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Mr. Laidlaw sets forth the long range

objectives of the program as: "(1) the lifting of the largest number of people to a higher level of life, economically and socially, (2) the building of a comprehensive co-operative structure through which the people will be able to control democratically a significant portion of the total economy, especially the things that are close to the necessities of life, and (3), through adult education, to lay the economic and social foundation that will permit all the people to grow in political understanding, culture and spiritual life."⁵

In order to accomplish these things, it is necessary, according to Mr. Laidlaw, to keep in mind certain fundamental principles such as the "primacy of the individual," or the dignity of man, to put it another way. Also, one must realize the importance of education in achieving social reform, and must place emphasis on the "economic" aspect and the "group action" approach to the solution of problems. Mr. Laidlaw cautions that education must not be afraid of "fundamental reforms" of social and economic institutions, as they are often the necessary pre-requisite to the achievement of the "full and abundant life for everyone."

THE METHODS

Throughout the 25 years of its existence, the

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5. Laidlaw, Alex, A Factual Outline of the Antigonish Movement, Extension Department, 1953, p. 8.

Extension Department has continued to rely on small study clubs as its basic technique. Sometimes it organizes a community meeting and then divides those present up into small discussion groups, or it may organize small meetings first in people's homes (that is where the term "Kitchen Meetings" comes from), and then end up with a community rally. The discussion leaders, who are either elected or appointed, act as a steering committee to plan the work of the individual groups. These groups have a regular program of study with appropriate literature for each stage. One group may study the organization of credit unions or housing co-ops or it may study the functioning of an existing co-op to see how it can be improved. These study groups may be one shot affairs where co-ops are already established, or they may continue their meetings for a year or more before any action is taken. This slow but sure approach has proved of great value in eliminating the faint-hearted, and the "too enthusiastic" who want to move ahead at too rapid a rate.⁶

Although the staff of the Extension Department has grown to 25 full and part-time field workers, its extensive activities would not have been possible without the assistance of hundreds of Parish Priests, Agricultural Representatives of the Provincial Department of Agriculture, and just plain school

6. Dr. M. M. Coady, The Antigonish Way, a series of radio broadcasts issued in book form by the Extension Department, p. 64.

teachers.⁷ One such teacher rose to become President of the United Maritime Fishermen, and a manager of the largest lobster canning factory in Eastern Canada, which is owned by the people.⁸

THE ACHIEVEMENT

Speaking before the Canadian Parliament, Mr. Cameron, Liberal M.P. from Cape Breton, had this to say about the Antigonish Movement: "In the riding which I represent... the fishermen, who were for some time on relief, have been taken off relief entirely through the splendid work of those in charge of the co-operative enterprises, and last Summer they were able to declare a small profit at the end of the season." The Moderator of the United Church of Canada, which was formed out of a merger of Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, Dr. Richard Roberts, personally urged the adoption of the methods of St. F. X. to other parts of Canada. In March, 1939, Pope Pius XI publicly praised the work of St. F. X. and conveyed his blessing to all who engaged in it. The message was composed by Cardinal Pacelli, now Pope Pius XII.⁹

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7. Report on the Educational Program for the Fishermen of the Maritime Provinces, for the year ending March 31, 1953, published by the Extension Department.
8. The Grand Etang Fishermen's Co-operative.
9. _____, Mobilizing for Enlightenment, Extension Dept., p. 13.

The people of the Maritime provinces could add many testimonials to these. Some 100,000 of these million and a half people are organized in 500 credit unions of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island with combined assets of \$12,000,000. When you consider that this represents families with an average of five children or more, this figure becomes even more impressive. The United Maritime Fishermen market each year through their central organization some \$3,000,000 worth of fish and fish products. The farmers and consumers co-operatives together did an annual business in 1951 of over \$35,000,000. The central wholesale, Maritime Co-operative Services, does a \$12,000,000 a year business.¹⁰ Some 200 families, organized in 40 housing co-operatives are today enjoying their own homes, which in many cases would not have been possible without the leadership provided by the Extension Department. Working under the supervision of skilled craftsmen, these co-operators actually built their own homes with their hands. A full time field worker services these housing groups.

The story of Point Sapin, New Brunswick, is typical of most of the little communities helped by the St. F. X. Extension Department. In 1935, only 12 people could be found by the Extension Department who were economically free in the sense that they owned their own boats and were not indebted to the fish dealers and merchants. Starting with these 12, a loan of \$12,000 was obtained from the New Brunswick government to rent a lobster factory. Only six boats

10. Laidlaw, op. cit., p. 15.

fished for the co-operative that season. At the end of the season, after paying the market price for lobsters, the co-op had enough money left over to pay off the government loan. In a few years they had saved enough to buy their own factory, which now took in the catch of over 40 boats. Previously the fishermen worked as hired hands for outside capital; now they owned their own boats and they had new homes, with electric lights and running water. Today their lobster factory does a business of \$38,000 during its two month season, and boasts of its own truck, a co-operative store, and a thriving credit union.¹¹

BUILDING PEOPLE

The Antigonish Movement is first and foremost an adult education movement. Its purpose is to build people, both individually and as part of a group, and to make them responsible and functioning citizens in the community. One of the graduates of the study group is today a C.C.F. (Socialist) Member of Parliament from industrial Cape Breton. Another is Secretary-Treasurer of the Canadian Congress of Labor, the C.I.O. of Canada. Quite a number of local co-operative leaders hold village offices as Liberal or Independent members.

