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Moral Education of the Poor: Adult Education and Land Settlement Schemes in Newfoundland in the 1930s¹

JAMES OVERTON

INTRODUCTION

RECENTLY, a number of writers have begun to explore the relationship between adult education and unemployment during the Great Depression. The consensus seems to be that adult education played a limited and experimental, but nevertheless important and progressive, part in attempts to deal with unemployment. Writing about Britain, for example, Harold Marks argues that adult education both helped to arouse popular concern about unemployment and played "an important part in meeting the heavy personal burden carried by the unemployed" in the 1930s (Marks, 1982: 1). Writers on the history of adult education in Canada might point to a much more significant involvement with the problems of poverty and unemployment in the period, perhaps citing the Antigonish Movement to support their case (Pannu, 1988).

The aim of this paper is to suggest that adult education had a much more ambiguous and important relationship to unemployment and the unemployed than has been previously recognized. To this end the politics of adult education's involvement in the unemployment issue in Newfoundland in the 1930s is discussed. Specifically, the argument advanced is that in the crisis of the early 1930s the adult education movement in Newfoundland came to play a central role in the moral education of the poor through the promotion of self-help responses to the problems of unemployment and poverty.

This essay argues that adult education played a significant role in relation to the state's efforts to cast off its responsibility for poverty and unemployment by promoting actions and policies which gave the poor and unemployed themselves

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the principal responsibility for dealing with these problems. These efforts were of some considerable political importance in undermining the struggles of the unemployed for adequate state support.

The focus of the discussion is on the political dimensions of the self-help movement in which adult educators were involved in the context of the economic and political crisis of the early 1930s that led to the collapse of Responsible Government in 1934, and on the early period of the rule of the Commission of Government that was installed by Britain in 1934 (Neary, 1988). This form of government consisted of six appointed commissioners, under the Governor of Newfoundland, answerable to the British Government.

The self-help movement of the 1930s consisted of a number of elements. However, for convenience the main focus of this paper is on land cultivation schemes.

THE AMBIGUOUS POLITICAL LEGACY OF ADULT EDUCATION

The first adult education work was purely remedial; it was for the purpose of protecting society from the social evils which could be traced to the lack of education. Then came the various programs that sprang from charitable intentions, from the genuine desire to improve the condition of the less privileged members of society. In time, adult education became less *for* the people and more *by* the people, as men sought voluntarily to improve themselves through educational programs. And finally we have the well developed activities of high social content and purpose that represent the more advanced forms of adult education today (Laidlaw, 1961: 21).

I think few writers on the history of adult education would, today, accept the kind of evolutionary perspective on the history of adult education offered by Laidlaw in the early 1960s. Reading recent articles about the state of adult education cannot but leave the reader with the impression that there is a profound crisis of theory and practice in the discipline. In general, there seems to be a sense that adult education has lost its way, or at least wandered far away from its earlier radical roots. From Welton, for example, we get a picture of adult education that is "professionalized, becalmed, and technicized" (Welton, 1987: 29). From Pannu (1988: 235), we get the argument that adult education has been incorporated by the state.

Concern and confusion about the project of adult education is nowhere expressed more clearly than in discussions since the early 1980s about the way in which adult educators should relate to the unemployed. If, in the early 1980s, adult educators were criticized for essentially ignoring the problem of unemployment and the needs of the unemployed, now, fifteen years later, they are more likely to be criticized for the particular nature of their involvement with unemployed people. Many adult educators have, for example, come into contact with the unemployed through the teaching of courses intended to improve the employability of those who

find themselves out of work. Much of the emphasis in these courses is on job search, life skills and basic education. Adult educators have also become involved in some of the government-initiated community development schemes that are intended to promote a self-help response to unemployment and rural crisis.

Those dissatisfied with the current state of adult education are likely to look to the past for adult education's golden age. In the past they find all the things that they argue are missing in the present—especially commitment and radicalism. They attempt to draw on the past for inspiration. Pannu, for example, suggests that

Prior to the Second World War, adult education in Canada had the character of a more or less radical social movement. Its primary goal in the 1930s was to mobilize the poor and the unemployed—the victims of the Great Depression—in collective self-defence and for radical transformation of the Canadian society (Pannu, 1988: 235).

Many would accept this statement as unproblematic, agreeing that adult education once had social purpose and radical aspirations. And here it is usual to cite the Antigonish Movement as an example of “progressive adult education,” that is, of an attempt to “empower local people within a reformist framework” (Cruickshank, 1993: 172).² In fact, it is the Antigonish Movement that is most often cited as *the* example of successful grass roots mobilization in Canada. That the Antigonish Movement was progressive is clearly not in doubt for many adult educators. Welton, for example, regards it as part of an educational movement which rejected liberal, individualistic ideals and promoted participatory democracy (Welton, 1987: 29). And with Lotz he goes further to suggest that it represents an important Canadian “left, radical tradition in its own right” (Lotz and Welton, 1987: 108).

Many adult educators would like to see themselves as, in some sense, the inheritors of this tradition. They view adult education as broadly progressive and populist in political terms—seeing themselves as working for and with “the people,” often against “the powers that be.” Pannu, for example, noting that adult education “stood with its victims as they collectively struggled for their emancipation” during capitalism’s last great crisis, clearly hopes that they will do the same again (Pannu, 1988: 242-3).

Against this, I argue that the question of the progressiveness of adult education cannot be determined by what its proponents say or think they are doing. Nor can it be determined in the abstract. We need to look at what adult educators actually do in specific social and historical contexts and to evaluate the politics and ideology of adult education. The point is that adult education, whether it is involved in the promotion of co-operatives, literacy projects, or land settlement, has to be examined in context. If we want to discuss progressiveness, then we need to identify what we mean by this and how it might be achieved and to examine the actions of adult educators in relation to this. This essay seeks to raise questions about the progressiveness of adult education precisely in the period that is held up to be its most radical moment.

"Adult education" is nothing if not a nebulous and vague concept, embracing as it does everything from Reading Circles, Co-operatives, Young Farmers' Clubs and Women's Institutes to the activities of University Extension Services. It can march under the banner of "Education is a lifelong process," as did the Newfoundland Adult Education Association in the early 1930s (Newfoundland Adult Education Association, 1930). It can claim to be about "learning to live" or "helping people study their problems and meet their needs" (Laidlaw, 1961: 20). It can be, as Albert Mansbridge put it, "synonymous with living rightly"—a definition with clear moral overtones which begs the question of "who decides what living rightly is?"

That adult education has at its heart a political and moral project becomes clear only when the theory and practice of its proponents is examined. Then we can see adult education ideas and practices being hitched to various political wagons—imperialism, nationalism, anti-communism or the promotion of enterprise culture.³

Liberal adult education has always had a strong social democratic ethos, as John McIlroy notes (1991: 13). Yet, following Raymond Williams, he also suggests that we need to see adult education as a "form of social control" (17). And here he is clearly calling for an examination, not of what might be called establishment adult education, but of the work of Albert Mansbridge and the Workers' Education Association (WEA).

There is a long tradition of thinking about education as a means of social control. This includes the work of John Stuart Mill, James Kay-Shuttleworth and Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century and that of Albert Mansbridge, one of the leading figures in adult education in the English-speaking world, in the early twentieth century. Education would be the means by which the working class was to be domesticated, or made safe for democracy. It would be the means by which militant working-class action might be undermined. Clearly, this was how Mansbridge and many others saw the function of adult education. As McIlroy notes (17-18), the involvement of the universities and the WEA in the field was informed by the same impulse that directed Matthew Arnold to promote culture as a means by which the working class would be turned away from the path of anarchy in *Culture and Anarchy*, first published in 1869. In the late 1860s, in the wake of the rioting that followed the defeat of the Reform Bill in Britain—especially the Hyde Park riot—Arnold argued that "monster processions in the streets and forcible irruptions into parks" should be "unflinchingly forbidden and repressed" (Arnold, 1978: 203-4). He endorsed the "old Roman way" of dealing with rioting, that is, to "flog the rank and file, and fling the ring-leaders from the Tarpeian Rock." At the same time he thought that culture should be promoted as a means of dealing with "anarchy" and achieving "safety" (202). It is perhaps not surprising that adult education has flourished when fear of working-class militancy has been at its height.

