

## Underdevelopment and the Structural Origins of Antigonish Movement Co-operatives in Eastern Nova Scotia

R. James Sacouman

Volume 7, numéro 1, autumn 1977

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad7\\_1art04](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad7_1art04)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Sacouman, R. J. (1977). Underdevelopment and the Structural Origins of Antigonish Movement Co-operatives in Eastern Nova Scotia. *Acadiensis*, 7(1), 66–85.

R. JAMES SACOUMAN

# Underdevelopment and the Structural Origins of Antigonish Movement Co-operatives In Eastern Nova Scotia\*

Directed from the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, the Antigonish Movement involved large numbers of farmers, fishermen and coal miners in the organization of numerous forms of co-operative enterprise during the 1920s and 1930s. It achieved its greatest success in the seven eastern Nova Scotian counties of Pictou, Antigonish, Guysborough, Richmond, Inverness, Victoria, and Cape Breton, the geographic boundaries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Antigonish. Besides pointing to such external factors as the growth of adult education movements and consumer co-operation in Britain, the United States and Scandinavia, the existence of the credit union movement in Quebec and the United States, and the development of an anti-communist Catholic social philosophy through papal encyclicals, early accounts of the Antigonish Movement usually assumed that it was the existence of local conditions of distress and malaise in eastern Nova Scotia which accounted for its success.<sup>1</sup> Impoverishment, rural de-

\* The author wishes to thank the Canada Council for the doctoral funding that made this study possible.

1 Of the sources written by activists and impressed visitors, the most extensive are A. F. Laidlaw, *The Campus and the Community: The Global Impact of the Antigonish Movement* (Montreal, 1961) and his edited volume, *The Man from Margaree* (Toronto, 1971); M. M. Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny* (New York, 1939); G. Boyle, *Democracy's Second Chance: Land, Work and Co-Operation* (New York, 1944) and *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia* (New York, 1953); B. B. Fowler, *The Lord Helps Those . . .* (New York, 1938); M. E. Arnold, *The Story of Tompkinsville* (New York, 1949); L. R. Ward, *Nova Scotia — Land of Co-operators* (New York, 1942); and J. T. Croteau, *Cradled in the Waves* (New York, 1951). Other early histories published by the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University include Coady, *Mobilizing for Enlightenment* (1940), *The Antigonish Way* (1942) and *The Social Significance of the Co-operative Movement* (1945); and H. G. Johnson, *The Antigonish Movement* (1944). As well, various issues of the Antigonish weekly, the *Casket*, between 1917 and 1940, and each issue of the bi-weekly information arm of the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, the *Extension Bulletin*, between 7 November 1933 and 19 May 1939 and its successor, the *Maritime Co-operator*, document the growth of the Movement's programme and organization. See also J. Lotz, "The Antigonish Movement: A Critical Analysis", *Studies in Adult Education*, vol. 5 (1973), p. 97.

population and loss of ownership and control or proletarianization were cited as conditions underlying individual malaise among the people of the region and the disruptions of industrialism were said to have forged a readiness to join co-operatives among eastern Nova Scotians.

Another factor consistently given great weight by the early sources was the existence of a cadre of dynamic leaders. This cadre developed within an already existing Catholic diocesan network centred around the diocesan university, St. Francis Xavier, and its members were strategically located in influential local organizations. Principals among this leadership were two cousins, M. M. Coady and J. Tompkins, both priests who had been educated abroad, and both former teachers at the diocesan university, the focal point for Catholic education in eastern Nova Scotia. In the main, journalists focused upon the leadership of the Movement, "the humble giants", and exaggerated their impact upon the Maritimes.<sup>2</sup> While this attention was at times an embarrassment to the activists in the Movement,<sup>3</sup> early scholarly analyses of the Movement maintained this emphasis on personalities.<sup>4</sup>

This dual stress upon generalized distress and dynamic leadership has led to the neglect of those social structural factors which may explain receptivity to the Movement's co-operative programme. The social structure of Atlantic Canada has been conditioned by a general, double-edged implication of capitalist underdevelopment: externally owned capitalization of exportable raw materials and semi-processed goods, and the creation and maintenance of a surplus population to work at the regional staple industries in times of capital expansion, but particularly to be exported as labour power to more developed areas.<sup>5</sup> In short, capitalist underdevelopment in Atlantic Canada has for many years capitalized two exportable commodities: raw materials

- 2 J. Herson, "The Humble Giants", *Atlantic Advocate* (February, 1960); D. MacDonald, "How F. X. Saved the Maritimes", *MacLean's Magazine* (June, 1953).
- 3 *Extension Bulletin*, 18 October 1938; Laidlaw, *The Campus and the Community*, pp. 91-93.
- 4 C. P. MacDonald, "The Co-operative Movement in Nova Scotia" (unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1938); H. P. Timmons, "An Analysis of the Religio-Cultural Aspects of the Nova Scotia Adult Education Movement" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1939); M. T. Murphy, "The Study-Action Group in the Co-operative Movement" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Fordham University, 1949).
- 5 Seminal pieces on Atlantic Canadian underdevelopment include B. P. Archibald, "The Development of Underdevelopment in the Atlantic Provinces" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1971); and D. Alexander, "Development and Dependence in Newfoundland, 1880-1970", *Acadiensis*, IV (Autumn, 1974), pp. 3-31. For a lengthier discussion of a Marxian theoretical approach to underdevelopment and social movements, see R. J. Sacouman, "The Social Origins of Antigonish Co-Operative Associations in Eastern Nova Scotia" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1976), pp. 56-75.

and human labour. However, within eastern Nova Scotia at least, underdevelopment has been uneven in effect upon primary production, leading to differing class structures in each of the major sectors of primary production. Understanding these various structures of underdevelopment is crucial in explaining the uneven success of the Movement. Eastern Nova Scotia was a region particularly "beseiged" in the 1920s and 1930s, as capitalism, co-operation, and trade unionism/socialism vied in an organized, though unequal, fashion for hegemony.<sup>6</sup> Since both in scope and dynamism, the "Antigonish Way", the "middle way" between big capitalism and big socialism,<sup>7</sup> rapidly became the dominant social movement among eastern Nova Scotia primary producers during the 1930s, understanding the various structures of underdevelopment may also provide a partial answer to the Movement's general success over competing social movements.

