

# C.W. Editor Back from Nova Scotia

Dorothy Day

*The Catholic Worker*, September 1938, 1,3,4.

*Summary: Describes her trip to Antigonish, Nova Scotia and her stay with the community. Discusses her meeting with the United Mine Workers and how cooperative stores there have built a spiritual foundation for their material needs distribution. Comments on the community's independence and its inter-dependence on one other. (DDLW #146).*

## Speaks of Steel Workers, Housing, Mine Workers

### DAY AFTER DAY

There are all sorts of odds and ends in my suitcase as I unpack from my three weeks' trip to Nova Scotia where I covered the Rural and Industrial conference at Antigonish. There are the pair of overalls which Father O'Neil from Georgetown gave me after he had worn them down into a mine one morning at Reserve Mines, Cape Breton. There are some pouches of tobacco from the cooperative store at Reserve, and a huge pair of white mittens, big enough for a seven-footer, knit by the fishermen at Dover. The only person they match in any way is Big Dan Ort; and I'm going to give them to him to wear in the dead of winter when he is selling *The Catholic Worker* up on Forty-second Street. He's a good indoctrinator, Big Dan is, and as he sells the paper, he'll be telling everyone of the cooperative movement at Antigonish, and there'll be a few more street corner discussions (round table discussions, after their fashion) on a Christian social order. . . There are some hand-spun wools and books on crafts, and two carders which Teresa gets great enjoyment in playing with. She is looking forward to the sheep on the farm, and washing and carding the wool herself to make comforters. With two sheep (not purchased yet, but one of our readers sent us the money for them) how long will it take to make seventy-five comforters, to warm the New York and Easton Catholic Worker gangs?

It Is good to be back, and I shall not go away again for a year. My mail is full of invitations to speak throughout the Middle West, but I have been wandering so much, here a month, gone a month, and now I shall stay home for a while.

Out in front Scotty, Clark and Shorty are managing the breadline with their usual kindness and efficiency, and the coffee, we still insist, is the best anywhere. We've been drinking strong, strong tea for the last three weeks—good but not so comforting as coffee. (Scotty Just ran in to say we had run out of sugar—we needed four pounds more to get through the morning.)

Scotty is not a Catholic, and I must tell him about all the Scotch Catholics I met in Nova Scotia, and the Scotch games we saw, and the Highland fling and the sword dance. And the music which sounded like the Chinese music in the club room down at the corner.

Joe Zarella tells me that during the festa to San Rocco the procession has bagpipes, trumpets and goodness knows what other musical instruments.

## **Eastern Steamship Lines**

The boat was crowded going up and coming back and one can't say much for the service on the Eastern Steamship lines. They have some kind of inefficient arrangement in the dining room so that everyone has to wait in line for a seat. Another bread line coming back, one not only waited for meals, but waited for landing cards, waited again to get them stamped, waited again to get off, so that the landing took almost two and a half hours. One man who had been abroad fifty three times said that it was easier to get into Germany than back into the United States.

But the trip was enjoyable with a day and a night on the ocean. Going up it was foggy and the fog horns mourned, but coming back it was clear and warm. Landing at Yarmouth one had to ride from eleven in the morning till one-thirty at night to get to Antigonish, so we stopped off at Truro that night and proceeded on again the next morning.

## **United Mine Workers**

No sooner had we landed at the "Extension" offices of Francis Xavier University, which is the seat of the Cooperative movement, than Father Coady announced we were going right back to Truro to address a convention of the United Mine Workers. Delighted at the closeness of the organized labor movement to the cooperative movement, I was glad to go. I had gone up there to learn about what was being done,—to sit in at the conferences of St. Francis Xavier University,—but found I had to begin speaking once again. Before I was through, I had talked to miners, steel workers, farmers and fishermen and many of them have been taking THE CATHOLIC WORKER for years and were close supporters of the movement. It made me feel again how necessary a penny paper is, that can be sent out by the bundle. It is all the better that it comes only once a month and is only eight pages. The workers do not read a great deal and the reiteration of general principles, and the ideas for a new social order we are stressing, come with so much the more force.

## **Miners and Steel Workers**

The cooperative stores that the miners and steel workers in Sidney and Reserve, and Glare Bay have started are models of efficiency and cleanliness. It sounds so paltry to say that—to say that they are the equal of any well-run chain store, when they mean so much more. They mean that groups of the workers have gotten together to study conditions: they have put into it their earnings to buy shares when they were working only two and three days a week

with large families to support; they have scrubbed and painted and schemed and figured, to make it a success. It's a store in the office of which you see missals lying on the desk. It's a store where the board thinks in terms of prayer to straighten out difficulties. The old stores used to give credit and gouge the customers. But that credit meant enslavement. It meant that stores shut off credit in times of strikes.