From its origins, one of the main aims of the movement to bring adult education to the working class had been to make this class safe for democracy. To put it bluntly, the aim was to lead workers away from the path of militancy, revolt and revolution towards what was called democracy. That adult education might play a key role in undermining support for communism was clearly recognized by those involved in the Antigonish Movement (Sacouman, 1979). Nor was this battle confined to the 1930s. When Moses Coady, one of the leaders of the Antigonish Movement, speaking in Newfoundland in 1951, stated that the main aim of adult education is to produce "enlightenment" in order to counteract "the bad ideologies that are afloat in the world," he was restating the fundamental ideological plank of the Antigonish Movement. It was a position not far from that of Newfoundland educator V.P. Burke when in 1937 he claimed that adult education would do much

to set men free—from materialism, from bad taste in living, in music, in drama, in recreation, and most of all from the utter drabness of unfulfilled lives (Burke, 1937: 298).

Indeed, Burke's position would have been even closer to Coady's if Burke had quoted fully and retained the full context of the quotation that he took, without acknowledgement, from Morse Cartwright (1935: 7) to define his position. For Cartwright, "the ambition of democracy is to set men free" from those evils identified by Burke above, but also "from governmental oppression." Adult education was to be an essential tool in protecting democracy "against fascism, communism and all other extremisms."⁴

It was common to view education in this way in the period. When Dean James E. Russell of Columbia University, chairman of the Carnegie Trust that was assisting Memorial College, visited Newfoundland in 1931, it was to preach about the role that education might play in securing "stability and social order" in a world "tottering on the brink of chaos" (*Daily News*, September 7, 1931). In the past, he argued, social order had been achieved through slavery, military power and ecclesiastical domination, but now it was time to promote education—education that would build character and develop leadership—as the route to peace and contentment.

But adult education was not just about opposition to militancy and radicalism in the realm of ideas. It sought to promote reform. Improvements in conditions would, it was argued, undermine the appeal of "bad ideologies" such as communism. Thus, when J.R. Smallwood called on people to rally round the flag of adult education in the fight against communism in the early 1950s, he argued that "we look upon the Cooperative movement as one of the great bulwarks against Communism, and as a practical expression of Christianity."⁵ The feeling that "if we don't give them reform, then they will give us revolution" was particularly widespread during the anti-communist hysteria that characterized the early 1950s in North America, but it was certainly not absent from adult education circles in the 1920s, 1930s and late 1940s.

The thesis being offered here is that, in general, what is seen as progressive adult education has very often attempted to perform a social control function for those wishing to protect and preserve capitalism in periods of crisis. Not only were its projects initiated and directed by the middle class, but in the 1930s, for example, its programs were taken up by the state in response to the problems and tensions of that period. What I am suggesting is that much of what adult educators did in the 1930s was, broadly speaking, an expression of concern over the problem of managing the unemployed. It was again, not surprisingly, the young unemployed, especially young males, who became the main object of anxiety and attention. Underlying this anxiety was concern about the maintenance of public order and the work ethic, the growth of radicalism and the question of how to minimize expenditures on public relief.

But education policy in the 1930s in Newfoundland was also shaped by the prevailing view, of the Commission of Government, that the economic and political collapse of the period was to a large extent caused by the moral failure of the Newfoundland population (McCann, 1987: 201-202). If poor character and lack of discipline were seen as the problem, then the solution, at least according to Sir John Hope Simpson, one of the country's Commissioners, lay

in morale—in true religion and in education—in honesty and brotherly love—in love of work—in self reliant effort—in willingness to sacrifice for the sake of our country and our neighbour (*Daily News*, March 14, 1935).

A variety of schemes were developed to bring about the moral rehabilitation of the poor, many of them building on already existing experiments. Incidentally, many of the programs of the 1930s are almost identical to the kinds of things that are now being promoted by governments to deal with the unemployed. For instance, Britain's "dole schools" were a feature of the 1930s. Their aim was to provide young people with the practical activities that it was thought would prevent demoralization and preserve the work ethic. In other parts of Europe, folk high schools and labour camps served the same purpose in the 1920s and 1930s. The schemes for rehabilitating and managing the unemployed in the 1930s involved private interests as well as the state. As the present paper demonstrates, some of these schemes resulted from the efforts of adult educators.

REFORM, SELF-HELP AND THE LABOURING CLASSES

What developed in the first quarter of the twentieth century in Newfoundland was a fairly wide-ranging, if limited, reform movement which focused its attention on medical and social problems (Overton, 1994). The movement was led by philanthropically-minded members of the business and professional classes of St. John's and emphasized self-help, individual responsibility, and, to a limited extent, charity, as solutions to social problems, rather than an expanded role for the state.

In Newfoundland, as elsewhere, the movement set itself explicitly *against* what was referred to as socialism or collectivism (Mason, 1974).

At the heart of this charity-organizing movement was *laissez-faire* ideology. Through thrift, industriousness and self-help, individuals would strive to secure their own welfare. In this they might be aided by various volunteer organizations which aimed to help the poor help themselves. By using volunteers, the role of the state in dealing with problems such as poverty, unemployment or ill-health might be minimized or avoided altogether. Networks of family, friends and neighbours constituted a "natural" back-up system that would provide mutual assistance in times of stress. Private charity, carefully controlled, might be provided when these systems failed. The role of the state was seen as being restricted to the legal reinforcement of family responsibility for dealing with poverty, the encouragement of volunteer efforts and perhaps the distribution of propaganda to make citizens aware of their civic duties. In the ideal *laissez-faire* state there would be no public relief system, no right to state support in times of unemployment or illness.

The method of the charity organizers was to work with the poor to encourage self-help and thrift. Through personal effort and demonstration the poor were to be shown the way to deal with their poverty. The practice of "settlement" had been at the heart of this approach to poverty since the nineteenth century. This meant that concerned individuals would, for a period, live amongst the rural and urban poor and involve themselves in the kinds of good works that would help in the process of rehabilitation and regeneration.

The promotion of co-operatives and other self-help projects as an element of the paternalistic practices of the middle class must be seen in political context. Such projects were promoted especially during times of labour unrest, according to Mason (1974: 312). As such, they can be viewed as part of a developing battle for the hearts and minds of the labouring classes.⁶ More specifically they can be seen as an attempt to counter growing working-class militancy. They are part of a reformist attempt to do something about social problems such as unemployment and poverty without direct state involvement through the provision of programs to deal with these problems. In an age when more and more unemployed working people were demanding the right to receive support the thrust of these reform efforts was to deflect the demand for rights away from the state by encouraging and assisting the poor and unemployed to solve what were regarded as "their own problems."

THE ORIGINS AND IDEOLOGY OF ADULT EDUCATION IN NEWFOUNDLAND

An examination of the ideologies and practices of the broad-based adult education movement in Newfoundland in the late 1920s and 1930s shows that it was centred

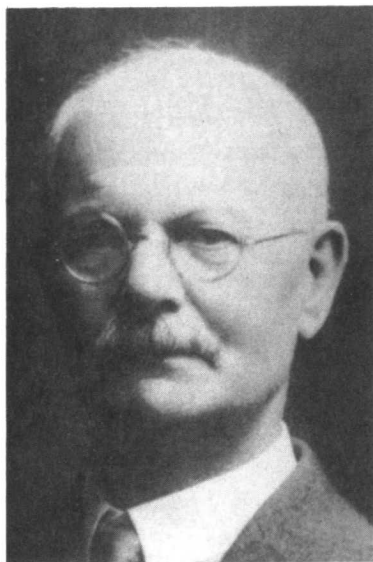
firmly in the charity organizing movement described above. In Newfoundland, as elsewhere, this movement was a response to the growing demands, militancy and political organization of the working class and small producers—for example, what one person, discussing the rise of the Fishermen's Protective Union, described as "the menace of Coakerism" (*Evening Telegram*, April 26, 1921; Overton, 1990). Many of the people involved in promoting adult education were also involved in attempts to organize charity and promote working-class self-help more generally. One of the major figures involved in the adult education movement in the period was J.L. Paton (1863-1946), President of Memorial College. His roots were firmly set in the charity-organizing tradition of reform.