The first set of co-operatives begun under the leadership of the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department, together with provincial Department of Agriculture fieldmen, were marketing co-operatives on Cape Breton Island in primarily subsistence agricultural areas.<sup>8</sup> These marketing co-operatives were formed in the early 1930s, a period of falling prices for those products which were marketed and yet a period in which "many of those who had gone from the rural districts to work in the coal mines and in various other industries had to return to their former homes".<sup>9</sup> Study clubs, mass meetings and rallies were also organized for the purpose of establishing a marketing organization to enable Cape Breton farmers to supply a much larger proportion of the requirements of the Sydney market. Throughout the fall and winter of 1930-1931, an educational campaign was carried on to convince the largely subsistence-oriented farmers of Cape Breton that such an organization could efficiently and effectively sell whatever surplus produce was avail-

6 For analyses of the trade union response, see D. MacGillivray, "Cape Breton in the 1920s: A Community Besieged" in B. D. Tennyson, ed., *Essays in Cape Breton History* (Windsor, N.S., 1973), pp. 49-67, and D. A. Frank, "Coal Masters and Coal Miners: The 1922 Strike and the Roots of Class Conflict in the Cape Breton Coal Industry" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1974). For an analysis of a capitalist-oriented response among eastern Nova Scotians, see E. R. Forbes, "The Origins of the Maritime Rights Movement", *Acadiensis*, V (Autumn, 1975), pp. 54-66.

7 Coady, *op. cit.*, 1942.

8 The best summary of pre-Antigonish co-operation in Nova Scotia is R. J. MacSween, "Co-operation in Nova Scotia" (unpublished manuscript in Public Archives of Nova Scotia, n.d. [about 1952]). A brief look at pre-Antigonish co-operation is in I. MacPherson, "Patterns in the Maritime Co-operative Movement, 1900-45", *Acadiensis*, V (Autumn, 1975), pp. 67-83.

9 MacSween, *op. cit.*, n.p.

able by promptly delivering to the Sydney market graded quality goods in volume. In 1931, local producer associations established a farm produce warehouse in Sydney, the Cape Breton Island Producers Co-operative, under the management of a federal Department of Agriculture official. It folded in 1933, never having significantly penetrated the Sydney market because of "irregular deliveries, poorly graded produce and improper packaging" and because of insufficient capital to carry the organization through its birth pains.<sup>10</sup>

A second set of Antigonish-inspired co-operative ventures were the producer co-operatives set up among fishermen.<sup>11</sup> Although the original drive towards fishermen's co-operatives preceded the establishment of the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, it was nonetheless Antigonish inspired. Principally through the leadership of Fr. J. J. Tompkins, the pastor of Canso, a meeting of local people was held in Canso on Dominion Day in 1927 to protest the impoverishment of fishermen in the Maritimes. Support among clergy in other fishing villages was mobilized by Tompkins at the annual Rural Conference at Antigonish. Through the insistence of these groups, a federal *Royal Commission Investigating the Fisheries in the Maritimes and Magdalen Islands* was appointed in 1928, which recommended the banning of trawlers and the encouragement of fishermen's co-operatives in order to maintain the existence of the many scattered fishing villages and of the owner-operated fisheries along the Atlantic coastline. Fr. M. M. Coady, soon to be Director of the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, was hired by the federal Minister of Fisheries to organize the East Coast fishermen. During the fall and winter of 1929-1930 over one hundred locals were formed and in June 1930 a marketing, educating and organizing centre was formed, the United Maritime Fishermen (UMF).<sup>12</sup>

Lobster canning and marketing was the first specific enterprise undertaken among fishermen partially because lobster is a delicacy, obtaining higher prices than ground-fish per unit processed and marketed. Moreover, lobster harvesting and processing were labour intensive, small-scale activities. Since lobster harvesting was most suitably carried out by individual fishermen in small boats close to shore, and lobster canning required only a minimum of capital equipment, the lobster industry was particularly suitable for co-

10 *Ibid.*, n.p.

11 See *ibid.* and the files of the Inspector of Co-operative Associations at the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Markets Branch, Truro for all incorporation dates.

12 See the office files of United Maritime Fishermen, Ltd., Moncton. The leadership played by the Catholic clergy and by the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department within the UMF is evident in the minutes of all UMF conventions in the 1930s.

operative investment.<sup>13</sup> Between 1931 and 1939, eighteen co-operative lobster canneries were formed out of existing locals of the UMF in eastern Nova Scotia and the organized marketing of UMF produce was aided by provincial Department of Agriculture fieldmen. Usually following the formation of fishermen's producer co-operatives, consumer co-operatives were initiated. The first Antigonish co-operative store was incorporated at Port Felix in 1932 and others soon followed.

In 1932, the St. Francis Extension Department set up an industrial branch office in Glace Bay and appointed Alex MacIntyre, a former coal miner and executive member of the UMW's District 26, as head. MacIntyre, known as "Red Alex" in the coal strikes of the early 1920s, had been blacklisted after the strike of 1925. He became so strongly converted to the 'Antigonish Way' that he was soon the most virulent attacker of the 'Red Way' in industrial Cape Breton.<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre's prestige and efforts were ably used by the Movement to carry its message to the miners and Tompkins was relocated to the parish in Glace Bay to assist in this work. Co-operative stores were soon incorporated in the coal and steel communities at New Waterford (1934), Sydney (1936), Reserve Mines (1937), Little Bras D'Or (1937), and Port Morien in Cape Breton; and at New Glasgow (1935), Trenton (1935, never functioned), Thorburn (1936), and Westville (1935, never functioned) in Pictou County. These were followed by co-operative housing projects at Reserve Mines (1938), Glace Bay (1939) and Dominion (1939).<sup>15</sup>

Some consumer co-operatives in the farming communities of eastern Nova Scotia were also incorporated in the later 1930s and the Movement had some success in influencing the re-incorporation of such stores in Antigonish County as the People's, Heatherton and St. Andrews. Moreover, a few woodlot related producer co-operatives were incorporated, such as a timber marketing and farm supplies co-operative at Grand Anse (1933) in Richmond, a wood-working co-operative at Iona (1937) in Victoria, and a sawmill at Irishvale (1936) in Cape Breton County. The only non-woodlot related producer co-operative formed in the agricultural communities in the 1930s was the threshing mill at Lower Washabuck (1937) in Victoria County. All of these producer co-operatives were very minimally capitalized.

