

In Search of “Saner Minds”: Bishop James Morrison and the Origins of the Antigonish Movement

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Volume 39, Number 1, Spring 2010

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad39_1art03

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Remes, J. (2010). In Search of “Saner Minds”:: Bishop James Morrison and the Origins of the Antigonish Movement. *Acadiensis*, 39(1), 58–82.

Article abstract

The 1925 United Mine Workers strike in Cape Breton was a crucial turning point in the thinking of James Morrison, the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Antigonish from 1913 to 1950. Before the strike, Morrison had consistently opposed the education reforms promoted by his subordinate, Father J.J. Tompkins. The strike encouraged Morrison to fear radical labor unions, which encouraged him accept the creation of the Extension Department at St. Francis Xavier University. This article, drawing largely on Morrison’s correspondence, traces the evolution of Morrison’s thought within the context of eastern Nova Scotia’s labor history.

In Search of “Saner Minds”: Bishop James Morrison and the Origins of the Antigonish Movement

JACOB REMES

La grève des United Mine Workers du Cap-Breton en 1925 marqua un point tournant crucial dans la pensée de James Morrison, évêque du diocèse catholique d'Antigonish de 1913 à 1950. Avant la grève, Morrison s'était toujours opposé aux réformes de l'éducation préconisées par son subordonné, le père J.J. Tompkins. La grève incita Morrison à craindre les syndicats ouvriers radicaux, ce qui l'encouragea à accepter la création de l'Extension Department à la St. Francis Xavier University. Puisant abondamment dans la correspondance de Morrison, cet article retrace l'évolution de la pensée de Morrison dans le contexte de l'histoire ouvrière de l'est de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

The 1925 United Mine Workers strike in Cape Breton was a crucial turning point in the thinking of James Morrison, the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Antigonish from 1913 to 1950. Before the strike, Morrison had consistently opposed the education reforms promoted by his subordinate, Father J.J. Tompkins. The strike encouraged Morrison to fear radical labor unions, which encouraged him accept the creation of the Extension Department at St. Francis Xavier University. This article, drawing largely on Morrison's correspondence, traces the evolution of Morrison's thought within the context of eastern Nova Scotia's labor history.

WERE THE POPULAR MEMORY OF INTERWAR eastern Nova Scotia a play, James Morrison, the bishop of Antigonish from 1913 to 1950, might play two roles. In Act I, a reactionary Morrison stands in the way of Father Jimmy Tompkins's academic reforms at St. Francis Xavier University. At the climax of that act, at the end of 1922, Morrison exiles Tompkins to distant Canso and soundly defeats the reforms. With Tompkins gone, the bishop and his accomplice, university rector H.P. MacPherson, have free rein over the diocesan college. When the curtain rises five years later for Act II, however, a benign Morrison plays godfather to Tompkins's Antigonish Movement, which the bishop welcomed into the same university in 1928. What the play needs is an entr'acte to connect these seemingly irreconcilable characters, the reactionary who thwarts Tompkins's reforms in 1923 and the reformer who five years later embraces them.

The events of the five years between Tompkins's exile and the establishment of the Extension Department at St. F.X. explain Bishop Morrison's apparent change of heart. Increasing labor militancy in Cape Breton marked those years, most notably the traumatic strike of 1925. Morrison's acquiescence to the Antigonish Movement, institutionalized as the Extension Department, can best be understood as the continuation of a long-standing policy by Morrison to diffuse labor strife in his

Jacob Remes, "In Search of 'Saner Minds': Bishop James Morrison and the Origins of the Antigonish Movement," *Acadiensis* XXXIX, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2010): 58-82.

diocese. The St. F.X. Extension Department expanded into the industrial areas of the diocese in the early 1930s because Morrison perceived an increased threat from communists among Cape Breton's workers. The bishop's unchanging objective was to undermine working-class radicalism. Morrison wanted the men working at all costs, consistently trying to prevent strikes and other disruptions. Increasingly anxious about the labor leaders he and his priests called "Reds," he backed the reformist Antigonish Movement as a way to fight communism.

The Antigonish Movement and the labor militancy of eastern Nova Scotia have both received considerable scholarly attention in the past generation. Those writing on the Antigonish Movement have sometimes gestured at its political setting, noting the poverty and discontent among farmers, fishers, and miners in the region.¹ Similarly, labor historians mention the Catholic Church, usually as just one of the many enemies faced by unionist coal miners, especially during the 1909 strike.² Rarely, if ever, has there been a sustained effort to place the rise of social Catholicism and labor militancy within the same historical frame.³

- 1 See, for instance, Anne Alexander, *The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today* (Toronto: Thompson Education Publishing, 1997), 30-42; and Jim Lotz, "The Historical and Social Setting of the Antigonish Movement," *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* 5 (1975): 99-116. The author thanks Glenda Gilmore, who supervised the writing of the original version of this article; David Frank, David Montgomery, John Herd Thompson, and three anonymous reviewers, whose assistance sharpened its writing and arguments; and Sister M. Roderick MacMullin and Kathleen MacKenzie for their help and welcome in Antigonish. This article is dedicated to the memory of Robin W. Winks (1930-2003), who first suggested its publication.
- 2 See, for instance, David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1999), 100-1, 276, 496; John Mellor, *The Company Store: James Bryson McLachlan and the Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1900-1925* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1983), 52; and John Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922-1935," *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992), 75, 82. If fiction is an indication, this pattern exists in popular memory as well; see, for example, Ann-Marie MacDonald, *Fall on Your Knees* (London: Vintage, 1997), 47. Though the Cape Breton labor movement received attention from historians in the 1970s and 1980s, few scholarly monographs emerged. For popular histories, see Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1976) and Mellor, *Company Store*. Donald Macgillivray's graduate work, "Industrial Unrest in Cape Breton, 1919-1925" (master's thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1971), remains unpublished, except for some related articles; see his "Cape Breton in the 1920's: A Community Besieged," in *Essays in Cape Breton History*, ed. B.D. Tennyson (Windsor, NS: Lancelot Press, 1973), 49-67, and "Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920s," in *Cape Breton Historical Essays*, ed. Don Macgillivray and Brian Tennyson (Sydney, NS: College of Cape Breton Press, 1980), 95-109. David Frank's prodigious and valuable work on the social and labor history of the region also began when he was a master's student in the 1970s; see his "Coal Masters and Coal Miners: The 1922 Strike and the Roots of Class Conflict in the Cape Breton Coal Industry" (master's thesis, Dalhousie University, 1974) and his subsequent "The Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1917-1926" (PhD diss., Dalhousie University, 1979). A series of important articles culminated in his biography of McLachlan. Representative articles by Frank include "Company Town/Labour Town: Local Government in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917-1926," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 14 (May 1981): 177-96; "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation," *Acadiensis* VII, no.1 (Autumn 1977): 3-34; and "Tradition and Culture in the Cape Breton Mining Community in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Cape Breton at 200: Historical Essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial, 1785-1985*, ed. Kenneth Donovan (Sydney, NS: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1985), 203-18.
- 3 Indeed, the only attempt of which this author is aware is Hayden Maxwell Trenholm, "Radical Labour and the Catholic Church: The Case of Cape Breton" (B.A. honours thesis, Mount Allison University, 1977).

Prior scholarship on the Antigonish Movement has been split on the relative importance of structural context compared to individual agency. R. James Sacouman ably describes the structural position of eastern Nova Scotia that allowed a successful social movement to develop. He dismisses the importance of the “small cadre of leaders” and argues that, without the social and economic context he describes, the leaders’ organization and ideas would have been for naught.⁴ In contrast, Ian MacPherson acknowledges the structural and cultural context, but he credits Tompkins and lay leaders for the “dynamism” of eastern Nova Scotia’s cooperative movement.⁵ Both scholars, however, were preoccupied with the success of the Antigonish Movement *after* its founding, and with its ability to attract new members and build sustainable cooperative enterprises. Neither emphasizes the infrastructural success of the Antigonish Movement or how its institutional home, the St. F.X. Extension Department, came to be established. The leaders whom MacPherson extols and Sacouman dismisses were largely clerical and thus under Bishop Morrison’s ecclesiastical control. These same men had attempted change within the university before, with a short-lived People’s School and an unsuccessful plan to join a federation of Maritime universities; but without Morrison’s support their plans went nowhere. The Extension Department was fundamental to the Antigonish Movement’s organization. As a larger movement, its success in mobilization can be traced to more than one of the elements Sacouman and MacPherson discuss: systemic regional underdevelopment, a history of cooperative enterprise, support from the state, and strong personal leadership, among other factors. But as an initiative and institution within the Diocese of Antigonish and St. Francis Xavier University, the Antigonish Movement required Morrison’s support, or at least his permission. Given Morrison’s

- 4 Robert James Sacouman, “Social Origins of Antigonish Movement Co-operative Associations in Eastern Nova Scotia” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1976), 7; Daniel MacInnes, “Clerics, Fishermen, Farmers and Workers: The Antigonish Movement and Identity in Eastern Nova Scotia, 1928-1939” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 1978). Like Sacouman, MacInnes is a sociologist; he analyzes the development of the Antigonish Movement through identity theory and describes the way the movement sacralized a new identity. In emphasizing the movement’s social and cultural aspects, MacInnes follows Sacouman in de-emphasizing the choices and agency of individual actors. Indeed, MacInnes argues that while Tompkins was “an important variable,” he is ultimately a distraction from understanding “the development of a new Catholic identity and the reformulation of belief in this identity” (158-9).
- 5 Ian MacPherson, *Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada 1900-1945*, Carleton Library 116 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1979), 100. This emphasis on personality and leadership is repeated in more recent scholarship, which has largely consisted of biographies and biographical sketches of Antigonish Movement leaders. See, for example, Andre P. Grace, “The Gospel According to Father Jimmy” *Convergence* 28 (1995): 63-79; Jim Lotz and Michael R. Welton, *Father Jimmy: The Life and Times of Jimmy Tompkins* (Wreck Cove, NS: Breton Books, 1997); Ernest Stabler, *Founders: Innovators in Education, 1830-1980* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986), chap. 4; and Michael R. Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2001). Non-biographical works, which have rarely been written by historians, have emphasized the movement’s ideology, successes, organization, and legacy, but they have breezed over the question of Morrison’s acceptance of the Extension Department. See, for example, Alexander, *Antigonish Movement*; Lotz, “Social Setting”; and Scott MacAulay, “The Community Economic Development Tradition in Eastern Nova Scotia, Canada: Ideological Continuities and Discontinuities between the Antigonish Movement and the Family of Community Development Corporation,” *Community Development Journal* 36 (2001): 111-21.

strident opposition to previous reform, his later support of the Extension Department calls out for explanation. The recent analyses of Peter Ludlow, arguing that Morrison was cautious in accepting change but never stood in the way of needed reforms, offer a logic based on an essential consistency in Morrison's thoughts and actions. The main argument of this article, however, is that the evidence shows that Morrison did have a crucial change of heart, and that the best explanation for his acceptance of the Antigonish Movement is his having witnessed the labour strife of 1925.⁶

Between 1908 and 1919, St. F.X. vice-president Father James J. Tompkins had devoted himself to expanding the reach of the university and making certain that it worked, in his phrase, "for the people." Tompkins's reforms have been well documented, especially his attempt to merge St. F.X. into a secular, federated university based in Halifax.⁷ In many instances, Bishop Morrison opposed Tompkins's reforms from his position as the priest's ecclesiastical superior and, by virtue of his episcopal position, as the chancellor of the university.