Paton, the ex-High Master of Manchester Grammar School in England, was appointed President of Newfoundland's Memorial College in St. John's in 1925. At Memorial Paton was in close contact with two other important figures in the adult education movement in the 1920s and 1930s, W.W. Blackall (1864-1943) and V.P. Burke (1878-1953). Blackall was on the Board of Trustees of the College. Burke was the convenor of the College's first Board of Governors. A graduate of Columbia University, Burke played a key role in obtaining a grant for the College from the Carnegie Corporation while he was Secretary of Education.

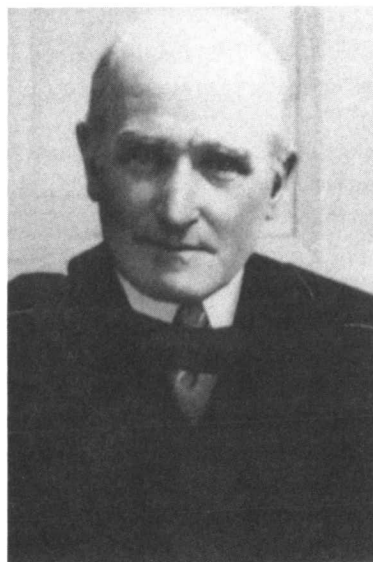
Paton came to Newfoundland as an educational reformer. A somewhat unorthodox figure, he was firmly supportive of an education accessible to all members of society. This support was based on his belief that if democracy was to function effectively then a country's citizens had to be educated so that they would be able to make informed judgements about important social issues.

The story of Paton's connection with the Workers' Education Association (WEA) and with Albert Mansbridge, its leading light, begins with Paton's father, John Brown Paton. Mansbridge first met John Brown Paton in 1904 (Mansbridge, 1940: 143). He was later to acknowledge that Paton's work in bringing "working men and universities into co-operative action" in the 1870s was "in spirit and method of action" identical to that which led to the formation of the WEA (143). The closeness of the relationship between Mansbridge and the Patons is indicated by the fact that J.L. Paton took Mansbridge's son into Manchester Grammar School and into his own home for a period when Mansbridge was away establishing the WEA in Australia (64). Like J.B. Paton, Mansbridge, a Church of England lay preacher, was an active Christian (Kelly, 1992: 248), and he preached "the gospel of education" as an integral part of the gospel of Christianity. The WEA was strongly supported by Carnegie in the period under consideration (273).

Mansbridge's visit to Newfoundland during his tour of Canada and the USA in 1929 was inspired by J.L. Paton (Mansbridge, 1940: 111). The visit took place under the auspices of Newfoundland's Education Bureau. Mansbridge's visit was the occasion for the formation of the Newfoundland Adult Education Association (NAEA).



W.W. Blackall



J.L. Paton

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The WEA was heavily involved in promoting the ethic of self-improvement for the working classes. It promoted education as one of the most important ways in which the working classes might advance themselves. In this it subscribed to an ideology which explicitly eschewed revolution and radicalism. That Paton took essentially the same position is clear from an early address on "Education and the Workingman" made in St. John's in 1926 (Paton, 1926). "The rank and file of Britain's working class," he argued, "regards education as the chief instrument by which they can achieve their emancipation." He went on,

They have determined to have an education system stamped with their own ideals. They have realized, years ago, that not by the guillotine and violence can they accomplish their great revolution, but rather by the slower process of equipping their minds for the task of self-government in politics and in industry.

The need was, he suggested, for "bands of men who will bring the universities to the service of the people." The struggle was to produce working-class leaders who would be a safeguard against the influence of "dangerous demagogues" and an educated working class which would be able to distinguish between "reason and rant."

According to Paton, working-class education was essential if democracy was going to succeed in an age when the symbol of rule was no longer the sceptre, but "the worker's cloth cap." How could the people as a whole govern, how could the will of the majority prevail, how could the citizen be competent to form judgements without the necessary education? The key to democracy was, according to Paton, not the "mere power to vote," but responsibility. And for this education was needed. Nor was education just a question of being able to read and write. It was a question of being able to think:

The three R's are not enough. In Newfoundland we have not even got that. Knowing how to read is no more education than a knowledge of how to use knives and forks is eating. Education's chief purpose is to awaken a thirst after knowledge and human excellence.

However, in Newfoundland the first step down the path to education was to "eradicate, absolutely, illiteracy from the island" (Paton, 1930). These remarks were made during an address to the Newfoundland Teachers' Association Convention at which Paton made much of the obstacle that illiteracy presented for effective democracy. Referring to India, he noted that one of the main obstacles to self-government in that country was the fact that in some sections only 4.6 percent of the men and 0.3 percent of the women could read. Paton also urged teachers to become involved in nature study, arguing that this would be important for Newfoundland's development, since it "could not become a manufacturing country" and people would not be able to live by "taking in each other's washing." The future lay in the effective development of the fishing, forest, mining and agriculture industries. Paton's concerns were not without a sympathetic hearing in some quarters. The *Daily News* (July 9, 1930: 4), in an editorial, expressed concern over the "lamen-

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table number of fine citizens throughout the country who are illiterate" and appealed for action to deal with the problem.

One of the early problems to be taken up by the Adult Education movement was the battle against illiteracy. According to Paton, between 16% and 20% of the population were illiterate in the early 1930s (Paton, 1934). Presumably this meant that they could not read and write *at all*. The problem was thought to have worsened with the onset of the Great Depression, because many families were unable to afford school fees and there was no free and compulsory education. In addition, many schools had been forced to close as a result of a 50% cut in the education grant.

Paton's view of education was that it should be a vehicle for promoting self-help. His position is set out clearly in his booklet *Training in the Service of Man*, published in 1904 (Paton, 1904). Paton's aim was to promote what he called "social solidarity." To this end he sought to teach people to appreciate—and thus accept—"the division of labour" by forcing them to understand the importance of "mutual interdependence" (7).

His barbs in the booklet were aimed at those he considered to be parasites, whether rich or poor. Through an appreciation of labour and the interdependence of society the boy "learns to hate the drone and see what an incubus he is to society" (7). Paton's scheme aimed to develop in people a "sense of social obligation" and "active service." This would lead not simply towards those with means feeling responsible for those who were less fortunate. It would also lead towards the rich actively meeting their social obligations:

The curse of our modern philanthropy is the writing of cheques for charities. Rich men nowadays sit down and discharge their social obligation by writing cheques, very much as in the days of Tetzels they used to absolve their sins by buying indulgences. What the world cries out for is personal interest and personal service and personal affection between the rich and poor. What the world wants is the great yawning gulf spanned betwixt man and man. This no cheque writing nor any other form of delegation will ever accomplish (8).

Active service inspired by Christian love was what Paton thought of as bridging the gulf between the rich and poor. And it was to this ideal that Paton devoted his life. The literacy classes were not simply intended to assist people to read and write. They were to be the vehicle for a more important ideological project:

It is not only the three R's which are taught. Students learn how to care for the body, how to figure out the daily budget, how to dress properly and to sew, how to prepare food, to learn something of the wide world and to work for the common good of all (Paton, 1934: 9).

The NAEA was formed in 1929. Its formation was but one expression of the growing interest in the promotion of working-class education and self-help. Interest in both education and self-help were already deep-rooted within the labouring classes of Newfoundland by the 1920s. Demands for improved education had been part of the platform of the Fishermen's Protective Union. Self-help housing had been tried as had co-operatives and various insurance schemes. But, significantly,



JESSIE MIFFLIN, BERTHA NORTHOVER,
KATHLEEN THOMPSON, MRS. FARWELL, IDA PARSONS
LAURA CANTWELL, MARY MADDOCK

Field Staff of the Newfoundland Adult Education Association

the self-help and education initiatives of the late 1920s and 1930s, especially those conducted under the label of adult education, were largely expressions of middle-class patriotism. Key figures in the development of adult education such as W.W. Blackall and V.P. Burke were influential figures in the Newfoundland Patriotic Association which was active during World War I.

The inaugural meeting of the NAEA was held in the council room of the St. John's Board of Trade on October 12, 1929. The first annual report of the NAEA, including a statement of the Association's aims, was published a year later (Newfoundland Adult Education Association, n.d.). During its first year of operation, the NAEA had attempted to "make haste slowly." A constitution had been drafted and officers were elected. The president of the Association was W.W. Blackall, while the vice-president was a representative of the Rotary Club, A.W. Mews. Other officers included V.P. Burke, Miss E.G. Howley, J.G. Higgins, Miss V. Cherrington, Miss M.E. MacDonald and Thomas Reddy of the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association (NIWA). The 29 original members had increased to 122 by October, 1930, and a number of societies had been invited to co-operate with the NAEA, including the NIWA, the Great War Veterans' Association, the Church of England Institute, the Knights of Columbus (represented by W.J. Browne), the Newfoundland Teachers' Association, the Newfoundland Outport Nursing and Industrial Association (NONIA), the Old Colony Club, the Rotary Club, the Salvation Army, and the Society of United Fishermen. John Middleton, the Governor, had become patron of the Association.