On the community level, there is the story of one fishing village where the people, after studying the advantages of the co-operative approach, went into the woods, cut the necessary lumber and put up

11. Coady, op. cit., p. 61.

a school house which they had been needing for some time. In an industrial community, the town fathers were unable to get the local merchants to subscribe to a new Bond Issue for the construction of new schools. Through the Provincial Credit Union League, a loan of \$20,000 was arranged and this enabled the town to raise the rest of the money needed. In another community, the Credit Union provides the only library facilities because the town council refused to appropriate the necessary funds. Through the Peoples School broadcasts, deficiencies in prison conditions and in the lack of vocational training were brought to the attention of the government. One all-important achievement has been the lessening of tension between Protestants and Catholics as a result of their working together.

NON PARTISAN IN POLITICS AND RELIGION

Officially, the University and the co-operative are neutral in politics. As already stated, individual members of co-ops participate in political campaigns on their own behalf. However, it often happens that the most active co-op people are also the leaders in political reforms. Frequently they find themselves confronted in the political arena by the same merchants who oppose them in the economic sphere.

Sometimes the University feels so strongly about an issue, as in the case of the Communists, that it will actively campaign against them. Such a case was the opposition caucus the University organized in the United Mine Workers and Steelworkers, which succeeded in driving most of the Communist leaders

out of both their union offices and their political offices.¹² It should be understood, however, that there is no official relationship between the Extension Department and the two labor federations.

Although the impetus and most of the personnel of the Extension Department have been of Catholic persuasion, no attempt is made to inject religious teaching into the co-operative movement. Unlike the Catholic Labor Syndicates of Quebec, there are no official Chaplains among the list of officers of a co-op. When religious appeals are made, they are restricted to ethical principles common to all religions. It is the contention of Dr. Coady and other leaders of the movement, that co-operation is practical Christianity.¹³ In their view, religion will witness a spiritual rebirth in people when hunger has been wiped from the face of the earth.

In the words of Rev. M. J. MacKinnion, present Director of the Extension Department and a Vice President of the University, the Adult Education program of St. F. X. "aims to train men and women who will...make the best possible use of the economic instruments placed in their hands by the Extension Department."¹⁴

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13. During the 1930's industrial Sidney consistently sent Communist members to Parliament.
14. Dr. M. M. Coady, Masters of Their Own Destiny, Harpers, 1939, p. 139.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE HIERARCHY

Of course, all of this material emphasis is not without its religious side. For Catholics, this program has a special meaning because it has the sanction of the Pope, and is being increasingly supported by the elevation of sympathetic clergy to positions of importance in the Church.¹⁵

In describing the Antigonish Movement as an exemplar form of Catholic Action, Dr. M. M. Coady warns that "it is not to be supposed that a bad world is the ideal environment in which souls can be saved. Moral theologians know full well that an environment that is full of temptations will wear down the sanctity of even saints. . . . There is not much doubt," Dr. Coady continues, "that we have lost (the working classes) because of the fact that society is maladjusted and badly out of line with justice in the economic sphere."¹⁶

Dr. Coady states that the laymen of the Church have a special mission to reverse this trend, because in the final analysis it is in "their own best interests." Dr. Coady sees these dedicated laymen working under the guidance of the Church. "There can be little doubt," says Dr. Coady, "that the movement to organize the laymen of the Catholic world to help out the hierarchy in the work of bringing all men to Christ is

15. Dr. Coady was elevated to a Monsigneur in recognition of his work.

16. Rt. Rev. M. M. Coady, "Catholic Action", The Canadian Messenger of the Sacred Heart, July 1951.

a part of the Divine Scheme of things. It may not be irreverent to say that it is a clever strategy."

In addition to their religious faith, these dedicated laymen must have a "positive social philosophy." Such a philosophy must contain "a democratic formula by which the world can be made not only fit for freedom, but safe for sanctity as well. The chief characteristic of such a formula should be that it is positive and adequate to the job of reconstructing the world."

It isn't necessary for the organization of the Lay Apostolate to enter the field of politics and economics directly. Rather, "it prepares and conditions mankind for proper participation for full-fledged civic and social life." In other words, they are to lead by setting an example. Dr. Coady has faith in the mass of the people and in their willingness to follow such leadership, because the Lay Apostolate "are not tied to the intriguing, nice, rich, powerful people."

Dr. Coady urges that we start by getting "power into the hands of all the people, so that they can curb the anti-social and diabolical monsters that appear from time to time in our world." To win power the people must first take their economic destiny into their own hands. Dr. Coady advises "co-operative effort that is represented by labor unions, co-operative credit and insurance societies, consumer co-operative stores with the wholesales and manufacturing plants that go with them."