13 That co-operative lobster canning was suitable to small-scale owner-operated production is evident in the independent formation of lobster canneries in Yarmouth County as early as 1922. These two canneries in Yarmouth County were the only instances of formal co-operation among fishermen prior to the Antigonish Movement.

14 See the issues of the *Extension Bulletin* and *Maritime Co-operator* for 1938, 1939 and 1940.

15 For the story of early co-operative housing, see M. E. Arnold, *The Story of Tompkinsville* and F. J. Miffen, "The Antigonish Movement: A Revitalization Movement in Eastern Nova Scotia" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Boston College, 1974).

Between 1932 and 1940 over 110 credit unions were organized in eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>16</sup> The credit union was intended to be a mechanism to solve two major structural problems militating against co-operation: the lack of traditions of mutual aid among rural primary producers and the inadequate means of accumulating and circulating savings. Yet, despite the potential utility of credit unions as introductory mechanisms of co-operation, they tended to be formed earliest in communities with people already schooled in mutual aid organizations. In 1932, three out of four credit unions in eastern Nova Scotia were formed in coal and steel communities; in 1933, six out of 12; in 1934, eight out of 12. By the beginning of 1935, 17 out of 28 credit unions incorporated in the region had been established in coal and steel communities. Even in fishing communities, the communities with no pre-Antigonish co-operative experience, credit unions usually followed other co-operative ventures. Only in the agricultural communities were credit unions more likely to precede other co-operatives,<sup>17</sup> partly because of the relative lack of success of other forms of co-operatives in these communities. As a training ground for further co-operative enterprise, the success of the credit unions was uneven. Of the five fishing communities in which credit unions were the first form of co-operative enterprise, all five had another co-operative later in the 1930s. Of the 27 agricultural communities in which credit unions were the first form of co-operative enterprise, only ten operated other co-operatives by 1940.

The Antigonish Movement had a substantial impact in eastern Nova Scotia. At the beginning of 1930, the three poorest counties contained no co-operatives, but by the end of 1940 Guysborough had ten, Richmond six, and Victoria eight co-operatives — all of which were Antigonish inspired. In Inverness County, three co-operatives existed at the beginning of 1930, 16 at the end of 1940 — at least 14 of which were Antigonish inspired. In Cape Breton County, the number of co-operatives expanded six-fold from three to 18 — at least 16 of which were Antigonish inspired. In Antigonish and Pictou Counties the growth rate was much less spectacular; there were six co-operatives operating at the beginning of 1930 and nine at the end of 1940 in Antigonish County, seven of which were initially or became Antigonish inspired. In Pictou County, there were two operating by 1930 and five at the end of 1940, only two of which were Antigonish inspired. In 1940, the report of the Inspector of Co-operatives showed that 37 out of 42 reporting co-operative stores in N.S., 14 out of 15 reporting fishermen's co-operatives,

16 See the files of the Nova Scotia Credit Union League at their office in Halifax.

17 From 1935 to 1940, the incorporation of credit unions in agricultural communities predominated in gross numbers and by the end of 1936, there were more credit unions in agricultural communities than in coal and steel communities in eastern Nova Scotia.

and six out of seven miscellaneous co-operatives were located in eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>18</sup> All four credit unions incorporated in 1932 were located in this area: all 12 incorporated in 1933, all 13 in 1934, 13 out of 14 in 1935, 24 out of 30 in 1936, 27 out of 36 in 1937, nine out of 40 in 1938, ten out of 35 in 1939, and one out of 16 in 1940. Nonetheless, while the Antigonish Movement had its greatest organizing success in the 1930s in eastern Nova Scotia, success within the region varied between and within types of primary production sectors and subareas depending upon the degree of direct large-scale capitalist underdevelopment.

The structure of underdevelopment of coal and primary steel production in eastern Nova Scotia has been rather amply documented by others.<sup>19</sup> The industry has been typified by battles between primarily outside capitalists for control of the coal fields and steel plants, concentration of external capital, centralization of productive secondary manufacturing outside of eastern Nova Scotia, and capitalist-working class conflict. Important effects of this rivalry, concentration and centralization are exhibited in the uneven growth and decline of the region's coal and steel industry.

Absolute coal production in both Nova Scotia and the Sydney coal fields peaked in 1913 and never recovered.<sup>20</sup> World coal production also reached a peak in 1913, but unlike Nova Scotian production peaked at a higher level in 1929.<sup>21</sup> During the depression of the 1930s, N.S. coal production was to pay the price of world-wide over-production without having ever regained 1913 levels. A N.S. *Royal Commission Provincial Economic Inquiry* reported in 1934 that although coal constituted 90 per cent of the value of mineral production in the province, "Much of the accessible deposits are exhausted and the mines must be pushed deeper, or further under the sea".<sup>22</sup> The cost of producing a ton of coal, already double that of the United States, increased

18 N.S. Department of Agriculture, Markets Branch, *Report of Co-operative Associations* (Halifax, 1940).

19 J. M. Cameron, *The Pictonian Colliers* (Kentville, 1974); B. D. Tennyson, "Economic Nationalism and Confederation: A Case Study in Cape Breton", *Acadiensis*, II (Spring, 1972), pp. 39-53; D. A. Frank, "Coal Masters and Coal Miners"; C. O. MacDonald, *The Coal and Iron Industries of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1909); T. W. Acheson, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880-1910", *Acadiensis*, I (Autumn, 1972), pp. 3-28; E. Forsey, *Economic and Social Aspects of the Nova Scotia Coal Industry* (Toronto, 1926); D. Schwartzman, "Mergers in the Nova Scotia Coal Fields: A History of the Dominion Coal Company, 1893-1940" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California at Berkeley, 1952); N.S. RC on Coal Mines, 1932, *Report* (Halifax, 1932); NS, RC Provincial Economic Inquiry, *Report* (Halifax, 1934); NS, RC on Trenton Steel Works, *Report* (Halifax, 1944).