The Association attempted to extend its influence through the creation of branches. By means of study circles, lectures, etc., education was to be brought to the people, according to W.W. Blackall. Thus, not only would the problem of illiteracy be lessened, but a "fuller and wider social intercourse" facilitated. People would be given the "courage to go forth and do things," while, overall, making "the people buoyant" would aid personal advancement as well as serve the cause of national development (Newfoundland Adult Education Association, n.d.).

The early activities of the NAEA included the establishment of a prison education group, the arrangement of correspondence courses, and the ordering of books. Circulars were sent to all the teachers in Newfoundland explaining the aims of the Association; and V.P. Burke, Secretary for Education, arranged for Miss Wil Lou Gray, an employee of the South Carolina Education Department and Supervisor of Adult Schools in South Carolina, to visit Newfoundland.⁷ As a result of this visit, Opportunity Night Schools were started, initially on Bell Island and at the premises of the Imperial Tobacco Co. in St. John's. The Bell Island school was financed by Mr. C.B. Archibald, manager of the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation's iron ore mine, and the Imperial Tobacco endeavour by that company. Volunteer teachers were used in both schools (*Daily News*, September 25, 1930: 1).

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By 1932 the NAEA had established a field staff of six teachers under the direction of Mrs. E.M. Farwell, a graduate of the University of Toronto in Social Service (Blackall, 1932). After being sent to Clemson College, South Carolina for training in Adult Education in 1931, Mrs. Farwell had provided an intensive course of instruction to Mary Maddock, Jessie Mifflin, Ida Parsons, Bertha Northover, Laura Cantwell and Kathleen Thompson, before they were sent to their education "stations" in Bishop's Cove, Botwood, Upper Island Cove, and other places.⁸ The Field Staff of the NAEA was supported by "twelve ladies of missionary spirit" who volunteered their services to help the Opportunity Schools. Although aided in its work by a grant provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the NAEA was experiencing some financial problems by 1932.

THE POLITICS OF SELF-HELP: FROM THE TOP DOWN

As already noted, one of the main aims of the charity-organizing movement of the mid-1920s was to deflect and undermine the growing demand for the right to relief of poverty that emerged in the period. It was no accident that public relief expenditure was one of the main concerns of the middle-class reformers. However, what had been a concern in the 1920s quickly became an obsession in the early 1930s when Newfoundland's fishing industry collapsed, serious destitution became widespread, violent confrontations between near-starving people and the authorities became a regular occurrence, the country tottered towards bankruptcy and the unemployed organized to press for work or dole (Neary, 1988; Overton, 1992).

With the onset of the Depression the Newfoundland adult education movement, spearheaded by the NAEA, became heavily involved in the promotion of self-help, focusing particularly on the promotion of land settlement, vegetable allotments, thrift, citizenship, and co-operatives. This movement was inspired and assisted by Wilfred Grenfell and by the Antigonish Movement. But it drew inspiration from European adult education movements and from the land settlement movement in Britain and elsewhere. It was a top-down movement to promote self-help amongst the labouring classes, led by an assorted collection of politicians, state officials, church leaders, professional educators and philanthropically-minded members of the business class.

As the crisis in Newfoundland deepened in late 1931 and early 1932, the NAEA became more and more involved in a variety of projects intended to promote self-sufficiency. In February and March, 1932, the Association arranged for a series of eight popular talks to be broadcast on topics such as gardening and small farming (*Evening Telegram*, February 20, 1932). The aim of these programs was "to excite discussion" and to this end it was suggested that "radio discussion groups" be organized in various localities. The broadcasts provided information about poultry

rearing and gardening, but the overall aim of the move was to make workers aware of their "patriotic duty." W.W. Blackall's message to the poor was the Biblical one:

Go to the ant, consider her ways and be wise, for, having no guide, overseer or ruler, she provideth her meat in summer and gathereth her food in the harvest.

The adult education network that already existed was intended to be the means through which discussion and promotion of self-help projects would take place. But efforts to organize the outports continued through 1932. The Field Secretary of the NAEA and its teachers visited various communities where they organized meetings that "took a missionary form" (*Evening Telegram*, March 24, 1932). Hymns, prayers and a talk about the aims, objectives and plans of the NAEA were followed by words of encouragement and optimism and the collection of names.

One significant event in this regard was the publication by the Land Development Association (LDA) and the NAEA of the circular *The Restoration of Hope* in late 1932 (National Archives of Canada [NAC], MG 30, Vol. 13, File 8). The circular was almost certainly written by W.W. Blackall. Blackall had been a schoolmaster in England for many years. He moved to St. John's in 1891 and became Headmaster of Bishop Feild College. He later became Superintendent of the Church of England schools. During the First World War he was on the Recruiting Committee and involved in the Newfoundland Patriotic Association. After the War he was a vocational officer. Blackall was well-acquainted with, and impressed by, what had been achieved through adult education in Denmark. He promoted a patriotic adult education movement on the Danish model as a solution to Newfoundland's economic problems in a pamphlet, *The Price of Fish*, published in 1927 (Blackall, 1927). In the pamphlet he explicitly drew on the lessons of the Patriotic Association:

During the Great War we had in Newfoundland a Patriotic Association. It was established to organise the effort of the people of Newfoundland to overcome the foe. It became the leader of the country. Under its directing hand men were enlisted to fight and women to nurse; people were instructed in their duty, moneys were raised, the bereaved heartened, comforts for the men at the front and cots for the wounded were provided (11).

Blackall was also familiar with the work of St. Francis Xavier University and Moses Coady. In fact, contact had been established with the Antigonish Movement in the early 1930s by those involved in the NAEA, and Dr. V.P. Burke, the Secretary of the Newfoundland Bureau of Education, had visited Antigonish. Blackall, like Paton and Burke, was to play a key role in promoting a self-help response to the problems of unemployment and poverty during the Depression.

It was Newfoundland's Bureau of Education that approached the heads of the churches and played a key role in the production and dissemination of the circular *The Restoration of Hope*. The circular, endorsed by the Anglican Lord Bishop of Newfoundland, brought together the newly-formed Land Development Association and NAEA in what was to be a major co-operative effort. This document was

sent to clergy throughout Newfoundland, together with instructions urging them to play a leading role in translating the proposal into action.

The question posed in *The Restoration of Hope* was "What shall be done to rehabilitate and strengthen our people?" Recent events had been traumatic:

In many a lonely settlement of our country the harvest has been for the toiler a blank. The promising load of fish has not yielded enough to meet costs; the potato crop has been ruined by blight or other disease; the winter approaches; the larder is poorly stored; the children are in rags; no labour is in sight; the mother is in great distress and the father downcast (1).

With distress came potential danger:

From those parts of the country of which this picture is true hope is about to vanish, and as hope goes out through the window the spirit of desperation enters at the door. This spirit is a dangerous citizen (1).

The problem for Blackall and others was how to restore hope "in the despondent hearts of our people."

The belief was that much good might be done "through the instrumentality of adult education." Immediately "consolation should be carried to, and courage inflamed in" the despondent. But even this task was beyond the ability of an Adult Education Association able to maintain only a small band of six teachers in the field. The larger task of "helping our people help themselves" could be undertaken only by organizing the adult population into community clubs. Such clubs would encourage "good-fellowship and co-operation" and they would help develop farming and gardening by means of the study and discussion of Department of Agriculture pamphlets on such topics as the breeding and feeding of pigs, poultry raising, and insects and pests.

But the whole movement would have a broader focus:

Those who are at the back of this movement are convinced that the proposed clubs should have the welfare of their country at heart and that consequently at their gatherings the spirit of patriotism should be fostered by the singing of patriotic airs and where possible by a study of the history of their country. It is thought that the Adult Education Association may be able to supply little books of songs and some historical matter either free or at a very low cost for the use of the clubs. In order that this patriotic phase of the movement may be indicated in the name of the club, the name suggested is the Newfoundland Community Club (1).