Among Tompkins's reform objectives at St. F.X. was an annual people's school, a Danish-style folk high school focusing on cooperativism, leadership, and the liberal arts. Though Morrison had shown some interest in providing educational opportunities in industrial Cape Breton in order to cultivate the "saner minds of the Unions," his interest, as this phrase suggests, lay in developing a cadre of lay Catholic leaders who could challenge the power of radicals in the miners' union rather than in the wholesale educational reforms that Tompkins championed.⁸ When Tompkins suggested a people's school to be financed by the Carnegie Corporation, Morrison opposed the idea. As chancellor, he directed his vice president not to pursue Carnegie funding.⁹ Tompkins persevered and successfully created the school – sessions were held January through March 1921 and 1922 – but Morrison offered only pro forma support. It is unclear how Tompkins won what he called the "Debate of the People's School," but it seems that he convinced the board of governors to overrule Morrison's objections.¹⁰ "The Peoples' School is a most wonderful success," Tompkins crowed

6 See Peter Ludlow, "'Cautious but Willing': Archbishop James Morrison, Fourth Bishop of Antigonish," (master's thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2004); and Peter Ludlow, "Fostering Social Awakening 'along safe and sane lines': Archbishop James Morrison and the Antigonish Movement," Canadian Catholic Historical Association *Historical Studies* 72 (2006): 29-53.

7 See James D. Cameron, *For the People: A History of St Francis Xavier University* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), chaps. 8, 9; Alexander, *Antigonish Movement*, 65-72; Lotz and Welton, *Father Jimmy*, 35-55; MacInnes, "Clerics, Fishermen, Farmers and Workers," 158-73; and Michael Welton, "Fraught with Wonderful Possibilities: Father Jimmy Tompkins and the Struggle for a Catholic Progressivism, 1902-1922" (Research Network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning Working Paper No. 57, 2002). Tompkins's letters to officials at the Carnegie Corporation document the federation battle from his perspective. See Maritime Provinces Educational Foundation grant file, box 211A, Carnegie Corporation of New York records, Columbia University Library, New York (MPEF file, Carnegie Corporation, CL). The summary that follows in this article is drawn primarily from Cameron's history and from Tompkins's letters

8 Morrison to C.F. MacKinnon, 17 November 1920, and Morrison to J.H. MacDonald, 24 November 1920, box 6, folder 42, Bishop James Morrison Papers, fonds 4, Archives of the Diocese of Antigonish, Antigonish, NS (Morrison Papers, ADA).

9 Morrison to Tompkins, 16 December 1919, box 6, folder 38, Morrison Papers, ADA.

10 Tompkins to Neil McNeil, 27 January 1921, MN AP07.31, and Tompkins to McNeil, 20 January 1920, MN AP07.25, Archbishop Neil McNeil Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto, Toronto (McNeil Papers, AAT).

to his friend Neil McNeil, a former Antigonish diocese priest had become archbishop of Toronto. Yet despite his triumph, he still despaired of his superiors. Writing of Bishop Morrison and University Rector (President) H.P. MacPherson, he complained to McNeil, “our leaders around here are dead and apologists for the dead.”¹¹ For reasons discussed in detail below, after 1922 Tompkins was no longer at St. F.X. to protect his project; after two other sessions were held in Glace Bay, Morrison and MacPherson ended the people’s schools.¹² Tompkins’s success in pushing through the people’s schools over Morrison’s objections may have strengthened the bishop’s resolve in future battles with reformers.

Until he was exiled at the end of 1922, Tompkins also battled Morrison over a Carnegie Corporation proposal to federate the region’s many small, denominational colleges into a nonsectarian university in Halifax. Tompkins’s support for university federation stemmed from his reformist idealism: he believed that a centralized university would create more educational opportunities for the ordinary people of the Antigonish diocese. Morrison’s correspondence suggests that his opposition had three themes: his conservative desire to diminish the role of secular organizations in the lives of Catholics, his distrust of Protestants, and his genuine fear that removing St. F.X. to faraway Halifax would discourage attendance from eastern Nova Scotia.¹³ Tompkins imagined that the Carnegie plan would sail through on the support he perceived among the people of the diocese, the parish priests – particularly those in the industrial areas – and the Catholic hierarchy in the other Atlantic dioceses. However, he faced fierce opposition from his ecclesiastical and university superiors, Morrison and MacPherson. “We have two terrible men at the head of this institution and we are up against the strength of utter weakness and blindness,” Tompkins complained to his friend McNeil. Though MacPherson’s opposition to the merger was well known, he mostly expressed it by remaining aloof; he was the only university president who did not correspond with the Carnegie Corporation about it.¹⁴

- 11 Tompkins to McNeil, 20 January 1920, MN AP07.25, McNeil Papers, AAT (emphasis in original). On McNeil’s cohort of Antigonish priests who dispersed within the Canadian hierarchy, see Mark G. McGowan, “The Maritimes Region and the Building of a Canadian Church: The Case of the Diocese of Antigonish after Confederation,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Historical Studies* 70 (2004): 46-67.
- 12 M.M. Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny* (New York: Harper, 1939), 5. Peter Ludlow attempts to diminish the extent to which Morrison discouraged Tompkins’s reform impulses. To do this, however, he must ignore the considerable evidence of Morrison’s opposition to the people’s schools. Similarly, Ludlow does not discuss the difference between their educational philosophies. The Danish model of folk schools that Tompkins supported was explicitly education for education’s sake and emphasized the liberal arts. Morrison, in contrast, wanted practical education. See Ludlow, “Social Awakening,” 37. On the Danish model, see Stabler, *Founders*, 11, 12.
- 13 See, for example, Morrison to P. di Maria, 15 December 1922, box 8, folder 51, Morrison Papers, ADA. As rector of St. Dunstan’s College earlier in his career, Morrison had pursued affiliation with Quebec’s Catholic Université Laval. In that case, St. Dunstan’s remained independent and merely relied on Laval for its ability to confer degrees; Catholics on Prince Edward Island were not threatened with any loss of control. On the other hand, Morrison did not always reject working with Protestants. During World War I, he served as honorary president of Antigonish’s Canadian Patriotic Fund, which included Protestant leaders. See Ludlow, “Cautious but Willing,” 18-19, 61.
- 14 There are few references to the amalgamation proposal in MacPherson’s personal papers at the St. F.X. University Archives, and there was almost no correspondence between him and Morrison regarding amalgamation. Nevertheless, Dalhousie President Stanley Mackenzie recognized from the

It was Morrison, with MacPherson's tacit support, who personally led the campaign against amalgamation. At the 1922 annual retreat for the diocese's priests, Morrison "set himself up as the sole spokesman" on the issue of federation, a bitter and angry Tompkins wrote to his friends at Carnegie: "When he was through with a most remarkable exposition of the subject he invited questions. That was all he would permit."¹⁵ The bishop impugned the motives and mental fitness of church leaders in other parts of the Maritimes who supported federation and rigged the process by which the regional hierarchy asked the opinion of the Vatican by asking the secretary of the Holy Office for a negative ruling. He exiled a key Tompkins ally from Antigonish to the small village of Havre Boucher and, according to Tompkins's telling, "tr[ie]d to raise a national cry, Scotch against Irish." He demoted Tompkins from his position as dean of students. Finally, he forbade publication of any news about the controversy in the diocesan newspaper.¹⁶

On 19 October, the St. F.X. board of governors met to reject amalgamation formally. With Chancellor Morrison in the chair, the board's few pro-federation partisans were quickly overwhelmed. Morrison opened the meeting by reading the vehement report of a committee he had appointed in August, which argued in part: "Catholics of the Maritime Provinces are forbidden by common sense and the natural law to give up their distinctively Catholic liberal arts work for a diluted, semi-Catholic, semi-pagan course of instruction in this proposed non-sectarian university."¹⁷ Morrison also dishonestly reported that the Maritime bishops opposed amalgamation, when in fact he stood almost alone among his brother bishops. Not surprisingly, the board of governors voted against the plan.¹⁸ Two months later, Morrison banished Tompkins to Canso, a desperately poor, predominantly Protestant fishing village. Without the participation of St. F.X., the plan fell apart, with the exception of King's College federating with Dalhousie University. That Morrison could scuttle the entire project, which had originally included half a dozen colleges, bespeaks his institutional power.

start that MacPherson opposed the plan and thought that if a Catholic school were included in the amalgamated university, it would not be St. F.X. See Mackenzie to Sills (copy to W.S. Learned), 11 July 1922, MPEF file, Carnegie Corporation, CL. The rector also apparently told Tompkins that he was opposed to the plan, or so Tompkins reported to Neil McNeil, 5 May 1922, MN AP05.34, McNeil Papers, AAT. See also Archbishop Edward J. McCarthy to Cardinal [Gaetano] de Lai, 10 January 1923 – declaring MacPherson a "persona non grata" in Halifax because of his opposition to the merger – box 4, "Letters from Archbishop," Archbishop Edward J. McCarthy fonds, Halifax Archdiocesan Archives, Halifax, NS. Indeed, MacPherson had declared himself against any hypothetical amalgamation even before the Carnegie report suggested it. See Cameron, *For the People*, 183-4.