Dr. Coady acknowledges that such a program "will elect opposition from the rich and powerful." In answer, he points to the "days of persecution under the Roman Emperor when the Church was drawn underground to the catacombs. May it not well be," asks Dr. Coady, "that the call of our age is

for the Church to go into overalls?" However, unlike the Worker-Priest movement in Europe, Dr. Coady does not advocate that priests perform the functions of laymen, but that the laymen themselves "carry Christ into the market place."¹⁷

As for non-Catholics, Dr. Coady is confident that "men of goodwill everywhere will be constrained to unite in such a program. It will tend to bring a 'one world' and to establish peace on earth." In summing up, Dr. Coady feels that the Catholic Lay Apostolate can well take the lead in this task because "it is the only agency that is ecumenical in its Faith, its philosophy, its economics, and its membership."

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

Like all human endeavors, the Antigonish Movement is not without its weaknesses. Like some American workers, there are many Maritime fishermen who are content to profit by the high price for fish which the co-operative made possible, but who refuse to carry their share of the load by selling through the pool.¹⁸ There is also the old story of struggling co-operative stores with insufficient volume and poor management, and the very successful modern stores that have a big percentage of non-

17. Robert Kothen, The Priest and the Proletariat, Sheed and Ward, 1948.

18. The fishermen of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, are an example.

member business.

With World War II and the post war prosperity has come a sharp decline in the number of study groups and in attendance at meetings.¹⁹ The recent rise in unemployment,²⁰ however, has reflected itself in a slight increase in meeting attendance. The curtailment of coal production and the layoffs in the steel plants is being felt by farmers in lower milk consumption, and by the shop keepers too.

Some difficulties in the way of the expansion of the movement have been due not to deficiencies in method, but to opposition of entrenched interests. For instance, the doctors of Nova Scotia successfully defeated a proposal for a co-operative health federation. Likewise the druggists, in partnership with the Doctors, frustrated all attempts to lower the cost of drugs through co-operative action. Also, the New Brunswick legislature, by failure to pass enabling legislation, has delayed low income co-operative housing for that province.

HOW IT IS FINANCED

At the present writing, the Budget of the Extension Department totals \$86,000 a year, of which \$46,000 comes from the Federal Government. In this one instance, the Government of Canada has

19. During the 1930's there were as many as 15,000 study groups in existence at one time.

20. 8,000 unemployed in 1954 on Cape Breton Island alone.

followed the lead of England and Scandinavia in subsidizing Adult Education. However, the money is given only for work among fishermen, and as yet there seems to be no inclination to extend it to other spheres. Another result has been the growing recognition of the need for Adult Education. On the provincial level, two Canadian provinces, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, have set up Adult Education Divisions in their Departments of Education, and some of these positions were staffed by St. F. X. graduates.

While the St. F. X. has no guarantee that its "fisheries grant" will not some day be withdrawn, it has had the satisfaction of seeing a similar grant go to the University of British Columbia from the Federal Government, and of noting that the provinces of Newfoundland and Quebec have launched similar programs for organizing fishermen. In both cases, St. F. X. men were chosen to start these programs.²¹

As a result of the foundation laid by the Extension Department, a woodlot owners' co-operative for the marketing of pulp wood, Christmas trees and lumber is being organized. It will serve the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland. Another development which is an outgrowth of the co-operatives is the new Potato Pool which is being organized on Prince Edward Island by the Provincial government.

Outside of Canada, a group of St. F. X. priests paid a visit to the Dominican Republic, and as a result Credit Unions have been organized where before

21. _____, Mobilizing for Enlightenment, Extension Dept., p. 13.

no public meetings were allowed. Perhaps this may provide the only training in Democracy until the present dictatorship can be overthrown. Elsewhere two Bishops' Conferences have been instructed by Pope Pius XII to study the technique of the Antigonish Movement for adaptation on a wider scale. One of these conferences took place in Africa and the other in Latin America. Overwhelmingly Catholic Latin America is beginning to stir, and the Catholic Church is not unmindful of this fact.

While the Antigonish Movement is only one of many adult education ventures, it has the particular virtue of being both revolutionary and associated with a religion which many regard as the very core of conservatism. This seeming contradiction suggests a possible key for unlocking the recuperative power and vitality of Democracy in a schismatic world.

In summarizing his report to the F.A.O., Mr. Alex Laidlaw of the Extension Department pointed to the decrease in pessimism in the Maritime provinces, and a growing faith in the future. He attributes this in large measure to the work of the Antigonish Movement. Mr. Laidlaw states that there is a lesson for the whole world in this change of attitude. Pointing to the present global challenge to Democracy, Mr. Laidlaw said:

"It is later than we think. In many parts of the world where depressed and dissatisfied people grow in number, it is simply a matter of who gets there first. We must act now to funnel the energies of the people towards goals of social betterment, or they

will surely be diverted along roads leading to disintegration of society as we know it and the destruction of the things we cherish and would preserve."

The Quiet Revolution is the fourth S.L.I.D. Research Tract and the second of a special series on the Churches and Social Action. The Tracts were originated by the Student League for Industrial Democracy to help celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its parent organization, the League for Industrial Democracy.

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