But the circular also outlined a strategy for promoting self-sufficiency through work in the country's schools. Here the aim was to reduce reliance on the fishing by diversification:

No country can afford to be one-industried. It is not then the hope that our people may become less fish-minded but rather that they may become more land-minded (1).

The "campaign" aimed at "leading our people to till the earth" employed a number of tactics to achieve its object. Of particular note was the promotion of school gardens. The aim was to "influence...the child who is to become the citizen of

tomorrow," but also through the children to generate parental interest in gardening. Moreover, it would be relatively easy to put such a plan into action, given that

Nearly every clergyman in this our land is Chairman of a Board of Education and is therefore in a position to exercise a powerful influence in the schools (2).

In fact, W.W. Blackall had long had an interest in promoting school gardens. He had launched the idea in 1910 and in late 1931 it was revived. The idea continued to be promoted as "poverty stalks around us, and starvation, or something very near to it, is the lot of many" (*Evening Telegram*, February 26, 1932).

The Restoration of Hope initiative was but one element in a broad-based effort to promote citizenship in the early 1930s; it was one strategy employed by the government to try and manage an increasingly difficult situation. Education about citizenship was intended to relieve the immediate pressure on the public relief system by trying to persuade people that it was their patriotic duty to fend for themselves rather than draw state benefits. Government officials such as V.P. Burke were actively involved in promoting citizenship:

I have given a talk to the teachers-in-training on citizenship and how we are governed, with a special appeal to the teachers to give their pupils correct ideas of their duties as citizens, what government is, and what the rule of the people meant for their own welfare and the welfare of the country at large (Public Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador [PANL], GN 13/1, Box 236, File 82: Burke to Alderdice, April 11, 1933).

And by this time the government had prepared its first book on citizenship for use in the school system, *Little Stories About Newfoundland* (Briffett, 1929).

Just as important in promoting self-help was the idea that, if people became engaged in self-help projects, this would prevent demoralization. The demoralization of the unemployed was feared by the middle classes, because it was thought that it might lead to confrontation and violence. At the same time as these projects were being promoted, the government sought to arm the police with tear gas so that they would be better able to deal with the unemployed if problems should arise (Overton, 1992).

Under Commission of Government, citizenship was also promoted as part of a long-term strategy to deal with the country's problems. Underlying this was the idea that Newfoundland's problems were at root moral in nature (McCann, 1987). When Thomas Lodge, one of Newfoundland's governing Commissioners, made this statement in 1937, he was airing views that were widely accepted in middle class circles:

To me the problem of Newfoundland is even more a moral one than a material one. In the moral sphere the outstanding need is for a vigorous education policy (*Manchester Guardian*, March 18, 1937).

The analysis offered by Lodge was that poverty and the dole had undermined morale and created a dispirited and dependent population. Dealing with poverty and dependency in Newfoundland would require a "radical transformation of the spirit which underlies its education system," according to Lodge.

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Another Commissioner, Sir John Hope Simpson, thought along similar lines (Neary, 1993). It was Hope Simpson's view that the dole had sapped independence and initiative. Because the people had been encouraged to regard the state as "the ultimate refuge," the existence of the dole was an obstacle to a self-help solution to the problems of poverty and unemployment (*Daily News*, April 3, 1935). However, it was Hope Simpson's belief that a program of re-education might go a long way towards changing public attitudes. To facilitate this, the Commission of Government appointed V.P. Burke as Director of Adult Education, a position he held from 1935 to 1950. By 1937, Thomas Lodge thought he could point to promising signs in this respect:

There is one hopeful feature in the situation. There is growing up a generation of youth which, I believe, appreciates that a country must work out its own salvation. It is a generation influenced by the work of Mr. J.L. Paton at Memorial College. It may well be that his work will outlive and outweigh that of a whole series of Commissions (*Manchester Guardian*, March 10, 1937).

BACK TO THE LAND

One of the projects most actively promoted by adult educators in response to the crisis of the early 1930s was land cultivation. In this section of the essay private and public efforts to develop self-sufficiency through gardening, small-scale agriculture and land settlement will be examined.

With me shovel on me shoulder,
Sure I'll clear out every boulder,
At daybreak my warm bed I will be scorning —
To our land our All is owing,
So our Food we'll now be sowing,
And I'm off to plant potatoes in the morning
(A.W.Mews, *Evening Telegram*, March 15, 1932).

This song, written by Arthur Mews, Colonial Secretary and a prominent Methodist, was part of the promotional campaign launched by representatives of the back-to-the-land movement that emerged in Newfoundland in the early 1930s. Schemes to settle the unemployed on the land were one feature of this movement. Land cultivation was intended to provide the poor with a means of support through their own efforts rather than by relying on poor relief. It was intended as an antidote to the moral degeneration that was widely thought to result from unemployment and dependence on the state.

Schemes for the settlement of people on the land and the promotion of agriculture and gardening as a means of easing poverty, cutting requirements for public relief and the rehabilitation of destitute people have a long history in Newfoundland (Cadigan, 1992; Handcock, 1994). They also have a long history elsewhere both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The land settlement schemes of the 1930s were part of a back-to-the-land movement which had clear ideological underpinnings.⁹ When in 1935, at Bangor, North Wales, Lloyd George announced that on social and humanitarian grounds the number of agricultural workers in Britain should be increased from the current figure of about one million to two million, he was expressing a sentiment that was widespread at the time (Menzies-Kitchen, 1936: 5). But not all agreed with Lloyd George that it was both possible and desirable to increase substantially full-time employment on the land. Menzies-Kitchen, for example, argued against increased involvement in commercial agriculture but in favour of land settlement as a means of supplementing unemployment relief (23). In this view, land settlement was essentially a social relief measure, involving the development of subsistence production or, at best, part-time farming on small-holdings.

Such agriculture was also being promoted in the United States in the early 1930s through the formation of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, formed in 1931 (Menzies-Kitchen, 1936: 19). Armed with a \$25-million fund, this organization aimed to assist the "'stranded' industrial population" by promoting agriculture. The focus was on those workers displaced by cyclical and seasonal unemployment from, for example, the timber industry, and on the "over-age worker." Groups of from 25 to 100 families were settled on the land, each with from one- to five-acre plots, to raise fruits and vegetables, poultry and pigs and the occasional cow.

In Germany, both the state and private enterprise were involved in land settlement in the 1930s (Menzies-Kitchen, 1936: 21). Some large corporations, including Krupps and Siemens, had also developed housing estates for their workers where a house and half-an-acre of land were provided on a hire-purchase basis. The main object of this development was to provide workers with a degree of support through the periods of unemployment. This, it was hoped, would "render skilled workers less likely to migrate to other firms" during boom periods (Menzies-Kitchen, 1936: 21). It was estimated that foods to the value of at least £20 (\$80) per year could be produced on the land provided by these schemes.

Overall, it is useful to think of land settlement schemes in political terms. These schemes were a means of trying to deal with the political and economic problem of surplus labour during capitalism's periodic crises. During such crises the unemployed must starve or be supported by charity or the state. And workers may not always be prepared to suffer in silence. The Newfoundland land settlement efforts of the 1930s were, like Britain's "home colonisation" schemes in the nineteenth century, examples of what Harris describes as "middle-class philanthropy rather than of working-class self-help" (Harris, 1972: 116). As such they were involved in "the regimentation of the unemployed" (102-144).

In Newfoundland, land settlement became a craze in the early 1930s. The back-to-the-land movement, for indeed it did become a movement, reached its peak in early 1932 at the height of the country's political crisis. Ex-servicemen protested

against pension cuts; the unemployed marched for work and relief; the Penitentiary overflowed; people argued that the government would soon have to use its newly-purchased tear gas to prevent something more serious than a few plate glass windows being broken. According to *The Evening Telegram* of March 9, 1932, "the government was stealing money and getting away with it while the poor man who protested this and tried to prevent starvation was getting gaol." The respectable middle class of St. John's organized a patriotic rally to promote the "soil as our salvation." Chaired by W.W. Blackall of the NAEA, the meeting included the head of the Constabulary, Inspector General Hutchinson, whose troops were facing the unemployed, and Canon A.H. Hewitt. With an incredible ability to look on the bright side of things, J.A. Cochrane, the president of the Newfoundland Teachers' Association, talked about education and the Depression. He argued that "adversity is a great teacher," and that "good often comes out of evil":

If this present depression has helped us to regain our independence, even the suffering of this winter will not have been in vain. The compulsory restriction of emigration, too, has forced us to find employment for our young men at home, and there is plenty for them to do if they would only show some initiative. (*Evening Telegram*, March 6, 1932).