20 See RC on Coal Mines (1932), Chart C; and D. A. Frank, *op. cit.*, pp. 229, 230.

21 See S. A. Saunders, *The Economic Welfare of the Maritime Provinces* (Wolfville, 1932), p. 30.

22 RC Provincial Economic Inquiry (1934), p. 192.



by fifty cents between 1926 and 1931,<sup>23</sup> and the exhaustion of cheaper coal deposits, without the significant development of secondary industry, adversely affected the work force. While the total average daily work force remained fairly constant during periods of low production (generally, 1921-1934), the average number of days worked per man declined between 1926 and 1931 from 4.4 days a week (230 days a year) to 2.7 days a week (140 days a year), a decline of 39.10 per cent. The percentage of new workers in the work force declined from 13.3 per cent in 1926 to 1.1 per cent in 1930.<sup>24</sup> Long term layoffs in the coal industry affected common surface labourers, contract and day-rated miners, and drivers underground drastically and about equally. Between 1 June 1930 and 1 June 1931, 91.71 per cent of common labourers at coal mines in N.S. (3,241 out of 3,534) had been laid off at least once, with 47.08 per cent of those laid off losing 25-28 weeks; 90.86 per cent of coal miners (7,350 out of 8,089) had been laid off with 47.69 per cent of those laid off losing 25-28 weeks; and 90.17 per cent of drivers and other haulage workers (835 out of 1,926) had been laid off with 42.63 per cent losing 25-28 weeks. A few managers, foremen and overseers had also been laid off.<sup>25</sup>

Even in the pre-depression years, coal production and employment was highly seasonal. December through April were particularly slack due to a "considerable dependence" on the St. Lawrence market which was only accessible during the winter by higher cost rail transportation.<sup>26</sup> After 1930, this dependence on the St. Lawrence market was exacerbated in the interests of the Montreal-centred owners of Dominion Steel (Dosco), in order to fuel their central Canadian concerns in manufacturing, light, heat and power. While steel facilities in N.S. only utilized, on the average, 25 per cent of local coal production, coal was being transported to central Canada to fuel central Canadian steel facilities, facilities often owned by Dosco itself or by some of its owners.<sup>27</sup> The structure of external concentration and centralization shaped not only the work place but also whole communities. Twenty per cent of the population of N.S. was wholly or in part dependent on the coal and steel industry.<sup>28</sup> These dependent communities were hard hit by the

23 RC on Coal Mines (1932), Chart C.

24 Calculated from *ibid*.

25 See Canada, *Census* (1941), VI, pp. 812-3.

26 Saunders, *Economic Welfare*, pp. 35, 36; also RC Provincial Economic Inquiry (1934), p. 30.

27 See RC on Trenton Steel Works (1944), pp. 21-3.

28 NS, RC on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation, *Report on Minerals* (Halifax, 1944), p. 71; Canada, RC on Canada's Economic Prospects, *The Nova Scotia Coal Industry* (Ottawa, 1956), p. 32. In 1956, New Glasgow was said to be 30% dependent, Stellarton 50%, Westville 50%, Sydney 50%, North Sydney 30% dependent, all others "wholly dependent". These estimates, while probably roughly correct for 1956, just as probably underestimate impact for the 1930s.

depression of the 1930s. On 1 June 1931, fully 77.73 per cent of male wage-earners, 20 years of age and over, were unemployed at Dominion, 70.58 at Sydney Mines, and 68.35 at New Waterford.<sup>29</sup> Direct capitalist underdevelopment was to provide the most fundamental structural basis for the high incidence of Antigonish co-operative formation in the coal and steel communities, given the decline of effective and militant trade unionism/socialism.

In sharp contrast to the externally capitalized, concentrated and centralized coal and steel industry in eastern Nova Scotia, agricultural production between 1871 and 1941 maintained, throughout this period, its traditional petite bourgeois structure, as individually-held small acreages were worked primarily by the individual owner's family unit in large part for subsistence, non-commercial purposes. This little-changing structure of agricultural production exacerbated a general rural out-migration, particularly by young people, related to the "shift away from labour intensive primary occupations, and away from the rural areas in which these activities are carried out."<sup>30</sup> Regional out-migration was mitigated only partially and only during periods of large-scale capitalization in the coal and steel industries.

While the actual number of farms declined dramatically between 1891 and 1941, operator ownership of occupied farms in Nova Scotia declined only nominally from a high of 96.3 per cent in 1891 to a low of 92.2 per cent in 1931.<sup>31</sup> The vast bulk of farming in the province and in the region was carried out by owner-operators and their families. The eastern county with the smallest percentage of owner-operated farms was that county with the largest local market, Cape Breton, but even here the percentage of owner-operated farms was never less than 91.7 per cent. The mean size of eastern Nova Scotia farms was about 100 acres between 1871 and 1921. Although there was some enlargement of mean size after 1921, in 1931 the mean acreage per farm was only 0.46 per cent greater than in 1871. The mean farm size varied substantially by county in eastern Nova Scotia, with farms in Cape Breton and particularly Richmond Counties substantially smaller than the mean and in Victoria, Pictou and Inverness Counties larger. Between 1891 and 1931 the absolute acreage of improved farmland steadily declined in the province.