15 Tompkins to Learned, 19 July 1922, MPEF file, Carnegie Corporation, CL (emphasis in original).

16 Cameron, *For the People*, 185-6; Morrison to Raphael Merry del Val, 11 November 1922, box 8, folder 51, Morrison papers, ADA; Tompkins to Learned, 20 October 1922, MPEF file, Carnegie Corporation, CL; Tompkins to Learned, 26 May 1922, MPEF file, Carnegie Corporation, CL; George Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia* (New York: P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1953), 107. The exiled ally was James Boyle. Four other professors also left the university in the same period, and though Tompkins claimed that they left in disgust (or were exiled), Cameron suggests that they left for other reasons. See Cameron, *For the People*, 472-3n69 and surrounding text.

17 "A Report On the Proposed Federation of the Maritime Universities, Submitted to the Governors of St. Francis Xavier's College by a Committee Appointed by His Lordship Bishop Morrison," p. 4, St. Francis Xavier 1919-55 grant file, box 318, Carnegie Corporation, CL.

18 Cameron, *For the People*, 187.

In retrospect, it is apparent that James Morrison “saved” the university from a plan that would have removed it to Halifax and placed it under the dominance of Dalhousie. From our contemporary vantage point, with St. F.X. having consistently ranked first among Canadian undergraduate universities in recent *Maclean's* surveys, the bishop’s refusal to merge with other universities might even seem prescient.¹⁹ But, at the time, the reformist voices in the diocese were urging federation. The faculty had voted unanimously for the plan. When Tompkins visited the Cape Breton industrial area, he had found full support from the priests there; a Tompkins ally reported “Cape Breton safe” in regards to its support of the merger.²⁰ The most vocal clerical supporters of federation were known as reformists: science professor Hugh MacDonald, a priest whom Tompkins referred to as “very much identified with Labor”; D.M. MacAdam, the pastor of Sydney’s Sacred Heart and one of the most senior priests in the industrial area; J.M. Kiely in multi-ethnic Whitney Pier; and J.H. MacDonald in New Waterford, who would take MacAdam’s position when he died.²¹ Thus, while in the long-term Morrison’s decision to block the Carnegie plan meant that there would remain in eastern Nova Scotia a strong university, at the time he handed the diocese’s reformist priests a major defeat. Those who served the workingmen of the Cape Breton mines had been ignored, and the leader of the reformists had been sent to out-of-the-way Canso. Since the personal income of a priest depended on the wealth of his parish, it was a grave matter to be transferred to a poor one. Moreover, Tompkins was educated in Rome, had been a university administrator, and had never before held a pastoral position; to be moved to Canso, with 1,626 people, of whom only 877 were Catholics, was a clear signal.²² Morrison’s message to the young, reform-minded priests who considered Tompkins their leader was unmistakable: watch out, or you will suffer the same fate

After a bout of depression, during which he bemoaned his fate, cursed Morrison, and toyed with the idea of leaving the diocese, Tompkins got to work on the social conditions of Canso and neighboring Little Dover. He created a model for Catholic social action based in adult education and reaching into finance and business. The fishing industry in the Maritimes was in a state of crisis, with fishers facing stiff competition from trawlers and unable to recoup from the sales of their fish anywhere near what it cost to catch them. Tompkins argued that organization and cooperation

19 See, for example, Mary Dwyer, “Our 16th Annual Rankings,” *Maclean's*, 13 November 2006, 74. This retrospective argument is adopted by Cameron, *For the People*, chap. 9, and Ludlow, “Social Awakening,” 39-42.

20 John R. MacDonald to Neil McNeil, 19 June 1922, MN AP05.37a, McNeil Papers, AAT. MacDonald’s source was J.H. Nicholson, a New Waterford pastor. Sydney real estate and insurance broker P.J. Webb agreed that Cape Breton industrial area clergymen favored the merger. See Webb to Angus L. Macdonald, 2 January 1922, item 66, folder 1348A, vol. 1532, MG 2, Angus L. Macdonald Papers, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, Halifax, NS.

21 Tompkins to Learned, 3 February 1922, MPEF file, Carnegie Corporation, CL; Learned to Stanley Mackenzie, 3 February 1922, MPEF file, Carnegie Corporation, CL. Tompkins, like Nicholson and Webb, expressed confidence that he had support from the industrial area priests.

22 Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*, volume 1, Table 38 (Ottawa, 1924). Also included in Tompkins’s parish was the fishing hamlet of Little Dover, a town so small that it did not merit a separate count in the census, though Lotz and Welton estimate its population at 400 (*Father Jimmy*, 69).

were the needed remedies. He encouraged his parishioners to form study clubs, in which they taught themselves about their problems and found ways to solve them. They banded together to raise the prices of their fish and lobster. On Dominion Day, 1927, rather than celebrating the 60th anniversary of Canadian Confederation, they rallied publicly to ask what Confederation had done for them, a question that eventually led to a royal commission on the state of the fishing industry.²³ Tompkins's work in Canso and Little Dover led to a broader collection of adult study clubs, cooperative enterprises and housing, and credit unions that came to be known as the Antigonish Movement.

The traditional narrative of the movement follows Tompkins to Canso and stays with him as he performs organizational miracles and reforms the entire fishing economy. It then credits him and his cousin Father Moses Coady with the creation of the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier – the fruition of Tompkins's dream of making St. F.X. a center of adult education.²⁴ But forcing the story of the Antigonish Movement into the biographies of Tompkins and Coady puts the narrative in a misleadingly rural context.²⁵ This is not to suggest that the rural context in eastern Nova Scotia was unimportant; indeed, Tompkins and Coady manifestly developed their ideas in rural locations. However, decisions made in the diocese could not ignore the reality that a large proportion of the diocese's residents were in urban areas, and so to understand the institutional origins of the Antigonish Movement we must examine not only the rural parts of the region but the events of the industrial areas. Indeed, Tompkins's supporters first on federation and then the Antigonish Movement tended to be not in rural areas but in the Cape Breton industrial area, where the church could not avoid coming into contact with radical labor. It is no coincidence that "exile," for Tompkins's priest-professor allies at the university, meant being sent to small villages. Restoring the urban context reveals what Morrison saw in the Antigonish Movement. While it took on the trappings of a rural cooperative movement in the tradition of social Catholicism, the movement, in Morrison's eyes, was the Catholic Church's weapon against secular, industrial radicalism. Tompkins and the Antigonish Movement came to represent the lesser of two evils for Morrison because of the militancy of Cape Breton's industrial workers and the fact that

23 Lotz and Welton, *Father Jimmy*, 55-90; Boyle, *Father Tompkins*, 111-30. On the political context of this movement, see Ernest R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979).

24 The most influential book that follows this pattern is Alexander Laidlaw, *The Campus and the Community: The Global Impact of the Antigonish Movement* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1961), 60-70, on which subsequent historians have heavily relied. For subsequent examples of this narrative see, most obviously, the biographies of Tompkins by Boyle and by Lotz and Welton as well as Grace, "The Gospel," and Gregory Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism: Political Thought in the Thirties and Forties* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980). Even Anne Alexander, writing ostensibly about Moses Coady, focuses on Tompkins's story in her chapter on the movement's prehistory. See Alexander, *Antigonish Movement*, 65-75. Acquaintances in eastern Nova Scotia also told the author this general story about the Antigonish Movement.

25 Peter Ludlow's biography of Morrison, "'Cautious but Willing,'" rescues the Antigonish Movement from Tompkins's life, but it is so focused on rescuing Morrison's historical reputation that it does not adequately explain the bishop's decisions. His subsequent article fails to shift the geographical context of the Antigonish Movement, mentioning the diocese's industrial strife only a single time, and then in the context of the 1922 strike. See Ludlow, "Social Awakening," 43.

Morrison perceived unionism, particularly red unionism, as a threat to the Catholic Church.

The long and bitter strike of 1925 was a crucial turning point for Morrison's understanding of working-class politics and the policy of his diocese regarding its working-class members. Morrison's consistent theme about the "industrial situation" was a desire for labor peace. He wanted the men working and going about their lives, but he was not an apologist for capital; if he criticized labor leaders when they called for strikes, he also condemned the company when it closed a mine. He hoped and expected that the government would step in to shore up the failing industry. To counter the radical leaders he saw as a bad influence, he explored the possibility of a Catholic labor union of the sort then being organized in Quebec. After the 1925 strike ended in defeat for the UMW, the influence of radical labor in the region declined, at least until the Second World War. But Morrison's fear of Communism seemed to grow as the Depression deepened and radicals increased their visibility if not their influence.²⁶

In the late 1920s, Tompkins, exiled in Canso, positioned himself and his cooperativism as a third way between harsh, unfettered capitalism and atheistic communism. After the 1925 strike, Morrison came to appreciate the Antigonish Movement as a stabilizing force not only for the fishers and farmers of rural areas but also for the miners of Cape Breton coal towns. The Antigonish Movement kept its followers firmly within the Catholic Church, proposed only reform to the existing economic system rather than revolution, and aimed to keep the men on the job.