“But we know what it means to go hungry,” one of the board said. “We have known the times in our own childhood when our fathers came home with nothing but a loaf of bread for the whole family to eat. We know that voluntary poverty and the Works of Mercy which the Catholic Worker stresses must have their place in this movement too. We know that the spiritual foundation is everything that without it material success means nothing. We are working because we are members of the Mystical Body and we know that when the health of one member suffers the health of the whole body is lowered.

“So we are starting a St. Vincent de Paul Society to build up the idea of mutual charity and mutual aid. Everyone bringing in what he can spare. One of the members of the cooperative board is the prime mover.”

## Housing

It is hard trying to write this at the last minute before going to press. One can only touch on a few of the highlights of the Antigonish movement. But after all, our readers can get pamphlets and materials by writing to the Extension Department, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Tell them you are a Catholic Workers reader and they'll send on the pamphlets telling how they got started.

The housing project that is started by the miners deserves a whole article. They started with ten families in a study club and now they have a village they call Tompkinsville after Fr. J. J. Tompkins who with Father Coady are the prime movers of the new order in Maritime Provinces (which include Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, New Brunswick, New Foundland.) All the men in the group are miners and they have known each other since childhood. They average in age 30 years. The oldest is around forty-five and the youngest twenty-one. There are 53 members of the community counting the children. They studied their problems for six months before they started; they designed their houses even to the extent of building them of cardboard first. The houses are all 22 by 26 feet and the ten acres of land cost fifty dollars an acre. They have an option on an additional ten acres for a communal farm adjoining, to work in their spare time.

Then when the whole plan was worked out they were able to get allowances from the government of \$2,000, five hundred of which is for their labor since they are doing the work themselves. None of the men are carpenters. They are all miners. But by calling in occasionally a skilled carpenter, mason and plumber they are able to put up the houses themselves. One is complete, bath and all, as a sample to work out the budget, and the other ten are going up with all the men working on all the houses at once. To work so that all the houses will be ready for them at the same time, they dug all the foundations first, then did the cement work, then the framework, and so on. They have appointed a foreman out of their

number and they keep a time sheet. On the days when the mines are not working the men put in ten hours a day. The days they put in eight hours at the mines, they put in four on the house building. One man said that he had been forced to be absent for one day because he had put in sixteen hours straight at the mines, filling in for one of the men who was off.

## Mainadieu

The fishing and farming community where I spoke was down on the top of Cape Breton. There are not many houses in the little settlement but the men came from along the shore and from inland, and families came with their children. We had oil lamps lit, four of them hanging in a chandelier in the middle of the room. Even the glebe house, which is what they call the rectory, has no electricity or running water. It was a serious, sympathetic crowd which gathered together to listen that night. Everywhere one found readers of THE CATHOLIC WORKER who felt that they knew us all, here in New York and in our other branches. It was good to talk to them.

Next morning Teresa, Fr. Poiriet and I got up at six-thirty and took one of the fishing boats (with an old automobile engine in it) out to Scaterie Island which is eight miles out from the mainland and extends seven miles out into the ocean. It was the last tip of land Lindbergh saw as he made his first flight cross the ocean.

When we got to the furthest tip of the island and pulled at the little dock we still had a walk of a mile across the island to get to the Church. There are only twenty families on the island, living on either side of it, and Father Poiriet gets over there once a month. He had to hear a great many confessions before Mass began, even the littlest girls and boys all dressed up for the great occasion, preparing to receive "Him Whom the heavens and sea cannot contain."

There was a sermon, and after the Mass we had a little meeting out in front of the Church from the steps, looking out over the sea where the fishing boats were out already. The men on Scaterie had stayed late ashore to receive Communion.

We had breakfast in the little three-room house of one of the families—a meal of porridge, tea and toast. The young mother of nine children, two of them had died,—served us daintily, holding a baby in her arms who crowed at us blissfully.

It is a hard life for the women there on the island, what with the long winters when the children are within doors. It's next to impossible to get a doctor there in the winter, the sea is so full of floating ice, and last winter she had been ill with scarlet fever when the baby was born, and the other children down with it too. A gallant and brave woman, young Mrs. Wadden.

None of the people consider themselves to be leading heroic lives, heroic in their patience and endurance of poverty. They are independent and sturdy, and they have hopefully started a study and a credit union. When the fishing is good and the market good, they get ten cents a pound for the sword-fish which come to as big as five hundred pounds. Then they have a good winter. But they must organize their marketing, and besides that they must study farming and handicrafts. There is not a plough on the island and only one horse. There are cows and chickens, but no sheep,

## More to Come

We are going to write more and more about this work during the coming winter. We wish our readers to know of this power house which is Antigonish, which is sending light over the continent. They are in their beginnings after years of patient endurance and study. They are working the “little way” and little St. Therese whose statue stands over the altar in the Church on Scaterie Island must love them.