According to Cochrane, a resurgence of pioneering spirit was called for and education could play a key role in "stirring up the people to a sense of their responsibilities." It is clear then that many middle-class observers did not view the Depression as an unmitigated disaster. They saw it as an opportunity to further their own political agendas. This is particularly clear in the case of the country's religious leaders.

Archbishop E.P. Roche of the Roman Catholic Church in his 1932 Lenten Pastoral reminded his flock that Lent was a period for purification of the body. He drew a parallel between the "penance and self-denial" required during Lent and the action which he saw as a necessary response to the Depression more generally (*Evening Telegram*, February 8, 1932). Later Roche repeated his message when he suggested that the world was passing through one of those periodic "volcanic eruptions" which afflict humankind (*Evening Telegram*, March 14, 1932). He argued that it was useless to speculate about the causes of this. However, he clearly thought that the situation in society must be God's will. The Depression was a punishment for wickedness, a purge along the lines of World War I. It was God's means of suggesting that society was in need of "purifying." The correct general response to this, according to Roche, was the creation of a Christian revival to carry out the process of purification. At a more practical level Roche suggested that it would be wise to adapt to conditions and to turn attention to the cultivation of the soil and the revival of the fishing industry.

Other religious leaders made similar arguments. The Anglican Lord Bishop of Newfoundland suggested that there were "possibilities of the present distress being turned to spiritual profit" in the long-term by the church (*Evening Telegram*,

February 16, 1932). He was later to endorse the LDA and the NAEA's plans for *The Restoration of Hope*.

While clearly concerned about the larger question of the spiritual welfare of society as it related to the crisis of the early 1930s, church leaders devoted a great deal of attention to the question of how people should respond to the problems they were being forced to face. Archbishop Roche called for

rigid economy, economy to the point of sacrifice and self-denial, economy that will make relentless war on all waste, extravagance, luxury of every kind. (*Evening Telegram*, March 14, 1932).

Thus, the familiar message was issued to people experiencing falling incomes that they should tailor their suits to the cut of their cloth. Roche called upon both state and household to balance their budgets. He called on individuals—the poor—to cut out “criminal extravagance” in the form of gambling, amusements and liquor consumption. To aid all this he advocated the promotion of citizenship. But Roche went further than simply using the crisis to reinforce the church’s opposition to cheap amusements, drink and gambling. He came out as a firm supporter of land settlement and measures to revitalize the fishing industry. Support for land settlement was also provided by another religious leader, Rev. H.G. Peile, Rector, Canon and Sub-Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in St. John’s. He made clear his thoughts about this matter in the following statement:

The present generation have lost “the adventurous spirit of their forefathers.” To-day we seem less anxious to make real efforts to supply our needs and a certain spirit of idleness can be discerned in many parts. It is no use turning round on God and blaming Him for the hard times through which we are passing. He has given us the treasures of the soil if we will only cultivate them. He has never promised to throw our food at us without labour on our part. As our Wayside Pulpit said some weeks ago “God feeds the birds but He does not throw their food into their nests.” (*Evening Telegram*, March 14, 1932).

He attacked sweepstakes and other things which “encouraged the desire to get rich without work,” arguing that they had reduced “the dignity of honest labour.”

The view that the Depression was a test, whether this test was sent by God or not, was quite widespread in the early 1930s. The question for people who thought this way was how well would society meet the test. Church leaders, as they had always done, enthusiastically participated along with adult educators in what emerged as a broad-based movement to teach Newfoundland’s suffering population the lessons of hard times. The mass unemployment of the early 1930s generated a whole ideological edifice involving judgements about the relationship between people’s moral condition and work and the proper conditions under which support should be provided to the destitute. The moral judgements of the church clearly supported the state’s retrenchment program.

A variety of arguments were used to support the establishment of land settlements. At one level the settlement of the unemployed on the land was seen

simply as a cure for the dangerous condition of idleness. As one "small farmer" writing to the press put it:

It is pitiable to see the crowds of young men who are content to loaf about the streets in the spring and summer, serving their time to become bums and dead-beats instead of turning their hands to some remunerative work (*Evening Telegram*, March 15, 1932).

Land settlement found widespread support particularly among the middle class. It was strongly supported by the adult education movement and the churches. In general, merchants, educators, church leaders, and government officials provided no shortage of good advice to the poor. They were untiring in their suggestions as to how the unemployed might survive by, for example, eating brown bread and potatoes rather than white bread (*Evening Telegram*, March 22, 1932). Such suggestions came together in the land settlement movement, led by W.W. Blackall, who argued that it was now time for the unemployed to "work or perish" (*Evening Telegram*, March 22, 1932). The promotion of land settlement started out largely as a private initiative, albeit one involving state officials and politicians. However, it was the Commission of Government that provided the financial backing for the first settlement established at Markland in May, 1934 (Neary, 1988: 64). A year later the government was involved in promoting much more widespread land settlement.

Advocates of land settlement such as J.B. Paton had long argued that such schemes should include all the unemployed. Those already "tainted with the pauper and dependent spirit," those idle because of "dissipation" or "physical weakness" and those exhibiting "the hereditary instinct of indolence and loafing which they have inherited from pauper ancestors" were to be included in land settlement (Paton, 1895: 81). The supporting argument was that "society must seek to redeem them and to redeem itself from the chronic evil which, like moral leprosy, afflicts them and afflicts society through them." In Newfoundland this philosophy was not put into practice. Rather, those who were thought to threaten the success of the land settlement program were carefully excluded. As W.W. Blackall, the country's leading adult educator, made clear, in Newfoundland's land settlements there was "no room for loafers, grouches or suckers" (*Evening Telegram*, March 22, 1932). In making this statement, he clearly recognized that for land settlement to have even a minimal chance of success it would be necessary to select carefully those of the unemployed who would be most likely to make good farmers. And, while many of those advocating land settlement did show some awareness of the difficulties associated with getting inexperienced people who were, perhaps, also suffering from physical deterioration to make a success of land colonization, it was in fact very common for the promoters of land settlement by the unemployed to show remarkable ignorance of what was involved in making unemployed long-shoremen into self-sufficient farmers or farmer-fishermen. They seem not to have given much consideration to what would happen to the unemployed once they had

been rounded up and shipped out to the back of beyond with their axes, spades and seeds to carve farms out of the wilderness.

Land development as a response to the economic crisis and the problems of poverty, unemployment and relief provision took an organized form in late March, 1932. Following a large "patriotic rally" held at the Pitts Memorial Hall, an organizing meeting, chaired by J.L. Paton, was held at Memorial College (*Evening Telegram*, March 26, 1932). At that meeting a decision to form the Land Development Association (LDA) was made. The announcement of the inauguration of the LDA was made in the *Evening Telegram* on April 1, 1932, by its Chairman, W.W. Blackall. The organizing secretary of the LDA was W.H. Frost, a man who had for some time been promoting cultivation of the soil as the solution to Newfoundland's problems of poverty and unemployment. In February, 1932, Frost had issued this stirring call for "War," presented as a "War — For Life Itself":

We should mobilize, use every source of advertisement and propaganda from press, pulpit, schoolroom, or public lecture to bring home to every class the seriousness of the situation, especially as regards the farmer, the fisherman-farmer, and the outport school children, and the gardener, for an intensive battle the summer long...It is war, is it too much to say it is war to the death, and those who have been to war or those who have been behind the lines during war, know what impossibilities have been made into accomplished deeds during war time. Accept it in that spirit as the profoundest patriotism, as a sacred duty; drive it home to every man, woman and child by every agency available and it will be done, and not only will our people be fed but we shall once more begin to see blue sky and the clouds descending till the horizon shows clear (*Evening Telegram*, February 23, 1932).

Failure to provide in this way would, according to Frost, lead not just to starvation, but to hopeless poverty, and this would lead to "crime, disease and anarchy."