The Church also had an institutional interest in workforce stability, since parish finances were dependent on contributions deducted from miners' wages. The check-off system was a long-standing feature of mining: rent for company housing, union dues, and donations to churches and hospitals all came out before a miner saw his pay. The reactions of Morrison and his parish priests to a 1926 company proposal that the entire check-off system be discarded reveal its importance to church finances; one pastor wrote: "If the 'check off' is done away with, I fear our churches, schools, and hospitals in Cape Breton will suffer. Over fifty percent of those who are now paying through the office towards Church Hospital etc will pay nothing if left to their own free will."²⁷ Another concurred: "Our people are willing to contribute to the church in this way but when it is left entirely to themselves to contribute in person and especially when the case of young boys [also working in the mines] is considered, it means that the revenue will be cut in two and the parishes cannot stand that with their many financial obligations."²⁸ Parishioners also faced collections in church each week, often offered to various funds or to bodies farther up the hierarchy such as the diocese, the Vatican, mission funds, and the like. Despite this structured giving, many

26 On the increased visibility of Communists in the 1930s, see John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, Canadian Centenary Series 15 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985). For a sustained examination of Cape Breton Communism, see Manley, "Red Stuff," as well as David Frank and John Manley, "The Sad March to the Right: J.B. McLachlan's Resignation from the Communist Party of Canada, 1936," *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 115-34.

27 M.N. Tompkins to Morrison, 8 February 1926, box 41, folder 89, Morrison Papers, ADA.

28 J.H. Nicholson to Morrison, 20 January 1926, box 41, folder 89, Morrison Papers, ADA.

parishes were in debt, and the industrial area parishes, and with them the diocese, depended on working men to fill their coffers.²⁹

Striking or laid-off men had less money to contribute to their parishes. As Morrison noted in 1922, "I sincerely hope the labor difficulties will soon be settled. Otherwise we will be in bad shape as to the various parish liabilities around the mines."³⁰ Priests confirmed that the Church got less money during work stoppages. At the end of 1922, for instance, New Waterford's J.H. MacDonald remitted donations to a half dozen funds: "I was hoping that the amount would be larger," he apologized, "and that we could send it before now, but there are so many of the people only commencing to get out of debt, after the hard times of last winter and spring."³¹ While the clergy undoubtedly cared about the pain that strikes caused their parishioners, a major issue for them was church finance.

Morrison had scant understanding of the conditions or politics of the industrial area of his diocese. Antigonish and the mines were far apart geographically and in consciousness, and no newspaper article or conversation with a parish priest could have provided Morrison with a full comprehension of the living and working conditions in the mining towns.³² His letters reveal an unsophisticated grasp of industrial disputes by referring to them almost always in the passive voice. In a 1920 letter to C.F. MacKinnon, for example, Morrison commented: "I have been following with anxious interest the developments of the labour unrest around the industrial centers of Cape Breton County, and it is sincerely to be hoped that conditions will soon become stabilized and regain normal standards."³³ "Labor troubles," to him, were something that simply "materialized."³⁴ And, as in this typical phrase from a 1925 letter to M. MacGillis, he accorded labour troubles agency of their own: "Labor troubles have brought about these trying circumstances."³⁵ For Morrison, strikes simply happened.

To the extent that people caused labour unrest, Morrison blamed radical union leaders. In the autumn of 1920, Morrison had written that he hoped that "the saner minds of the Unions will be able to exert a healthy influence."³⁶ Strikes, in his view, were never in workers' interest; he wrote in 1922: "I sincerely hope the parties may come to some reasonable agreement, and give the poor people an opportunity to make a decent and competent livelihood."³⁷ Morrison's conception of labor relations did not admit the possibility that strikes could be a necessary way to "give the poor people an opportunity." This idea that the workers were simply controlled by bad leaders was

29 Mellors (*Company Store*, 52) makes a similar, if more polemical, point in regards Morrison's predecessor John Cameron and the 1909 strike.

30 Morrison to J.H. MacDonald, 21 August 1922, box 8, folder 50, Morrison Papers, ADA.

31 J.H. MacDonald to Morrison, 2 December 1922, box 36, folder 67, Morrison Papers, ADA.

32 Ludlow argues that Morrison's distance from Sydney made his ecclesiastical management difficult as well. See Ludlow, "'Cautious but Willing'," 46-51. On Cape Breton complaints about the dominance of outsiders – including those on mainland Nova Scotia – who did not understand local conditions, see Macgillivray, "Community Besieged," esp. 52, 62.

33 Morrison to C.F. MacKinnon, 24 November 1920, box 6, folder 42, Morrison Papers, ADA.

34 Morrison to C.F. MacKinnon, 17 November 1920, box 6, folder 42, Morrison Papers, ADA.

35 Morrison to M. MacGillis, 7 April 1925, box 10, folder 62, Morrison Papers, ADA.

36 Morrison to C.F. MacKinnon, 17 November 1920, box 6, folder 42, Morrison Papers, ADA.

37 Morrison to J.J. Macneil, 1 February 1922, box 7, folder 48, Morrison Papers, ADA.

shared by many of the diocese's priests, particularly the more conservative ones. "Our poor miners are suffering," J.J. Macneil wrote in 1923, "and paying dearly for their cowardly surrender to their radical leaders during the past years."³⁸

Since 1909, when a group of radicals led by James B. McLachlan first tried to organize the coal miners of Nova Scotia into District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America, the region had grown increasingly radical and strife-torn until the crescendo of violence and misery in 1925. The unsuccessful 1909 strike for recognition set the pattern for future labor battles, including evictions from company houses, militia occupation of the region, and long-lasting bitterness between the strikers and the operators. It took another ten years for the radicals to reconstitute and win recognition as District 26 of the UMW. The new union's constitution drew liberally from that of the Industrial Workers of the World, and McLachlan, its primary leader, dreamed openly of a worker's democracy.³⁹

Besides recognition of the UMW, the nationally and provincially militant year of 1919 was otherwise quiet in eastern Nova Scotia, and the union had several years of success through traditional negotiations without resorting to militant action.⁴⁰ But the merger of all Nova Scotia coal and steel concerns into a single company, the British Empire Steel Corporation, or Besco, made the union's job more difficult. Management demanded large wage cuts and seemed willing to fight. In 1921, the union forced wages to stay steady – though workers had hoped for an increase – only after the government stepped in and made clear it would not tolerate any disruption in the coal supply.⁴¹

The negotiations that started in December 1921 did not go as well for the union. Besco insisted miners take a one-third wage cut from the previous year. After a season of unsuccessful negotiations, the men started an on-the-job slowdown – a new and controversial tactic in Canada. As the dispute wore on, the rhetoric of the union leaders became more and more militant. In March, McLachlan issued a pamphlet to rally the men: "War is on, a class war. . . . War is on, and it is up to the workers in the mines of the British Empire Steel Corporation to carry that war into the 'country' of the enemy." Meanwhile, at McLachlan's request, the Communist Party sent organizer Tim Buck to Cape Breton. At a mid-summer meeting, the district voted to join the Red International of Labor Unions over Buck's objections, who, in ironic contrast to Morrison, feared uncontrollable rank-and-file radicalism. In August, the company and the union leadership came to a compromise agreement. But the men refused to accept it and instead declared another new tactic: a one-hundred-per cent strike in which maintenance men would be forbidden to keep the pits dry, thus threatening permanent damage to the company's assets. The threat had its intended effect, and the company settled in September.⁴² The 1922 strike was remarkable not only for its new tactics,

38 J.J. Macneil to Morrison, 19 December 1923, box 38, folder 74, Morrison Papers, ADA.

39 Frank, *McLachlan*, 138-40.

40 On labor militancy in Amherst and Halifax, see Nolan Reilly, "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919," *Acadiensis* IX, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 56-77; Suzanne Morton, "The Halifax Relief Commission and Labour Relations during the Reconstruction of Halifax, 1917-1919," *Acadiensis* XVIII, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 91; and Suzanne Morton, "Labourism and Economic Action: The Halifax Shipyards Strike of 1920," *Labour/Le Travail* 22 (Fall 1988): 78-80.

41 Frank, *McLachlan*, 189-201.

42 On the 1922 strike, see Frank, *McLachlan*, 233-76.

but also for its grassroots nature. The one-hundred-per cent strike was not the idea of McLachlan or the other leaders; it sprang spontaneously from the rank and file. The slow-down, the total strike, and the from-the-bottom control generally were all turning points in the growing radicalism of District 26, but they were important especially in retrospect. Bishop Morrison, who thought the men were controlled by overly radical leaders, would not have understood the importance of 1922 and its rank-and-file radicalism, and his correspondence betrays no shift in his understanding of labor relations. Though he commiserated with his pastors over their financial difficulties, the only reform Morrison pursued after the 1922 strike was intended to undermine the union's leadership, suggesting that he did not grasp the fundamentally rank-and-file nature of the strike.

The labor peace that came with the end of the 1922 strike did not last long. In 1923, workers at the Besco-owned steel plant in Sydney walked off the job to demand union recognition and the miners struck in sympathy. The strike was to have disastrous consequences for District 26. Perhaps working in collusion with Besco management, John L. Lewis intervened to depose the elected leadership of the district and replace McLachlan and his followers with an executive that promptly called off the strike. Worse still for the radicals, McLachlan was arrested and brought to Halifax on charges of sedition stemming from a circular he wrote criticizing a June police riot. With the union's elected leader in jail and its ability to challenge company power in shambles, it looked as if radicalism had been defeated in Cape Breton.⁴³

During the 1922 strike, the conservative pastor J.J. Macneil at Dominion had suggested to Morrison the creation of a rival Catholic union to replace the UMW. Forwarding to his bishop the constitution of a Quebec Catholic union, he argued that the "good" workers were tired of radical labor leaders stirring up trouble as "many of the poor miners here know of the sane condition of labor in Quebec and are asking: 'Why not organize Catholic labor here?'"⁴⁴ With a Quebec-style Catholic union, the problems of secular organized labor could be eliminated. Morrison responded with a lengthy letter two days later: "What you tell me about Catholic miners asking you why not form an independent Catholic Union of miners and workmen, I may say that this is the first intimation I have had of a possibility along that line. Now if such an undertaking can be put through, I shall certainly be in favor of the movement, and I give my approval to it at once." As a first step, Morrison directed Macneil to canvass his parishioners to judge the chance of success.⁴⁵

Five months later, in the middle of the steelworkers' strike, Macneil finally got back to Morrison with the results of the canvass: "I was refused by [only] one, and he

43 On the steel strike, the UMW's sympathy strike, and their aftermath, see Frank, *McLachlan*, 293-315. On the inconclusive accusations of collusion, see especially page 314, and Manley, "Red Stuff," 80.