Data on mean capitalization per occupied farm, in current dollars, show the small-scale nature of capital investment and capital holdings. Whether taken in total or by its components of land, buildings, implements and

29 Calculated from Canada, *Census* (1931), VI, pp. 1269-71.

30 K. Levitt, *Population Movements in the Atlantic Provinces* (Halifax, 1960), pp. iii, 140.

31 All data on the characteristics of agricultural production are taken or calculated from Canada, *Census* (1941), VIII, pp. 144-201; *Census* (1931), VIII, pp. 84-109; *Census* (1921), V, pp. 131, 176, 678.

machinery, and livestock, the amounts of capital invested remained meagre between 1901 and 1941. When mean capitalization in the province is compared with changes in consumer and producer goods wholesale price indices, mean capital investment per farm increased only during 1901-1911 and 1921-1931; it declined between 1911 and 1941 and increased by merely 356-522 1926 dollars between 1901 and 1941.<sup>32</sup> Mean capital investment in land per farm, again expressed relative to wholesale price indices, declined between 1901 and 1941 by 316-137 1926 dollars per farm. Mean investment in buildings increased by 339-394 dollars, and in implements, machinery and livestock, crucial indicators of productive capital, increased by 229-236 1926 dollars, yet still stood at only 332 current dollars in 1941.<sup>33</sup> Data on the eastern counties for 1931 and 1941 indicate the even smaller scale of investment here, about 80 per cent of the mean for the province. In terms of investment in means of productions, only Pictou County (1931 and 1941) and Cape Breton (1931) show greater mean investment in implements and machinery than the provincial mean. No county shows greater mean total investment than the provincial mean for either 1931 or 1941, while Richmond (1931 and 1941) and Guysborough (1941) showed less than half.

With respect to gross value of production, again only Pictou (1930 and 1940) and Cape Breton (1940) Counties show means greater than that of Nova Scotia. Mean value of gross production per farm, in current dollars, was never more than 935 dollars for any county; Richmond and Guysborough (1930 and 1940) obtained less than half of this mean. Of course, these figures greatly understate differences between counties in terms of mean cash incomes. In every case in 1940, the first year for which data are available, the greater the mean gross value of production for any county, the less the percentage of mean value consumed on the farm. Excluding the value of forest produce sold and the value of all produce consumed on the farm, Pictou and Cape Breton Counties dominated in mean potentially commercial production per farm relative both to the region and to the province, while Antigonish County was higher than the eastern Nova Scotia mean but lower than the provincial mean. The gaps between counties in terms of this indicator are immense. Pictou had the largest mean potentially commercial value per farm, 3.95 times as large as the county with the lowest mean value,

32 Given in M. C. Urquhart and K. A. H. Buckley, ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Toronto, 1965), p. 296. These figures depend on whether consumer or producer goods wholesale indices are used.

33 The position of the seven eastern counties relative to each other with respect to mean investment in implements, machinery and livestock in 1931 exactly corresponds to the position of these counties with respect to mean gross value of production in 1930. Total investment exactly corresponds in only three out of seven pairing cases.

Richmond. Data on hired farm labour confirm inter-county differences in market production.

In 1940, the majority of farms in Nova Scotia had owner-operators and/or members of household earning cash income off the farm. In eastern Nova Scotia a somewhat larger number of farms reported off-farm income, with proportionately more farms reporting income from the fisheries than in the province as a whole. Antigonish, Cape Breton and Pictou Counties had lower percentages of farms reporting off-farm income than the Nova Scotia percentage, while Victoria, Richmond, and Inverness had the largest percentages. However, when income from work off the farm is taken as a percentage of gross farm revenues, only Antigonish has a lower percentage than Nova Scotia, with Richmond and Cape Breton having the largest. The reasons for this can be clarified by looking at the reported length of off-farm work as a percentage of all farms. Cape Breton had the largest percentage of part-time farmers, working 157 days or more a year off the farm or exactly half the number of working days in a year (assuming a six day work week). Richmond had the highest percentage of farms reporting an off-farm work year of 49-156 days.

Not working for off-farm income can indicate two opposing structures of farm production and marketing: year-round commercial farming or wholly subsistence farming. Data previously cited support the second of the alternatives. Even as late as 1940, 53.1 per cent of all farms in Nova Scotia were subsistence farms or combinations of subsistence, and generally those counties were most subsistence oriented which were furthest from markets and industrial employment.<sup>34</sup> Eastern Nova Scotia contained 20 per cent more subsistence or combination of subsistence farms than did the province proportionately. Only Pictou County (50.0%) had fewer subsistence and combinations of subsistence farms than Nova Scotia. When subsistence and combination of subsistence farms are added to part-time farms, they comprise over three-quarters of all farms in the eastern region, a figure 18.2 per cent larger than that for Nova Scotia. Again only Pictou County (60.0%) had a smaller percentage than the province (65.3%). Far and away the vast majority of farms in eastern Nova Scotia, but particularly in Victoria, Guys-

34 Percentages are calculated from Canada, *Census* (1941), VIII, p. 197. Definitions of types of farms are in *ibid.*, pp. xxv, xxvi. "Farms on which the value of products consumed or used by the farm household amounted to 50 p.c. or more of the gross farm revenue were classed as 'Subsistence Farms'. 'Combinations of Subsistence Farms' are farms where the value of products used or consumed and the revenue from another main type, such as poultry, livestock, etc., were required to form 50 p.c. or more of the gross farm revenue'. 'Part-time farms' are farms where 50 p.c. or more of the gross revenue was obtained from work performed off the farm (such as lumbering, fishing, road work, custom work), from overnight lodgers, boarders, campers, etc."

borough, and Inverness, were non-commercial operations. Subsistence oriented production offered in times of general crisis more “stability and security, if at a lower level of living” than industries which were more in the main stream of capitalist development.<sup>35</sup> This helps to explain the turn-around towards slight growth of many rural subdivisions in eastern Nova Scotia during the 1930s. Yet, however well subsistence production mitigated sufferings in times of crisis, long-term maintenance of a subsistence structure of production is the crucial indicator of the underdevelopment of eastern Nova Scotia agriculture, an underdevelopment structurally different from direct capitalist underdevelopment of the coal and steel and the fisheries sectors. This lack of direct underdevelopment by large-scale capital was to provide the principal structural basis for the lack of Antigonish co-operative formation in the agricultural areas of the region.