Operating on a "non-partizan and non-sectional" basis, the LDA outlined a broad program that included, as its primary objective in the summer of 1932, the provision of allotments for unemployed men in St. John's (White, 1934: 41). Public-spirited citizens were encouraged to place plots of land at the disposal of the Association. By this means some 600 unemployed men were "given a chance to grow sufficient vegetables for the following year." Of these, it was said that 50 percent obtained good results, with the balance having fair to poor yields. The production of some of the allotment holders suffered because of potato blight.

The focus of these initial efforts at land development was the unemployed of St. John's. However, several groups were formed to encourage self-help, co-operative programs in the outports by means of "the study of specially prepared bulletins" and by providing tools, seeds, and livestock to those who did not possess them.

The main aim of land development was to make the unemployed more self-sufficient. However, the establishment of a market in St. John's in the fall of 1932 allowed for the sale of surplus produce with an estimated value of \$27,000.

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The allotment scheme was continued in 1933. The unemployed were again provided with land, seeds, and fertilizer on condition that "equivalent returns" be made after the harvest. An attempt was made to improve productivity by using the best imported disease-resistant seeds (especially potatoes). Efforts to promote agriculture outside St. John's were intensified in 1933. Fifteen organizers were sent to various districts in one month in order to establish land development groups. These efforts resulted in 260 societies devoted to "the development of outport gardening" being set up. Again, seeds and fertilizers were provided by the government on the condition that they were paid back at the end of the season. At the end of 1933 the LDA received some 18,000 barrels of potatoes for storage, grading and sale. The keeping of sheep, goats and pigs was also encouraged by the LDA. In 1933 the outport societies were provided with 700 young pigs and there were plans to expand this figure to over 2,000 animals in 1934.

The LDA also proposed to develop a "Land Colony" on which "surplus labour" would be settled. In fact, they presented quite detailed plans for a "colonial settlement of 100 men" to the government in 1932, but these plans were not accepted. In 1933 the work of the LDA was presented to the Amulree Commission, which was enquiring into Newfoundland's problems (NAC MG 30 E82, Vol. 17: Evidence of W. White and W. H. Frost). The Commission was favourably impressed by what it saw and endorsed the idea of land settlement in its final report.

These early efforts to promote greater self-sufficiency amongst the poor gave rise to a fully fledged state-sponsored land settlement movement in Newfoundland under Commission of Government. Such settlement was promoted as not just a way of lessening the relief burden or of removing a portion of the dangerous classes from the urban areas where they posed the most threat. They were presented as complete schemes of social reorganization:

If surplus population cannot be absorbed in fishing or mining or industry, if emigration is impracticable, the only alternative is settlement on the land (Lodge, 1939: 172).

The hope for the future of the many is greater attention to the land to improve their standard of living by producing at home substitutes for imported supplies such as pork and beef, beans and peas (Gorvin, 1938, V.1:13).

The appeal of Markland is that it is not a mere experiment in land settlement. It is in conception and in execution something far more important. It is an attempt at complete social reorganization (Lodge, 1937: 66).

As has been suggested, the self-help efforts of the 1930s, including the back-to-the-land (land settlements, etc.) movement and the related co-operative movement, were, like their earlier counterparts elsewhere, *not* grassroots movements. They were initiated and sustained by adult educators, church leaders, state officials, and others.

There had been earlier self-help, co-operative farming, and home colonization movements in Britain which largely emanated from the lower classes—the Diggers and Levellers, the Chartists and Owenites (Armytage, 1961). But the movements

of the late nineteenth century and of the 1930s were largely promoted from above by reform-minded members of the middle class involved in working out and implementing what they saw as solutions to society's pressing problems. The adult educators involved in Newfoundland in the 1930s were in the tradition of reformers such as John Brown Paton and Horace Plunkett, the Irish co-operator. Paton and Plunkett were concerned with the problems of rural areas and with the rural crisis of the late nineteenth century, but the attention that they focused on rural areas cannot be understood without an appreciation of the depth of their concern with the problems of urban decay and unemployment. They attempted to stem the stream of outward migration from rural areas by improving conditions in the countryside. This they hoped would be a means of dealing with the urban poverty that many found so threatening.

For these Christian reformers the impetus for the action was the threat that was posed by *not* introducing reforms which would at least to some degree deal with the problem of poverty and unemployment. Not to act would be to risk social conflagration. To this end, Plunkett preached *Noblesse Oblige*—the title of his 1908 pamphlet—to the Irish gentry in the hopes of persuading what he referred to as “our class” to do their duty to the country (Digby, 1949: 150). The promotion of co-operatives for Plunkett was seen as a way of limiting class division.¹⁰ This is a position that can be found in the writing of supporters of co-operatives in Newfoundland in the 1930s, including the Rev. Oliver Jackson, Superintendent of Newfoundland Home Missions for the United Church, and organizer of Folk Schools (Jackson, 1936).

Plunkett started from the position that it was politically “desirable” to maintain the “peasant proprietor” (quoted in Anderson, 1902: 230-31). This, he argued, could only be done “under existing conditions in the world's markets” by co-operation (231). John Brown Paton took a similar position; only for him it was the restoration of the “English yeoman” that was the focus of his attention (Paton, 1914: 237). Many of Plunkett's ideas on co-operation were applied to Newfoundland in the 1930s by his disciple Margaret Digby, who working for the Horace Plunkett Foundation and with the assistance of the Newfoundland government produced a report on “the opportunities for co-operative organization” in 1934 (Digby, 1934).

In the efforts of Plunkett and others we see a typical path of development. There is no doubt that the early co-operative movement had a radical, self-help thrust to it. However, by the late nineteenth century much of the effort put into promoting co-operatives came from middle-class reformers. And increasingly their efforts were given official sanction and adopted, with modifications, as state policy. This is exactly the path that was followed in Newfoundland in the first half of the twentieth century.

In fact, self-help, co-operatives, and so on continued to be promoted as perhaps *the* main form of social welfare for British colonies throughout the 1930s and the 1940s (Fabian Colonial Bureau, 1945). Such a policy was also applied to New-

foundland by the Commission of Government. This approach proved convenient for governments wishing to try to improve conditions somewhat without spending much money. The encouragement of self-help social welfare was also used to try to counter growing pressure for social programs such as unemployment insurance or even adequate relief provision.

MEANWHILE, AMONG THE UNEMPLOYED...

The story here would not be complete without reference to another educational effort that developed in Newfoundland in the early 1930s.

As the Depression hit Newfoundland many of the poor and unemployed responded to government's attempts to cut relief and refusal to provide work by organizing (Overton, 1992). Organizations of the unemployed sprang up in many communities. The largest movement was in St. John's, but it was rivalled in size and strength in parts of Conception Bay. The people involved in these organizations attempted to protect themselves and their families by demanding work and wages or adequate relief support from the state. To this end petitions were circulated and presented. Meetings were held, speeches were made, research was undertaken, and marches were organized. And there is no doubt that the organizing efforts of the unemployed did meet with some success.

This movement was of and for the unemployed. It produced its leaders, developed and refined its tactics, celebrated some victories and suffered many defeats in confrontations with the police. It was the movement of the unemployed in St. John's, under the leadership of Pierce Power, that emerged as the first and strongest opposition to the "dictatorship" of Commission of Government in 1934.

Until recently the unemployed in the 1930s have remained shadowy figures. But thanks to those police undercover agents who noted carefully everything that was said at their meetings in the period, this situation can now be corrected (Overton, 1993).

Pierce Power, like the middle-class members of the adult education movement, also saw his role as that of education. Power saw himself not as an "agitator" but as an educator of the working class. He was there to tell them about what action would be required if they were to improve their conditions. His speeches document the range of problems faced by the poor and unemployed. He lays the blame for these problems not on the poor themselves but at the door of the government. He tells people about the need to organize, agitate and protest in order to improve conditions. He points to the successes that have come from similar action elsewhere, in Russia, for example. He stresses the need to be prepared for attacks by the authorities if such action is taken. To lie down in the face of government's efforts to limit relief spending was to ensure harsh treatment and to invite still

harsher treatment. To resist and fight was to risk a beating, but without this risk nothing would be gained.

And Power, together with many other members of the unemployed organization, was beaten by police in 1935, during a protest of the unemployed in front of Newfoundland's Colonial Building. But the educator still educated. He talked about the distinction between law and justice. He talked about the need to go on and "make history," about the need to "sweep poverty away." And he talked about the need to "make a Police Force out of the working class" in order to defend the class.