44 J.J. Macneil to Morrison, 5 October 1922, box 36, folder 65, Morrison Papers, ADA. Since the *Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada* had only been founded in 1921 and at its start had encompassed only a quarter of Quebec's union members, Macneil's claim that peaceful labor relations in Quebec were to its credit seems overgenerous. However, the process of creating Catholic unions in Quebec had been gradual, so it is not impossible. See Jacques Rouillard, *Les syndicats nationaux au Québec de 1900 à 1930* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1979).

45 Morrison to J.J. Macneil, 7 October 1922, box 8, folder 51, Morrison Papers, ADA.

is not a practical Catholic,” Macneil boasted.⁴⁶ Morrison, in turn, was excited about the possibility of a Catholic union that would do away with the “irreligious and Godless tactics of some of the present labor leaders.”⁴⁷ Yet when he asked other priests in the industrial area, Morrison found significantly less enthusiasm. In April, as the industrial area waited nervously for the next steelworkers’ strike, he asked the well-regarded D.M. MacAdam, pastor at Sacred Heart in Sydney, his opinion of a Catholic union.⁴⁸ “It would not only set Protestant against Catholic; but it would also tend to a division among Catholics themselves,” MacAdam warned.⁴⁹ His language was unusually frank for a priest writing to his bishop, and his tone suggested he felt strongly. E.McG. Quirk, a federal labor ministry official with whom Morrison corresponded, also strongly disapproved of Catholic unions outside Quebec.⁵⁰ When Morrison presented the issue to a meeting of clergy in the industrial area, nearly all of them rejected the idea, citing the concern that Catholics would be targeted by Protestants, who would remain in the old UMW, for splitting the union. One even warned of a “civil and religious war” should the clergy try to organize a rival union.⁵¹ For the time being, that was the end of the idea. With McLachlan in jail and the other radicals deposed, Morrison may have felt that the crisis in union leadership had passed. In any case, he was not yet ready to press the issue.

The labor peace that followed John L. Lewis’s attack on the leadership of District 26 in 1923 corresponded roughly with the brief period of McLachlan’s imprisonment. When McLachlan emerged from his sentence for sedition in March 1924, he quickly reclaimed the union, albeit from a position outside the elected office. When the 1924 contract expired in January 1925 the district leadership was slow to take action, waiting instead to see what Besco would do. The company escalated first, suspending credit at company stores at the most militant mines. When in March a strike was called, it was the company that allowed three collieries to flood, meaning that the men who had left work there would probably never return. It was clear the strike would be a long battle. Preparations had been made even before it began to provide help for miners’ families, and relief committees in each of the towns had been operating since the winter.⁵²

46 J.J. Macneil to Morrison, 7 March 1923, box 37, folder 69, Morrison Papers, ADA. The canvass took such a long time partially because he could only work on the project after working hours, and because “in every case one has to talk over the whole labor situation.” See Macneil to Morrison, 5 February 1923, box 37, folder 69, Morrison Papers, ADA.

47 Morrison to Michael S. Macneil, 5 June 1923, box 8, folder 54, Morrison Papers, ADA. See also Morrison to J.J. Macneil, 14 March 1923, box 8, folder 53, Morrison Papers, ADA.

48 Morrison to D.M. MacAdam, 10 April 1923, box 8, folder 53, Morrison Papers, ADA. MacAdam had been considered for Morrison’s position when the previous bishop died, and the pastor of Sacred Heart was generally the most senior of the industrial area priests.

49 D.M. MacAdam to Morrison, 12 April 1923, box 37, folder 70, Morrison papers, ADA.

50 E.McG. Quirk to Morrison, 9 July 1923, box 37, folder 71, Morrison Papers, ADA. Quirk had first met Morrison on a train in March 1919, and he chaired a conciliation conference between the union and the company in 1920. See E.McG. Quirk to Morrison, 16 March 1919, box 31, folder 41, Morrison Papers, ADA, as well as Frank, *McLachlan*, 192.

51 Minutes of a meeting of industrial area clergy, 13 July 1923, box 37, folder 71, Morrison Papers, ADA.

52 Frank, *McLachlan*, 355, 373. McLachlan retained influence as publisher of a labor newspaper in Glace Bay.

When the strike started, Morrison hastily called a meeting of the industrial area priests. "Some of the 'red' element," it seemed, were obstructing the work of the relief committees, and it was decided that Sydney's J.H. MacDonald would serve as chair of a combined relief committee to oversee charity to all affected communities.⁵³ By late March, donations were flowing through Morrison's office to MacDonald's Sacred Heart.⁵⁴ The Church's sponsorship of a relief fund, while certainly altruistic, also had the benefit of good publicity. "Your Lordship's appeal was certainly very timely and puts the Church in a position which can no longer be disputed by the Red element," wrote J.H. Nicholson in New Waterford.⁵⁵ MacDonald, not surprisingly, agreed with his brother priest: "Among the good effects, apart from the alleviation of misery and distress, which this appeal will have, is the telling rebuke administered to the Red element for criticisms and complaints that the Church has been indifferent to their real welfare."⁵⁶

Church control of the relief fund caused some problems when it came to the "Reds." Early in the strike, McLachlan solicited a donation from the Soviet government, and the Russian miners' union, through the Red International of Labor Unions, offered \$5,000 to the relief committee. Despite the fact that this was almost half again what was raised through Morrison's appeal, the committee rejected the donation.⁵⁷ "Its acceptance," it said, "would be construed in certain circles as Russian propaganda, and would result in diminishing contributions throughout the Dominion." McLachlan, after a few weeks' controversy, remitted the money to District 26's headquarters, thus bypassing the relief committee.⁵⁸

Morrison did not stop at relief work. While his response to the 1925 strike was more humanitarian than his responses in 1922 or 1923 – probably because of the severity of the poverty and the fact that it had been a difficult winter – his basic attitude toward work stoppages remained the same. To Morrison, the strike had been caused by some combination of a radical union and inhumane management. For the latter, he called frequently for an investigation of the coal industry and the finances of Besco, even travelling to Halifax in March 1925 to lobby the provincial government accordingly. Morrison was normally wary of political entanglements, and so his trip to Halifax suggests that the 1925 strike made him examine new ways of solving labor militancy. But as the strike wore on and both sides showed themselves to be intransigent in their demands, Morrison's focus shifted from fixing the company to

53 S.P. MacDonald, "Minutes of meeting of the clergy of the Colliery Districts of Cape Breton county, called by his lordship the Bishop, held in the Lyceum, Sydney, Wednesday, March 11th, 1925, at 2.30 p.m.," box 39, folder 82, Morrison Papers, ADA. J.H. MacDonald had been a curate in Glace Bay and a pastor in New Waterford before being transferred to Sacred Heart when MacAdam suddenly died in 1924. He was thus the senior industrial area priest. See Angus Anthony Johnston, *Antigonish Diocese Priests and Bishops, 1789-1925*, ed. Kathleen M. MacKenzie (Antigonish, NS: Casket Printing and Publishing Company, 1994), 61.

54 On 12 March, Morrison issued a circular to all the diocese's priests requesting a special collection be made on behalf of the miners and their families. See box 22, folder 2, Morrison Papers, ADA.

55 J.H. Nicholson to Morrison, 25 March 1925, box 39, folder 82, Morrison Papers, ADA.

56 J.H. MacDonald to Morrison, 27 March 1925, box 39, folder 82, Morrison Papers, ADA.

57 In May, Morrison sent MacDonald what he described as probably the last relief payment; the total then stood at \$11,050.68. See Morrison to J.H. MacDonald, 6 May 1925, box 10, folder 62, Morrison Papers, ADA.

58 Frank, *McLachlan*, 376; Manley, "Red Stuff," 91-2; Mellor, *Company Store*, 277.

fixing the union. At a June meeting of industrial area priests, the consensus was that the “Reds” had to be rooted out of the union before there would be labor peace. The priests agreed on little else, however, with some arguing that the Church should stand by while the company attacked the Red-dominated UMW and some arguing that the clergy should help.⁵⁹ Looking for new ideas, Morrison inquired into the “plan of employees’ representation” that existed in place of a union at the Sydney steel plant but he seems to have quickly given up on the idea.⁶⁰ A more promising concept was an old one: a Catholic union. After the failure of the idea in 1923, Morrison had never completely given up, and had in 1924 directed C.F. MacKinnon, one of his more conservative pastors, to form a Catholic Workmen’s Guild.⁶¹ MacKinnon in turn passed the assignment to S.P. MacDonald, a reformist priest from a political family, and MacDonald was just finishing the project when the 1925 strike hit.⁶²

In June 1925, District 26 gave up on the international-directed strategy of waiting and called for a total strike, which included stopping work at the company power plant in New Waterford. On 11 June managers and company police sought to restore the town’s water and electricity, sparking a confrontation between them and a mass of workers. Company police opened fire, injuring several and killing one, William Davis. The shooting prompted a riot: company stores were looted and burned, and the police were run out of town. They were only saved from physical harm by the intercession of J.H. Nicholson, the pastor at Mt. Carmel Parish, who calmed the men until the police had a chance to escape.⁶³

Early that summer Morrison had started communicating with J.A.H. Cameron, a Montreal lawyer who had received two degrees from St. F.X.⁶⁴ Cameron was a big-city lawyer who was well connected in Halifax and knowledgeable about labor negotiations in Cape Breton. It is unclear from Morrison’s correspondence how he started writing to Cameron, but it is clear that he quickly fell under the latter’s influence. Cameron pushed strongly for a Catholic labor union. “The blessed industrial peace enjoyed in the Province of Quebec is almost wholly due to the adoption of the principles laid down by Pope Leo in his inspired encyclical,” he wrote, referring to *Rerum Novarum* – a key social Catholic text.⁶⁵ In several letters throughout that violent summer, Cameron suggested to Morrison that he follow the lead of Quebec’s hierarchy and help form a Catholic labor union.⁶⁶ Morrison took his

59 J.H. MacDonald, Minutes of “Sydney Meeting re Labor Situation,” 15 June 1925, box 40, folder 85, Morrison Papers, ADA.