The structure of the fisheries in eastern Nova Scotia contrasts with both the monopolistic structure of coal and steel and the small-scale non-market structure of agriculture. While fish production remained throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries even less capitalized than agriculture, it was faced with direct destruction by externally owned, vertically integrated fish corporations — firms which employed labour on trawlers, bought fish from independents, and sold gear and other provisions to the independents. Prior to the second World War, independently owned boat and small vessel inshore fishing always predominated, *in terms of number of fishermen*. Often such inshore fishing was carried on in conjunction with subsistence or part-time farming and woodlot forestry where possible, with wage-labour in the fish plants and other industries in the off-season, and with common labour on public works where and when available. Typically, fishermen in eastern Nova Scotia were owners of their means of production, their boats and gear such as they were. They survived the off-season as ‘jacks-of-all-trades’, providing the same cheap labour power in the off-season that their wives often provided throughout the year at the fish plant. But during the period of large-scale capitalization of the coal and steel industries in the eastern counties from 1890-1912, the number of fishermen declined by 23.25 per cent in Nova Scotia and by a massive 42.95 per cent in eastern Nova Scotia. By 1912, the number of fishermen in the region had declined to a low of 35.3 per cent of the fishermen in the province from a high of 47.3 per cent in 1890. Particularly hard hit were Victoria and Richmond Counties, which underwent further major losses of fishermen

35 J. F. Graham, *Fiscal Adjustment and Economic Development: A Case Study of Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1963), p. 22.

between 1927 and 1939.<sup>36</sup>

Several studies have examined the persistence of boat and small vessel (e.g. schooner) inshore fisheries in Atlantic Canada,<sup>37</sup> and have noted that “Nova Scotia entered the twentieth century with a *growing* tendency toward the use of small boats”.<sup>38</sup> Small boat inshore fishing in the region persisted while the numbers of fishermen declined partly because of the intrusion of fish buyer-trawler owners upon the fishing banks and the attraction of the eastern Nova Scotia coal and steel industry and of employment in the “Boston States”.<sup>39</sup> The Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation’s *Report on the Fisheries* stated in 1944:

This small-scale condition is partly attributable to the many fish varieties taken on the Atlantic coast, and to the fact that they are landed all along the coast line, which was early settled in small communities; hence the large numbers of small producers, processors and exporters. Another reason for the small-scale is the history of the eastern trade, which grew before the days of canning and refrigerating and which depended on salting for preservation — a method which could be followed effectively by the fisherman himself on the shore: in the past he could be both producer and manufacturer.<sup>40</sup>

A depression in fish prices beginning in 1921, world overproduction in the late 1920s, the general depression of the 1930s, and the incursion of Norwegian, Icelandic, British, Portuguese, Spanish and Newfoundland trawler fleets into eastern Nova Scotia banks and markets threatened the viability of small boat inshore fisheries in eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>41</sup> Inshore fishermen were unable to obtain sufficient capital to replace the minimal equipment they did have, let alone improve and expand their means of production. A vicious circle of capital deterioration and lack of cash set in: “A melting away of capital resources of all kinds”.<sup>42</sup>

36 Data in this paragraph were calculated from Canada, RC Investigating the Fisheries of the Maritime Provinces and the Magdalen Islands, *Report* (Ottawa, 1928), p. 96; and NS, RC on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation, *Report on the Canadian Atlantic Fisheries* (Halifax, 1944), p. 157.

37 Most notably, H. A. Innis, *The Cod Fisheries* (Toronto, 1954).

38 NS, Department of Trade and Industry, *A Brief Review of the Fisheries of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1963), p. 10; emphasis added.

39 See R. F. Grant, *The Canadian Atlantic Fishery* (Toronto, 1934).

40 NS, RC on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation (1944), p. 26.

41 Grant, *The Canadian Atlantic Fishery*, pp. 30-34; Department of Trade and Industry, *Brief Review of Fisheries*, p. 15.

42 Department of Trade and Industry, *Brief Review of Fisheries*, p. 17. See also, pp. 31-3.

Incursion of foreign trawlers into the fisheries brought, after 1908, a series of “successful oppositions” by boat and small vessel owners to the trawler fisheries.<sup>43</sup> A major “successful opposition” to trawlers led four out of five federal commissioners to recommend in 1928 “the total prohibition of steam-trawlers from operating from Canadian ports, landing their catch in Canadian ports, or obtaining in Canadian ports coal or supplies”.<sup>44</sup> Their *Report* documented the growth of the trawler fisheries and concluded:

that they [the trawlers] are responsible for over-production and the consequent ‘glutting’ of the market, thereby preventing the shore fishermen from disposing of his catch, of superior quality, at a reasonable price; that because of the low prices offered, and the virtual control of the Canadian markets by the companies operating steam-trawlers, the shore fishermen are deprived of an adequate livelihood, with the resultant serious depopulation of the fishing villages in recent years; and that if steam-trawlers are allowed to continue to operate from Maritime Province ports, the fishing villages in these parts will soon be deserted.<sup>45</sup>

Although it is debatable whether the decline can be blamed solely on trawlers, without taking into account the extremely low levels of capitalization and income in the shore fisheries, the 1928 Commission appears to have been correct in its assumption that the fishing communities would decline unless trawlers were condemned.<sup>46</sup>

During the mid-1920s, fishermen in the Canso area communities which had trawler operations and cold storage plants owned by the trawler companies experienced price-lowering by the buyer-trawler operators and some were left with no fresh fish buyers at all as the companies merged and centralized their operations in Halifax (as did National Fish and Maritime Fish in 1931) or became insolvent in the depression (as did Leonard Fisheries in 1933).<sup>47</sup> In either case the local cold storage plants were shut down, leaving no storage for fresh fish or for bait.<sup>48</sup> Some details on the dependence of fishing communities on a cured fish company were supplied by the president of Robin, Jones and Whitman, which operated at Cheticamp. The Company claimed to

43 See *ibid.*, pp. 24-31.

44 RC Investigating the Fisheries (1928), pp. 98, 99.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 92-5.

46 See W. G. Ernst, *Submission on Behalf of the Fishermen of the Province of Nova Scotia to the Royal Commission on the Fisheries* (Halifax, 1928), pp. 4-5.