Perhaps Power was not wrong in his assessment of what was needed to protect people from poverty that was as much state-imposed as Depression-induced in the 1930s. Throughout the period the government attempted to limit or even cut relief. And it is quite clear that they were willing to do this even though they were aware of the hardships caused by their policies. When, in 1937, a government official announced that, for some parts of Newfoundland, "dole is done," this statement was supported by the argument that "we must keep the brakes on firmly or our ideal of recreating a self-supporting people will never be realized. This will involve a severe struggle and some considerable hardship, if not actual suffering" (PANL GN 38 S6-1-2, File 4: Mosdell to the Commissioner for Public Health and Welfare, August 30, 1937:8).

And the story here would not be complete without a return to the efforts of the adult educators. The year 1937 saw yet another call to engage in practical patriotism from the urban middle class of Newfoundland. The following is one of a number of patriotic songs and poems celebrating the theme of self-help, co-operation, mutual sacrifice and unity as a way of meeting the challenges of political and economic collapse and reconstruction.

Let's sing of our country's treasures
On land and on the sea.
Let's sing of our sons and daughters
Who yearn for liberty.
Of those in field and wood and mine,
And her brave fishermen.
Let's sing of the day not far away
When the sun shall shine again.

Let's sing as we work together
Heeding our country's call.
The end's in sight when we all unite
Each for the good of all.
Let's sing as we march together,
Onward to meet the foe.
Hand in hand for our dear land
That's the way we'll go.

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This song was composed in the spring of 1937 by Judge W.J. Browne and Alan C. Pittman for inclusion in one of the Co-operative Hour Broadcasts on the radio. It was completed too late for inclusion in the radio broadcasts and was subsequently sung by the popular baritone, James Neville, before a St. John's audience at Pitts Memorial Hall in November (*Evening Telegram*, October 25, 1937). The sentiments expressed may have done little for Newfoundland's poverty-stricken sons and daughters, but no doubt they warmed the hearts of those attending the concert.

CONCLUSION

In Newfoundland in the 1930s the question of self-sufficiency was at the heart of the on-going struggle over the question of support for the destitute. Overall, the provision of public relief was viewed as a measure of last resort, something to be provided by the state when everything else failed and when they were forced to address the needs of the destitute through threat, protest, and riot (Overton, 1992). The assumption was always that people could and should provide for themselves. Even the destitute who were lucky enough to obtain public relief were expected to provide an estimated fifty percent of the food that was thought necessary to keep body and soul together. Not surprisingly, in this context, the state attempted to promote self-sufficiency among the destitute population as part of a strategy to limit as far as possible expenditure on public relief.

As the crisis developed in Newfoundland in the early 1930s, the fishing industry collapsed and other industries came under great pressure. Very quickly a large proportion of the country's population became destitute. The demand for public relief rose dramatically, a demand that was often backed up by threat of violence or by actual violence against the authorities when they refused to provide people with assistance. The government tried by whatever means it could to hold the line on relief expenditures, becoming more desperate as its financial situation deteriorated in late 1931 and 1932.

It was against this backdrop of rising violence and impending financial ruin that the middle and ruling classes tried to lessen the pressure on the state by attempting to shift some of the burden of responsibility for dealing with the growing poverty onto the backs of the poor themselves. Of central importance to these efforts were those involved in adult education. The NAEA, through its involvement in promoting citizenship, land settlement and self-help, aimed, as with the earlier Charity Organizing movement, to reduce the burden on, and pressure for, state relief systems.

Some of the people involved in the movement to promote self-help were, no doubt, acting out of sympathy for the plight of the destitute. But they were also motivated by self-interest and fear. Their anxiety was certainly heightened by the series of violent confrontations between the authorities and the unemployed that

occurred in 1932. But they were also participants in what can only be described as a movement of national salvation. To this end they wanted to find ways of holding back the tide of demand for state support that they saw as threatening to sink the ship of state. In the patriotic quest to save "Newfoundland" from ruin, poor Newfoundlanders might have to be thrown overboard, but something might also be done to help them keep afloat. They could be encouraged to cultivate the land.

What developed in the early 1930s was a battle between the destitute and the state over support. The state always denied responsibility for dealing with unemployment and poverty, while yielding to the demands of the unemployed when it was thought that this was necessary in order to avoid the kind of major confrontation that would throw the government's ability to rule into question. On the other side, the poor and unemployed struggled to survive as they had for generations by producing their own food where possible and by any other means available. They also struggled to survive by organizing and by demanding that the government fulfil its responsibilities to its citizens by ensuring that they did not starve. Nor was this organization in vain. In many cases it led to concrete, if limited, improvements in, for example, the relief ration.

In the context of this struggle, adult education, broadly defined, aligned itself not with the poor and unemployed in their struggle for the right to work or relief, but, I would argue, with the government against them. In this context, they played an important role in efforts to manage the unemployed in the early 1930s.

Notes

¹Paper prepared for the Eighth Biennial Conference of the Canadian History of Education Association, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland on October 13-16, 1994. The comments of Phillip McCann and Patrick O'Flaherty on an earlier draft of this paper are very much appreciated.

²The Antigonish Movement was directed from the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia in the 1920s and 1930s. The leaders of the Movement were Catholic priests who attempted to deal with poverty through the promotion of co-operatives (Sacouman, 1979).

³In an age when "reform" can mean the dismantling of the social programs that provide a degree of protection for the poor and unemployed, when adult education is being used to seed the enterprise culture that governments of all political persuasions are attempting to cultivate, it is clearly imperative that we examine and evaluate the political and ideological projects of adult educators.

⁴We can perhaps see why Burke might have wanted to leave out "governmental oppression" and play down the defence of democracy against various forms of what many were calling "dictatorship." Responsible government had been suspended in Newfoundland in 1934, and in 1937 the country was being ruled by what Thomas Lodge, one of the British-appointed Commissioners who ran the country, called "dictatorship."

⁵Smallwood Papers 3-06-042, Publicity and Advertising, 1949-55, "The Cooperative Movement: 14.

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⁶Charity organizers argued against the idea that co-operatives were part of a socialist plot to undermine capitalism by abolishing profit, suggesting rather that the ideals they promoted implicitly encouraged acceptance of the capitalist systems. The roots of the co-operative movement led by Horace Plunkett lie within the agricultural organizing movement, a rural counterpart to the urban charity organizing movement.

⁷Gray was one of the authors of the brochure *The Opportunity Schools of South Carolina* issued in 1932 (Cartwright, 1935: 83).

⁸Ida Parsons later died in a fire while conducting school at Harbour Grace (Burke, 1937: 298).

⁹The word "settlement" has great significance both in Britain and in Newfoundland. It suggests much more than just placing people on the land. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a settlements movement which involved men and women from universities dwelling amongst the poor and working with them towards their rehabilitation. Most of the settlements were in cities, but the movement was also extended to rural areas. Settlement was one method of adult education. The Newfoundland schemes of the 1930s very much followed this model.

¹⁰Plunkett pioneered state encouragement of self-help and voluntary bodies in both North America and Ireland (Adams, 1949: viii). His influence spread as far afield as China and was firmly felt in the various attempts at rural reconstruction in Newfoundland during the crisis of the 1930s. It was his biographer and disciple Margaret Digby who was called to help Newfoundland in the early 1930s (Digby, 1934). Plunkett's philosophy emphasised the need to encourage initiative and self-help. It was his firm belief that the state should not be responsible for dealing with problems such as poverty and unemployment. Too much state involvement would, he thought, "weaken the resources of self-help" and "encroach on and contract the proper sphere of voluntary effort" (Adams, 1949:ix). People should solve their own problems through their own efforts and, like Digby, Plunkett believed that state help kills self-help. However, in an era when the strength of the state was increasing, Plunkett pushed for this to be directed towards the encouragement of self-help and voluntary effort. As a representative of the state, he played a prominent role in the movement to limit the state's role in dealing with social problems. As President of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, established in 1894, Plunkett's approach to solving rural problems was the exact equivalent of that being promoted by groups like the Charity Organizing Bureau for urban slums. The "keynote" of the Society's proposal was the proposition that "farmers must work out their own salvation" (Anderson, 1902:218). What this added up to in practice was the promotion of co-operatives.

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