60 Morrison to H.J. Kelly, 17 June 1925, box 10, folder 63, Morrison Papers, ADA.

61 Morrison to C.F. MacKinnon, 24 April 1924, box 9, folder 58, Morrison Papers, ADA.

62 S.P. MacDonald to Morrison, 15 April 1925, box 40, folder 83, Morrison Papers, ADA.

63 Frank, *McLachlan*, 380-5; Mellor, *Company Store*, 294-316.

64 “Prominent Alumnus Dies in Montreal, Graduate of St. F.X. and Dal had noted career,” *Xavierian Weekly* (15 December 1928). I am grateful to Kathy MacKenzie at the St. F.X. archives for finding Cameron’s biographical information. Cameron had earlier acted as a sort of “eyes and ears” in Montreal for Toronto Archbishop Neil McNeil. See, for example, Cameron’s letters to McNeil: 11 July 1913 (MN AS06.07), 13 September 1913 (MN AH02.115a), 29 January 1915 (MN AH04.04), McNeil Papers, AAT.

65 J.A.H. Cameron to Morrison, 15 July 1925, box 40, folder 85, Morrison Papers, ADA.

66 Cameron mentions the foundation of a Catholic union in his letters of 23 June, 15 July, 30 July, and 6 August 1925. He once wrote with the same suggestion to Edgar Rhodes, the premier-elect; a copy of the letter to Rhodes (14 July 1925) was enclosed with the letter of 15 July. See Morrison Papers, ADA.

advice. In early August he wrote a circular to all the industrial area priests instructing them to survey the miners in their parishes and report the number of Catholic and non-Catholic UMW members.⁶⁷ By then, the province's new premier, Edgar Rhodes, negotiated a stopgap contract while a royal commission investigated the coal industry. To the union any contract was a victory, as was the agreement by Besco to permit a union dues check-off for the length of the contract. Yet except for the fact that Besco did not succeed in suppressing the union, it was a lost strike.⁶⁸ After 1925, there was simply little fight left.

Morrison pushed harder for a Catholic union in 1925 than he did in 1923 because he had witnessed the later, harder, and more violent strike. The clergy at the 15 June meeting – only four days after William Davis's murder – rehashed many of the same arguments about a Catholic union that had been made in 1923. Some argued that a Catholic union would prove unpopular and upset the men even more. Others, like the vehemently anti-communist J.J. Macneil, argued strongly that a Catholic union was the men's only hope. But, unlike in 1923, Morrison seemed to side with Macneil and Cameron.⁶⁹ In October 1925, he wrote the priest at Victoria Mines: "For some time I have had very much at heart the desire to have formed some such [Catholic] Union, and especially since the debacle brought about by the recent demoralizing strike and the lamentable effects that have followed it."⁷⁰ There is no mention in any of Morrison's letters of the fear of division that halted the first drive to organize a Catholic union.

However, the 1925 strike also made Morrison realize that peace was dependent on the men being satisfied. Although it is unclear why Morrison's attempt to organize a Catholic union failed, by the next year he had given up on the idea and the proposal disappeared from his correspondence. Where Morrison and his most of his priests had previously written disapprovingly about labor strife and the radicals who encouraged it, their letters after 1925 showed much more compassion towards the men. His later correspondence focuses on the company's role in ensuring a living wage. "I am very much concerned, as we all must be, about the present closing down of the work at the Princess colliery and the practical closing of Florence," he wrote to the Sydney Mines pastor in 1926. "What on earth can the Company have in mind by the step at this time of year, when there is practically nothing else for the people to do? It is impossible to understand them."⁷¹ His tone was similar in 1928: "I hope the Company will soon come to some concrete decision of a more hopeful nature, so that the people may be enabled to make a decent living."⁷²

By September 1928, however, Besco had collapsed into bankruptcy, and the workers were anxious about the financial stability of the reorganized operator, the Dominion Steel and Coal Company (known as Dosco). The provincial election in September 1928 may have suggested further uncertainty to those watching from

67 Morrison circular letter, 7 August 1925, box 10, folder 63, Morrison Papers, ADA.

68 Frank, *McLachlan*, 385-60.

69 J.H. MacDonald, Minutes of "Sydney Meeting re Labor Situation," 15 June 1925, box 40, folder 85, Morrison Papers, ADA.

70 Morrison to A.G. McAuley, 8 October 1925, box 10, folder 64, Morrison Papers, ADA.

71 Morrison to C.F. MacKinnon, 14 January 1926, box 10, folder 65, Morrison Papers, ADA.

72 Morrison to M.A. MacAdam, 28 Jan 1928, box 11, folder 72, Morrison Papers, ADA.

Antigonish. McLachlan ran against Conservative and Liberal candidates and came in third, a result particularly unsurprising given that District 26 president John McLeod endorsed the Tory. But McLachlan's 2,589 votes were not insubstantial, giving cause for concern among Catholic anti-communists.⁷³

It was in this atmosphere that Morrison acceded to calls to form an extension department at St. F.X., an idea intimately connected to university amalgamation and to Tompkins's successes in Canso. The 1925 strike, while effectively deadening for a time any remaining radicalism in the coal fields, showed Morrison and other conservatives what could happen if circumstances worsened again or if radicals regained power in the union. A program of Catholic social action could be the method by which the Church could diffuse any future radicalism that might bring back the dark days of 1925 and earlier. "What may come next there is no telling," M.A. MacAdam wrote ominously in 1928 from Glace Bay.⁷⁴

The creation of the St. F.X. Extension Department mirrors in many ways the earlier battle over university federation. There are, to be sure, key differences between the Antigonish Movement and Tompkins's earlier experiments with popular education embodied in the people's schools and university federation. Most importantly, the centralizing impulse of the federation scheme was absent from the locally based study clubs and co-ops of the Antigonish Movement. But the people's schools, federation, and study clubs were all methods by which reformers within the college and the diocese tried to provide "knowledge for the people" (to use Tompkins's phrase). If federation was a continuation of Tompkins's experiments with the people's schools, extension was an even more direct outgrowth of the underlying philosophy.⁷⁵ The Extension Department brought participants into study clubs, where they discussed problems and potential solutions as fishermen had at the beginning of the Antigonish Movement. Study clubs then became the nuclei for more direct action, like the creation of retail, producing, housing, and financial cooperatives. The downtrodden of Nova Scotia had to educate themselves before solutions could be found, and the clear lesson taught in the study clubs was that cooperativism was the solution. The Extension Department institutionalized the Antigonish Movement, which Tompkins had created from the ashes of his defeated university federation struggle.

If the ideological similarity between university federation and the Extension Department was obvious, the overlap of their proponents was even more striking. To begin with, there was Jimmy Tompkins, who was as personally associated with extension as he was with federation. Tompkins's followers were the same in each case, too. In 1931, an evaluator from the Carnegie Corporation wrote "The priests who are interested in the movement are in general the same group who worked for the federation plan of Dalhousie University."⁷⁶ James Boyle, the young priest exiled from St. F.X. for his support of amalgamation, became a leader in the cooperative

73 Frank, *McLachlan*, 441.

74 M.A. MacAdam to Morrison, 23 June 1928, box 43, folder 102, Morrison Papers, ADA.

75 On the continuity between the people's schools and the Antigonish Movement, see MacPherson, *Each for All*, 131.

76 Memorandum, B.Y. Landis to Carnegie Corporation, 1931, folder 318.9, box 318, Carnegie Corporation records.

movement.⁷⁷ Even the man placed in charge of the department, Moses Coady, was Tompkins's cousin – on both sides of the family – and credited Tompkins with his decision to become a priest.⁷⁸

Like the push for federation, the origins of the Extension Department can be traced to priests, especially the priest-professors at St. F.X., who were looking for ways to improve the lives of their flock. The earliest pressure to create an extension department came from the rural and industrial conferences that were held annually to exchange ideas of how to help workers, farmers, and fishers. The conferences began in 1923, just after the expulsion of Tompkins from Antigonish, and may have served as a safety valve for Morrison to control dissent in his diocese. By allowing reform-minded priests to come together once a year to discuss potential solutions, he relieved the pressure created by rejecting the reformist initiatives advocated by Tompkins. Morrison officially welcomed the priests and other participants in the conferences, but he was hesitant to adopt their recommendations.⁷⁹

Like proponents of amalgamation before them, supporters of establishing an extension department set about convincing the Catholics in the diocese of the need for the program. But where Tompkins had campaigned endlessly and personally for support for federation, he and his allies advocating an extension department now recognized the power of institutional pressure. A key organization was the Scottish Catholic Society of Canada. Michael Gillis, a noted reformist priest and pastor of Boisdale and Frenchvale, was secretary of the society from 1921 and 1925 and helped push this cultural organization to become more political. Under his influence and that of J.H. Nicholson from New Waterford, in 1928 the society pledged to raise \$100,000 to form an extension department of its own. All three of these clerical leaders had supported federation. Later writers, including Coady himself, credited the Scottish Catholic Society for “scaring” Morrison into action with its plan to supplant the university in adult education.⁸⁰ Yet given that the society delivered only \$2,000 to the newly created Extension Department during the latter's initial fund-raising campaign – \$98,000 short of their original goal – it seems unlikely that the threat would ever have appeared serious. More likely is that the Scottish Catholic Society provided a respectable cover for the political work that its leaders already advocated.⁸¹

The second organization credited with helping to found the Extension Department was the St. F.X. Alumni Association. The association's chair was Glace Bay lawyer Neil McArthur, who had chaired the anti-amalgamation committee in 1922. At that time McArthur had been sufficiently loyal to Morrison that he showed the report to him for approval before it was officially submitted.⁸² Yet in 1927, at Coady's suggestion, the association appointed a committee to examine the possibility of establishing an extension department and picked reformers for all four seats. Three of

77 Johnston, *Antigonish Priests and Bishops*, 16.

78 Boyle, *Father Tompkins*, 28-30. On their common lineage, see Johnston, *Antigonish Priests and Bishops*, 30, 113.

79 Cameron, *For the People*, 213.

80 Cameron, *For the People*, 214-15.

81 Dan MacInnes, “The Role of the Scottish Catholic Society in the Determination of the Antigonish Movement,” *Scottish Tradition* 7/8 (1977-78): 37.