47 See F. A. Nightingale in Canada, RC on Price Spreads, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* (Ottawa, 1934), I, pp. 327-82.

48 See A. Hanlon and B. L. Wilcox, in *ibid.*, pp. 51-68 and 89-100.

have “the second oldest chain store operation” in Canada, next to Hudson’s Bay Company.<sup>49</sup> It had supplied gear and provisions on credit since 1766 and followed a stated policy of paying high for fish and getting it back through the stores. As President Whitman put it: “We go into anything which will give the fishermen something else to do outside the fishing season — cordwood, pulpwood, wharf timber, lumber. Incidentally, in the export trade we are willing to buy and sell anything on which we can make a dollar”.<sup>50</sup>

Within this monopoly structure, the ‘independent’ fishermen, the vast majority of fishermen in eastern Nova Scotia, attempted to earn a living. Average *annual* incomes in the fisheries in 1933 ranged from \$160 (\$110 from line fishing, \$50 from lobster fishing) at Canso to about \$200 at Queensport in Guysborough County, \$100 in Richmond County at Arichat and Petit de Grat, \$75 in Cape Breton County at Glace Bay and \$100 at L’Archeveque, North Sydney, Gabarouse, Grand River and Forchu, and \$175 at Louisburg. The extremely low level of cash income to independents can be contrasted to the mean annual earnings of \$1,347.60 for trawlermen from 1929 to 1933.<sup>51</sup> The Royal Commission on Price Spreads contrasted the absolute cash impoverishment of the independents with their conditions of labour — often involving 72 hours without rest with “continuous physical discomfort and serious danger of loss of life”.<sup>52</sup> The extremely low cash income from the fisheries could be only slightly supplemented by part-time farming and forestry. Part-time farming was virtually impossible over large sections of the east coast and even where possible tended to be necessarily of a subsistence nature, to provide food for the table. Part-time forestry, usually in one’s own woodlot, was also dependent on geography and the existence of local markets, which were seriously depressed in the 1930s, if they had ever existed. Detailed data on capital investment for 1939 show the results of low cash income.<sup>53</sup> Mean capital investment in boats and vessels in eastern Nova Scotia for 1939 was a mere 142.70 dollars compared to an already low provincial mean of 208.10 dollars.<sup>54</sup> Only one fisheries district in the eastern

49 See H. H. Whitman in *ibid.*, pp. 471-86.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 477.

51 See Hanlon in *ibid.*, pp. 51-68. These figures represent no deductions for gear but deductions for other operating expenses (gas, oil and bait), eight months labour with in most communities “nothing whatever to do during the other four months”. “Some little farming” was reported for L’Archeveque, Gabarouse, Grand River, and Forchu: “just large enough to carry them over the winter”.

52 See Canada, RC on Price Spreads, *Report* (Ottawa, 1935), p. 183.

53 See RC on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation (1944), pp. 142, 143.

54 Commenting on the Nova Scotia mean, the provincial RC stated: “the kind of boat and engine that this would provide, even if men worked in pairs and groups, is self-evident to anyone who compared it with the investment in the family car”. *Ibid.*, p. 35.



counties, Cape Breton (1), had a larger mean investment in boats and vessels than the province while three districts, Guysborough (1), Inverness (2), and Victoria (1) had a mean investment of under 100 dollars in boats and vessels, although mean investment in gear in eastern Nova Scotia 1939 was slightly greater than in Nova Scotia because of a greater dependence on strictly inshore activities such as lobstering. With the near market districts of Cape Breton (1) and (2) excluded, the mean income in eastern Nova Scotia was 281.2 dollars in 1939 compared to 398.1 dollars for Nova Scotia.<sup>55</sup> Although processing by fishermen themselves of their landed catch contributed to a greater proportion of income in the eastern region than in the province, the contribution, although 14 per cent of mean income, was a mere 38.1 dollars per fishermen in eastern Nova Scotia (ranging from 28 to 2 per cent and from 81.9 to 2.9 dollars in the eastern districts).

Direct underdevelopment of the small-scale 'independent' fisheries in eastern Nova Scotia, together with a high degree of community dependence on the large fish companies, was to be the principal basis for the higher incidence of Antigonish Movement co-operative formation in the fishing areas of the region. Direct underdevelopment and dependence also provided a structural linkage across class boundaries between the industrial working class of the coal and steel primary production sector and the petite bourgeoisie of the fisheries sector, both class segments having the same structural 'enemy', capitalist underdevelopment. During the 1930s the Antigonish Movement provided the apparently across-class programme for survival that actually linked these two differing class segments in organized co-operative action.

Capitalist underdevelopment in eastern Nova Scotia included three structures of underdeveloped primary production which were coincident with the three major primary production sectors in the region: a structure of capitalist-working class social relations in an externally owned coal and steel industry, a structure of capitalist-petite bourgeois relations in the inshore and offshore fisheries, and a structure of petite bourgeois relations in agriculture. The structure of ownership of coal and steel tended to determine the extent of secondary processing of coal-fired steel products. With the depletion of coal reserves and the decline of secondary manufacturing in eastern Nova Scotia during the 1930s went the possibility of regional population and employment growth; eventually, with the increase in external ownership went the growth of a strong local market. Both independent primary production in agriculture and in the fisheries were faced with the same internal underdevelopment dilemma or vicious circle: existing minimal means of production yield minimal returns for investment in means of production. Returns

55 See *ibid.*, p. 167.

were often insufficient, on the average, even for the replacement of exhausted means of production. However, in the fisheries, this internal underdevelopment dilemma was aggravated by direct control by big fisheries companies over the costs and returns of fishing. The 'truck system' of control and exchange that prevailed in both the coal mining and fishing communities was a major contributor to the growing dependence of those communities on big capital. By forcing coal miners and independent fishermen to purchase their consumer supplies from company stores "on the tab" for high prices, coal miners and fishermen were kept dependent on the respective companies.