82 Ludlow, “‘Cautious but Willing,’” 100.

the committee's members were fixtures at the rural and industrial conferences and leaders in the Scottish Catholic Society, and a fourth member had been a protégé of Tompkins and a noted supporter of amalgamation. Tompkins himself appears to have advised the committee.⁸³ The committee reported in August 1928 to the St. F.X. board of governors with a strong call for the university to form an extension department.⁸⁴ Morrison could easily have derailed or ignored the report, or his ally McArthur could have appointed a different committee. Yet when the governors met in November, they quickly agreed to form an extension department starting the coming January.⁸⁵ In 1922, Morrison had manipulated the board to block reform; in 1928 he did not.

The Extension Department accomplished many of Tompkins's goals for federation without fundamentally altering the nature of St. Francis Xavier. The creation of the Extension Department did not run the risk that Morrison feared of destroying St. F.X. by merging it into a secular university: it did not physically remove it from the community, it did not necessarily risk mixing with Protestants, and it did not cede curricular authority to others.⁸⁶ However, its founding on the eve of the Great Depression – and it is worth remembering that, in the words of novelist Ann-Marie MacDonald, Cape Breton in the 1920s was a dress rehearsal for the rest of North America in the 1930s – weakened the core mission of the university by drawing funds and attention from the younger, traditional students in Antigonish and lavishing it on the adults in study clubs.⁸⁷ This dilemma was made clear in MacPherson's complaint in 1933 to a Carnegie inspector that "St. Francis Xavier's income is down – that everything is being cut but extension, and that is too vital. He [MacPherson] can't provide more college services."⁸⁸ By placing the university's finances in the hands of those whom they had worked so hard to destroy earlier, MacPherson and Morrison had essentially given control of the university back to those who had favored the merger.

Why, then, did the Extension Department succeed while amalgamation failed? The traditional answer has been that Morrison and MacPherson were pressured by the powerful Alumni Association and the Scottish Catholic Society into acting. But Morrison and MacPherson – especially Morrison – had withstood pressure before, and from many of the same people, during the amalgamation battle. The prime advocates of extension in both organizations had also supported amalgamation. The pressure in 1928 was in some ways less, since there was not as much interest outside the diocese

83 Cameron, *For the People*, 216-17. The members of the committee were Michael Gillis, John R. MacDonald, Hugh MacDonald, and A.B. MacDonald. A.B. MacDonald had presented a paper at the 1928 Rural and Industrial Conference lauding cooperatives, and Hugh MacDonald was a noted amalgamation supporter. Gillis was so close to Tompkins that in 1925 the former suggested that the latter priest be promoted to coadjutor bishop of Halifax. See Gillis to McNeil, 10 June 1925, MN AP07.53, McNeil Papers, AAT.

84 The report is in box 44, folder 107, Morrison Papers, ADA.

85 Cameron, *For the People*, 217. It is notable that during those two months, there is a general absence of discussion in Morrison's correspondence about an extension department.

86 On Protestant clergy's involvement in the Antigonish Movement, see MacPherson, *Each for All*, 132.

87 MacDonald, *Fall On Your Knees*, 192.

88 "St. Francis Xavier University: Extension Work in Nova Scotia," 31 May 1933, folder 318.9, box 318, Carnegie Corporation records. On the financial dangers of extension, see also Ludlow, "Social Awakening," 47.

in the creation of an extension department. In 1922 Morrison had rebuffed the bishop of Charlottetown, the archbishops of St. John's and Toronto, and his own metropolitan, the archbishop of Halifax.⁸⁹ In exiling Tompkins and ignoring the pleas of his supporters, Morrison had shown himself capable of standing by a decision to ensure conservative control of the diocese. Had he wanted to, Morrison could surely have prevented the creation of the Extension Department the way he had prevented the college merger. Moreover, key allies of Morrison in 1922 openly supported extension without seeming to compromise their loyalty. The answer must therefore be that the Extension Department succeeded because Morrison wanted it to succeed.

Indeed, Morrison also passed over other opportunities to derail the Antigonish Movement, as when Moses Coady was recruited to the dominion marine and fisheries ministry to help organize the United Maritime Fishermen. For Coady to accept the civil position, Morrison had to release him from his normal pastoral duties. Not only did he grant permission, but he also added in his letter to the minister a broad endorsement: "If the fishermen are to make a lasting success of their calling, they must needs be organized as is practically every other industry that counts for anything."⁹⁰

The Antigonish Movement was meant to focus on rural life and ways to improve farming and fishing. Yet the report of the Alumni Association committee reflected its awareness of the industrial situation: "While the Alumni discussion dealt almost exclusively with the condition of the farming population, the Committee, after several meetings, came to the conclusion that if, at this time, a program of Catholic Social Action were initiated, it should embrace the three main sections of our working population—miners, fishermen and farmers." The report cited the Royal Commission reports on fishing and coal mining in arguing the importance of relief for the plight of fishers and miners.⁹¹ Although rural priorities prevailed at first, even this emphasis suggested the influence of the 1925 strike. Since its founding in 1919, one of the major purposes of the Scottish Catholic Society had been to improve rural life to stem the tide of out-migration and urbanization.⁹² The 1925 strike confirmed for Morrison that people would be better off and happier on the land rather than in cities. "I often think how much better it would have been for many of these miners if they had remained on their farms," he wrote at the time. "Many of them indeed would gladly go back to the land, but they have not the means to reestablish themselves as farmers."⁹³ The Antigonish Movement sought to provide those means. H.P. MacPherson referred explicitly to the importance of the 1925 strike to the creation of the Extension Department in a later letter to Andrew Rae Duncan, who had chaired

89 On St. John's and Charlottetown, see W. Foley to Tompkins, 1 April 1922, folder 6a, MG 10, J.J. Tompkins Papers, Beaton Institute for Cape Breton Studies, University of Cape Breton, Sydney, NS. On Halifax, see Cameron, *For the People*, 185-6. On Toronto, see, for example, Tompkins's undated note to McNeil on a copy of a letter from G.J. McLellan to Tompkins, 26 May 1922, MN AP07.40.g, McNeil Papers, AAT.

90 Morrison to P.J.A. Cardin, 20 August 1929, box 12, folder 79, Morrison Papers, ADA. See also MacPherson, *Each for All*, 132.

91 Report of the committee of the Alumni Association, box 44, folder 107, Morrison Papers, ADA.

92 MacInnes, "Scottish Catholic," 27.

93 Morrison to D.A. MacIsaac, 26 March 1925, box 9, folder 61, Morrison Papers, ADA.

the 1925 Royal Commission on the coal industry on which MacPherson had served. “The emphasis you placed on the necessity of men doing their own business instead of having others do it all for them, while questioning and instructing the Cape Breton miners at Sydney, made a profound impression on me,” he wrote in a chatty letter to his old friend. “I was convinced that you were right. Were it not for that conviction our Movement would in all probability not have been undertaken.”⁹⁴ For both Morrison and MacPherson, the Antigonish Movement, though originally focused on the countryside, was started with one eye on the industrial area.

The Extension Department expanded to industrial Cape Breton in the early 1930s, a time of increased concern over the labor situation and fear over an apparent communist resurgence. As early as December 1929, Tompkins warned Morrison of the danger communists posed in Cape Breton: “It appears that we might have a red army in the maritimes before many years—and it will not be confined to the mines. People who ought to simply wont [*sic*] deal with poverty and discontent till revolutionaries take up the burden. . . . And yet about the only literature easily available and with punch and an appeal to the common man in straits is produced by radicals and reds. And I see McLachlan is starting in again.”⁹⁵ Although Morrison had not warmed personally to Tompkins, his response reflected a shared concern that “Reds” would rise again in the coalfields.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, until the latter half of 1931, the bishop’s view of the coalfields remained what it had been since the 1925 strike: relieved that there was little current danger, but wary and watchful.

The tone of Morrison’s letters changed as the Depression deepened and as Communist Party activities among the miners increased. In October 1931, he lamented to Alex Thompson, a retired industrial area priest and former president of St. F.X. then living in New Orleans, of the hardship in Thompson’s old neighborhood: “Economic conditions also in this part of the world are anything but good, especially in the mining and industrial districts, and we have what practically amounts to the bread-line.” He sounded a worried note about the attitude of the miners, although he hoped that the Church could help avert a crisis: “The situation looks bad in every way. Everything possible is being done to direct the Catholic people along sane lines.”⁹⁷

Morrison sent his friendly letter to Thompson a few weeks after he had met his industrial area priests. For two-and-a-half hours, sitting in the elegant Lyceum in Sydney, the priests bemoaned the irresponsibility of the men and the rise of communism. To the clergy, the men laid off from the coal pits were lazy for refusing the offer to repave roads, and they feared that the communists were having a field day among disaffected and unemployed miners. As before, they may also have worried about the monetary loss to the diocese and parishes should the men refuse to work. Much as they had during the 1920s, the priests saw the Church as a moderating influence and Morrison suggested lay Catholic societies and homilies from the pulpit

94 MacPherson to A.R. Duncan, 9 December 1939, MG 1/1/1 288, St. Francis Xavier University Archives, Antigonish, NS.

95 Tompkins to Morrison, 9 December 1929, box 45, folder 115, Morrison Papers, ADA.

96 Morrison to Tompkins, 11 December 1929, box 12, folder 80, Morrison Papers, ADA. For other examples of Morrison’s dismissive tone, see his letters to Tompkins on 9 January 1930 and 7 February 1930, box 13, folder 81, Morrison Papers, ADA.