Within the independent farmer segment, structural variations occurred along a subsistence-commodity production continuum. Those least polarized from big capital underdevelopment were the subsistence farmers and the wealthiest commodity producing farmers in eastern Nova Scotia. Subsistence farmers tended to experience fewer of the indirect financial and market controls of big capital since their production was not market-oriented and their need to expand not dictated by the laws of capitalist development. The wealthiest commodity producers were sheltered from the harshness of the direct controls since they could obtain credit easier and could afford to transport to better paying markets. Those farmers in the middle of the subsistence-commodity production continuum (in semi-subsistence, semi-commodity production farming and farming-and-fishing) were the most structurally polarized of the independent farmer class segment. Confronted with the full force of indirect financial and marketing controls, they were not wealthy enough to obtain easy credit and yet had to expand in order to remain viable. They generally did not produce enough of one product nor have large enough shipments to command better prices for their produce.

The central theme of this study has been that varying structures of capitalist underdevelopment in eastern Nova Scotia underpinned the incidence of Antigonish Movement co-operative formation. To substantiate this theme, the likelihood of Movement co-operative formation in differing types of census subdivisions, up to 1940, were compared.<sup>56</sup> It was expected that coal and steel and fishing subdivisions would be over-represented with respect to Movement co-operative formation in both depressed subdivisions in general (operationalized by depopulation) and in farming subdivisions and that middle range farming subdivisions would have a greater likelihood of Move-

56 For definitions and a methodology for identifying and comparing types of census subdivisions, see Sacouman, "Social Origins", pp. 76, 80-3, 195-217.

SUMMARY TABLE

The Differentiating Power of an Underdevelopment Interpretation of the Data: Comparative Likelihoods of Co-operative Formation.

| <i>Type of Subdivision</i>                                      | Differentiating Power                          |                                   |   |   |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|
|   | <i>Incorporated-and-operated co-operatives</i> | <i>Incorporated co-operatives</i> | <i>Subdivisions with incorporated co-operatives</i> | <i>Subdivisions with incorporated credit unions</i> |
| (i) Coal and steel sub-divisions over depopulated sub-divisions | 3.0  | 3.0                               | 2.9   | 2.8   |
| (ii) Fishing sub-divisions over depopulated sub-divisions       | 2.3  | 2.2                               | 2.3   | 1.6   |
| (iii) Fishing subdivisions over farming sub-divisions           | 3.0  | 3.2                               | 2.9   | 2.0   |
| (iv) Middle range over larger farming subdivisions              | 9.7  | 10.9                              | 6.7   | 1.5   |
| (v) Middle range over smaller farming subdivisions              | 2.0  | 2.3                               | 2.9   | 1.3   |

ment co-operative formation than either of the extremes. As the Summary Table indicates,<sup>57</sup> these expectations were convincingly fulfilled.

The emphasis in earlier accounts of the Antigonish Movement on generalized conditions of distress in eastern Nova Scotia was an over-emphasis. Conditions of distress were prevalent before, during and after the formative years of the Antigonish Movement. But why some 'distressed' areas formed Antigonish-inspired co-operatives and credit unions and not others is unanswerable without an understanding of varying structures of underdevelopment. Why coal and steel and fishing subdivisions were greatly over-represented remain mysteries with a mere emphasis on generalized distress — as does why farming- and- fishing and semi-subsistence farming subdivisions were greatly over-represented relative to subsistence and commodity farming communities. Similarly, earlier writers over-emphasized the powers of a dynamic leadership. The leadership was unquestionably dynamic. But why the leadership ignited the fishing and not the farming villages is problematic to the dynamic approach, especially since the biographies of many of the dynamic leaders are rooted in eastern Nova Scotia farming villages. The magic of the Antigonish leadership and programme was potent or impotent depending on the structural bases upon which it acted. Of course, an emphasis on underdevelopment and structural origins of the Antigonish Movement can itself be an overemphasis if it leads to dogmatic structural (or economic) reductionism. If, however, structural conditions are viewed as principal bases upon which other more directly social considerations are phrased, then a myriad of questions left unanswered in this study become more readily solvable. Why did the Alumni Association of St. Francis Xavier University, the diocesan Catholic clergy, and the Scottish Catholic Society come together in the late 1920s to form the core of the Movement? Why did the Movement win, during the 1930s, over militant trade unionism/socialism in the region? Why did the Movement ultimately fail in reaching its expressed objectives in eastern Nova Scotia and the Maritimes?

With capital expansion in coal and steel in eastern Nova Scotia, 1890-1910, unskilled and semi-skilled wage labour became available for male members of subsistence and semi-subsistence farming or farming-fishing families and for male members of independent fishing families. Because of the seasonal nature of the coal mines, agriculture and the fisheries, many of these people became in fact part-time farmers and/or fishermen *and* part-time

57 The data for this Summary Table are from Tables 5, 10, 15, 21 and 23 in *ibid.*, pp. 270-6, 281, 297-300, 209-10, 313. 'Depopulated' subdivisions accounted for 90 of 167 subdivisions (53.9%), 37 of 88 incorporated-and-operated co-operatives, 43 of 99 merely incorporated co-operatives, 28 of 66 subdivisions with co-operatives and 49 of 111 subdivisions with credit unions. Figures for other types are presented in *ibid.*, pp. 195-217.

wage labourers. Proletarianization within the region was thus mitigated as a strata of semi-petite bourgeois, semi-proletarians was produced. 'Jack-of-all-trades Bluenosers', combination farmers-fishermen-proletarians, were produced and class differences, differences in relationship to the means of production, were lessened. During periods of crisis within the coal and steel industry, the independent-proletarian and his full-time proletarian children had the farm and/or the boat to which to return for at least subsistence purposes and during the Great Depression a significant return to the rural subdivisions, a process of 'subsistencization', is apparent, although only apparent given the bluntness of available evidence. Both mitigated proletarianization during expansion and subsistencization during industrial crisis were results of underdevelopment. Both served to lessen interclass differences through the establishment of an intermediary strata of farmers-fishermen-proletarians. Perhaps this particular process of underdevelopment will best explain, at the structural level of analysis, the development of an apparently across-class leadership and programme, the success over trade unionism/socialism in the 1930s, and the ultimate failure of the Movement.