97 Morrison to A. Thompson, 15 October 1931, box 13, folder 86b, Morrison Papers, ADA.

be used to encourage thrift, hard work, and anti-radicalism.⁹⁸ Morrison's first public reaction to the perceived crisis was to issue a pastoral letter essentially promoting *Quadragesimo Anno*, the pope's major social encyclical of May 1931.⁹⁹ While Pius XI had acknowledged certain rights of labor, he also bitterly attacked socialism. Morrison published his letter in September, a few days after his meeting in Sydney.¹⁰⁰

Events external to the diocese in 1932 encouraged Morrison's fears of Reds. In the spring, Andrea Cassulo, the apostolic delegate in Ottawa and Morrison's ecclesiastical superior, issued a questionnaire to all Canadian dioceses about the prevalence of communism.¹⁰¹ Morrison necessarily took Cassulo very seriously, and he passed the delegate's questions on communism to J.H. MacDonald, who responded calmly: "Communism has had a small membership in the industrial centres of Cape Breton for some time. . . . Communists number at present about 300 in this diocese, but this number of three hundred is sometimes more than trebled by additions from the ranks of the unemployed, particularly when parades or demonstrations of any kind are held."¹⁰² Displaying considerable concern over the matter, Morrison also asked the opinion of his old ally Neil McArthur.¹⁰³ McArthur obliged with a list of mostly Slavic names of men whom he described as "known to us to be active Communists."¹⁰⁴ Morrison's response to Cassulo was designed to be soothing, emphasizing that "the people do not look to communism as a remedy for the hard times through which they are passing." But it was clear, too, that the Antigonish Movement was the bishop's bulwark against communism: "For more than a year the University of St. Francis Xavier of Antigonish has had functioning a University Extension Department, the professors of which go out through the country and assemble the people at meetings and clubs to teach them sound economic principles on the basis of Catholic teachings. . . . Excellent results have been realized by this effort."¹⁰⁵

As the 1930s and the Depression wore on, the appeal of the Communist Party grew, and Morrison's fears of a radical resurgence were not unfounded. In May 1932 miners, afraid of losing yet another strike, grudgingly accepted a contract from Dosco; but they quickly turned on the conservative union executive that had negotiated it. The next month, locals in Cape Breton voted to secede and form the Communist-led Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia. By September, when the AMW held its first convention, it looked as if it would overthrow the UMW, and for the first half of 1933 the new union threatened a strike to demand recognition from the company. The

98 "Minutes of a Meeting of the Catholic Clergy of the Parishes from Little Bras D'or to Port Morien Inclusive," 21 September 1931, box 48, folder 125, Morrison Papers, ADA.

99 On the theological background of the Antigonish Movement, see Alexander, *Antigonish Movement*, 48-64.

100 Encyclical, 26 September 1931, box 22, folder 33, Morrison Papers, ADA.

101 A. Cassulo, circular to bishops, 11 May 1932, box 49, folder 129, Morrison Papers, ADA. This was four days before *Quadragesimo Anno* was published.

102 J.H. MacDonald to Morrison, 27 May 1932, box 49, folder 130, Morrison Papers, ADA. Morrison's letter to MacDonald asking him to address the questionnaire, 21 May 1932, is in box 14, folder 89.

103 Morrison to N.R. McArthur, 23 May 1932, box 14, folder 89, Morrison Papers, ADA.

104 N.R. McArthur to Morrison, 2 June 1932, box 49, folder 130, Morrison Papers, ADA. Where McArthur obtained his list or how he defined Communists is unclear, but Morrison did not question it.

105 Morrison to A. Cassulo, 6 June 1932, box 14, folder 89, Morrison Papers, ADA.

miners, however, remembering the bitter strikes of previous decades, were reluctant to force the issue, and by June the AMW had abandoned threats of a district-wide battle in favor of smaller strikes by specific locals. In 1934 and 1935, the AMW was stuck in the paradoxical position of claiming a majority of Cape Breton miners as members while at the same time suffocating for lack of funds and never coming close to company recognition of any local.¹⁰⁶

Morrison in his letters made no mention of the AMW, and given his superficial understanding of union politics and industrial relations he probably did not keep abreast of the specifics of the AMW's quest to replace the UMW. He could not have avoided, however, the provincial election of 1933 and the dominion election of 1935. In 1933 the Workers' United Front – the Communist Party in disguise – ran McLachlan in Glace Bay and another prominent party member, John MacDonald, in North Sidney-Sydney Mines. Though neither came close to winning, the election was notable for how well the Communists trounced the working-class alternative – the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. Dawn Fraser, the CCF's candidate in Glace Bay, announced that his party's platform was taken from *Quadragesimo Anno* and tried to appeal specifically to Catholic workers. His loss to the Communists must have therefore been particularly worrisome to Morrison.¹⁰⁷

In the 1935 election McLachlan contested the riding of Cape Breton South as the sole Communist candidate east of Montreal. The election was hard fought, with McLachlan loudly proclaiming his commitment to the end of capitalist rule in Canada and his opponents predicting doom if he were to win. The Church, not surprisingly, vocally opposed McLachlan's candidacy, and priests freely attacked him from the pulpit. He did better than expected, coming in second after the Liberal victor. The *Glace Bay Gazette* wrote: "McLachlan was expected to poll a large vote but even his most ardent supporters did not expect him to come within 100 votes of the leading candidate."¹⁰⁸ In both elections McLachlan's relative success in the polls was threatening in and of itself, and it reflected the growing popularity of radical politics in the industrial area.

Now Morrison would be held accountable for the Communists in his midst, and the Antigonish Movement would again be his first defense. Cassulo read in a Swiss newspaper in January 1936 that the Catholic miners in Cape Breton had voted for the Communist candidate. The papal delegate demanded an explanation from Morrison.¹⁰⁹ Morrison denied that communism was a force in the coalfields, especially among Catholics. Despite his protestations, Morrison nonetheless wrote more than two, closely typed pages describing what he was doing to stem the tide; in particular, he proudly described the work of the Antigonish Movement: "As to action taken by the Catholic clergy and laity to combat such communistic efforts and to improve the economic and social welfare of the people, while I have no desire to be

106 Michael J. Earle, "The Coalminers and Their 'Red' Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932-1936," *Labour/Le Travail* 22 (Fall 1988): 99-137.

107 Manley, "Red Stuff," 105-8.

108 Frank, *McLachlan*, 493-500.

109 A. Cassulo to Morrison, 21 February 1936, box 54, folder 153, Morrison papers, ADA. Thanks to Johnathan Markowitz Bijur for his assistance translating the letter from Italian.

boastful, I think I can say with truth that more is being done in this diocese along this line than is being done in most other places throughout the whole country.”¹¹⁰

Given Morrison’s evident faith in the Antigonish Movement’s ability to combat communism, it should not be surprising that the Extension Department began to expand in the industrial area just as the threat of radicalism appeared to increase. During the early 1930s, the Extension Department self-consciously tried to engage the miners. A 1933 report described the department as having trouble organizing in Sydney and Glace Bay “because of the infiltration of labor agitators, reds, pinks, general spouters, etc.”¹¹¹ Despite the difficulties, the report indicates a growing interest to extend the reach of the Antigonish Movement to the industrial area. The university listed Sydney Mines, New Waterford, Reserve Mines, Glace Bay, and New Glasgow as the sites of greatest expansion in a 1934 report to the Carnegie Corporation.¹¹² In March 1935, Morrison transferred Tompkins to Reserve Mines to organize in an industrial context.¹¹³ This time, no one spoke of “exile”; Tompkins and Morrison may not have gotten along personally, but the priest was no longer shunned. Just as the Communist Party appeared to be making inroads into industrial Cape Breton, the Church responded by increasing the presence of the Antigonish Movement.

The rhetoric of the Antigonish Movement in the 1930s presented it as a third way between atheistic communism and harsh capitalism.¹¹⁴ “What is Communism?” asked George Boyle, a lay employee of the Extension Department, in the very first issue of its *Extension Bulletin*. “It seeks to wipe out the idea of God, it abolishes private property – the right of a man to own anything. What is Co-Operation? It is a plan by which the people learn to produce the goods which their locality permits, through group effort; it embraces group buying, group selling, group financing, and so on for all the social services which shield the welfare of men. It opposes the system of man set against man in competitive fury for livelihood.”¹¹⁵ A later issue of the *Extension Bulletin* explained cooperativism as the only reasonable response to the Depression: “Communism is the system of the desperate poor. Fascism is the system of the desperate rich. Co-operation is the system of a thoughtful and enlightened people.”¹¹⁶

Morrison was a reluctant reformer, and we can see in the rhetoric of the third way why he found the Antigonish Movement useful. Morrison saw the movement as a

110 Morrison to A. Cassulo, 27 February 1936, box 16, folder 101, Morrison Papers, ADA.

111 “St. Francis Xavier University: Extension Work in Nova Scotia,” report for Carnegie Corporation, 31 May 1933, box 318, folder 318.9, Carnegie Corporation records.

112 “Report of the Work of St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department, Year Ending May 1934,” box 318, folder 318.9, Carnegie Corporation records. New Glasgow is in the Pictou County industrial area.

113 Johnston, *Antigonish Priest and Bishops*, 113. Tompkins was chaplain at Bethany, the motherhouse for the Sisters of St. Martha, for about half a year between his time in Canso and when he was moved to Reserve Mines. On Tompkins’s time in Revere, see Mary Arnold, *The Story of Tompkinsville* (New York: The Cooperative League, 1940) as well as Rusty Neal, “Mary Arnold (and Mabel Reed): Co-operative Women in Nova Scotia, 1937-1939,” *Acadiensis* XXVIII, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 58-70.

114 On the presentation of the Antigonish Movement as a middle way, see MacInnes, “Clerics, Fishermen, Farmers, and Workers,” 401-4.

115 George M. Boyle, “What is the Self-Help Plan,” *Extension Bulletin*, 1 November 1933.

116 *Extension Bulletin*, 8 November 1935.

bulwark against the dangerous radicals who threatened to mislead his flock into Godless communism and create needless strife and suffering. Despite his claims to Cassulo, there is no evidence that the Antigonish Movement had much to do with the failure of the Cape Breton “reds” to gain control of the district after 1925. Ironically, though, it was the presence of the reds that allowed Jimmy Tompkins’s reformist program to gain the support and blessing it needed from Bishop James Morrison.