

# To All You Mainlanders .....

## A Newfoundlander Replies



BY PATRICIA THOMAS



Every time I hear someone criticize Newfoundland it makes me boil. At first I didn't mind it so much, but when I kept on hearing the same ridiculous stories being tossed at me day in, day out, it finally began to get under my skin.

**OUTSIDERS IGNORANT**  
Would you believe that a reasonably intelligent girl I went to school with in Montreal actually believed that my home was a 2-story igloo, and that I owned my own private dog-team? I have heard Newfoundlanders being described as lazy good-for-nothings, wards of the government. People in Newfoundland are supposed to live from one month to the next on their unemployment cheques. The worst of this, of course is the attitude of smug, sneering superiority assumed by almost all the non-Maritimers I have met when they hear that I am from Canada's tenth province. There is absolutely no basis for this

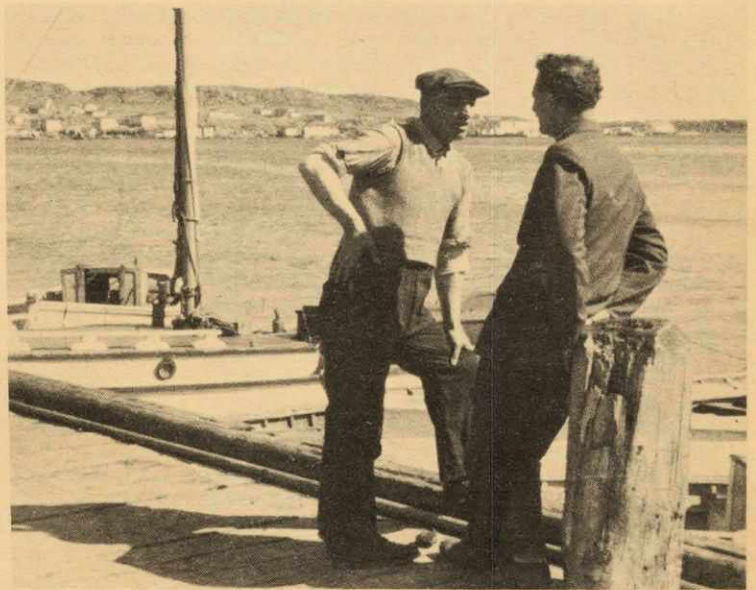
feeling. Although, there are some things amiss on the island, every half or quarter truth that the Newfoundlander has to endure when he or she travels has an explanation which cannot be faulted. Most of the rumors are without any basis at all.

**ALL NOT ROSY**  
However, the Newfoundlander has to make some admissions. Certainly, the level of prosperity, from the point of view of money, least, is low. But what option is there? The Island is a huge place. It has roughly the area of the 3 Maritime Provinces, but a population of less than half a million. Natural resources except for pulpwood are almost nil. We have new development in Labrador, but this cannot make up for the poverty of the Island itself.

It is quite true that at certain times of the year, there are many Newfoundlanders on Unemployment Insurance. But most Newfoundlanders are self-employed, or nearly so. During the winter season, repairs on house and also on the fishing equipment are necessary for most of the small fishermen, who form a very large part of the population. It is not that these men refuse to work; in fact they are working, even though it is for themselves. Furthermore, most of the towns are very small, and communications are not the easiest, especially in the winter.

What is very hard for the outporter to take is that there is a race of people in St. John's who are almost as contemptuous and supercilious as the typical mainland. There are a few other towns which are somewhat half-way between the typical outport and larger centres like St. John's and Cornerbrook. The people here are a little closer to the realities of life, but there is still a stratification.

**NEWFOUNDLAND HAS OWN CULTURE**  
Another thing which the super-informed Upper Canadian doesn't seem to realize is that Newfoundland, owing to its different cultural background is a cultural entity of its own, almost as different in its way as Quebec is from Ontario. This colors the whole attitude toward the life back home. The pace of life is quite different. Then owing to the poverty of Newfoundland, there are educational problems, so the level of education is necessarily lower. Many of the educated people move away. This is not as



THE PRESENT . . . .

selfish as it seems. Under the present set-up, something which is in no way the fault of either the Province or the people, it is really remarkable that there is such a large number who remain. This is because of the intense feeling of nationalism felt by Newfoundlanders, even though we don't go around, putting bombs in mailboxes.

**COUNTRYSIDE INHOSPITABLE**  
Another point of criticism is the state of the roads. Of course, these are made by the truly ignorant. The landscape, choked as it is with rock, hill, swamp and the like poses tremendous problems to the Highway construction program. Add to this the very scattered and sparse population, the reader will get some idea of the problems faced by the Newfoundland Government. And this government is one thing the Province can really be proud of, comparing as it does with the best in Canada. What other provincial premiers had the courage to call the bluff of Big Labor, and sent the IWA and their thugs scurrying back into the woodwork on the mainland. However, there is some evidence that labor 'goons' set the terrible forest fires of a few years ago.

The mores and customs of the people, too, come in for more than their fair share of criticism.

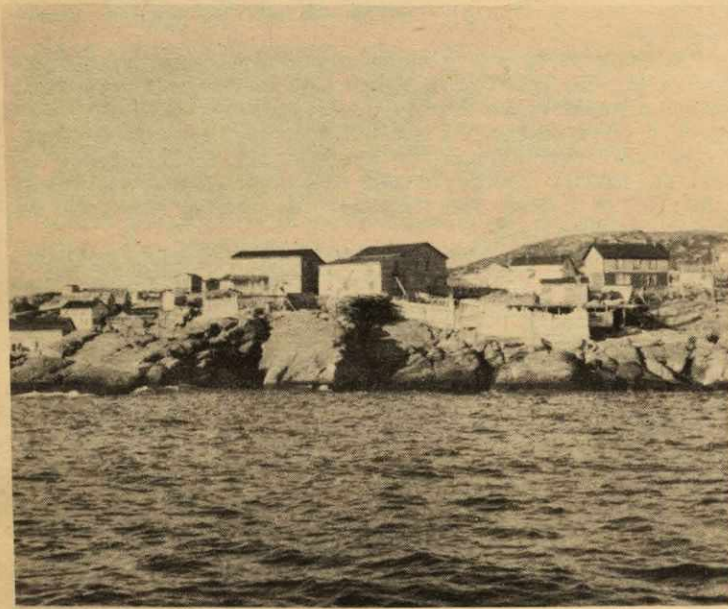
Newfoundlanders are a friendly and highly hospitable people, and some of the pseudo-sophisticates of the mainland can even find something to ridicule in this. For these people I can only feel sorry, for I am glad that my outlook is not so distorted. Religion is well-observed by the people as a whole.

**SEA BIG INFLUENCE ON NEWFOUNDLAND LIFE**  
This, of course can be at least partly said to be due to the environment. The sea is a wild and cruel thing. The real power of nature can be observed in the fierce grandeur of a storm, and many have said that this type of life, near as it is to nature, brings man nearer to God than other types of existence which are somewhat more artificial. However, oddly enough, this apparent adherence to religion has another side. The illegitimacy rate is quite high in the outposts, and this sort of thing is also common elsewhere, too. Perhaps the lack of the strong Calvinist background, which hangs over most of the rest of North America like a great dark cloud is the answer for this. However, the above-mentioned things take place everywhere, in any society, not just in Newfoundland. Perhaps another explanation is the fact that in the outposts the girls have to marry young; economics force this.

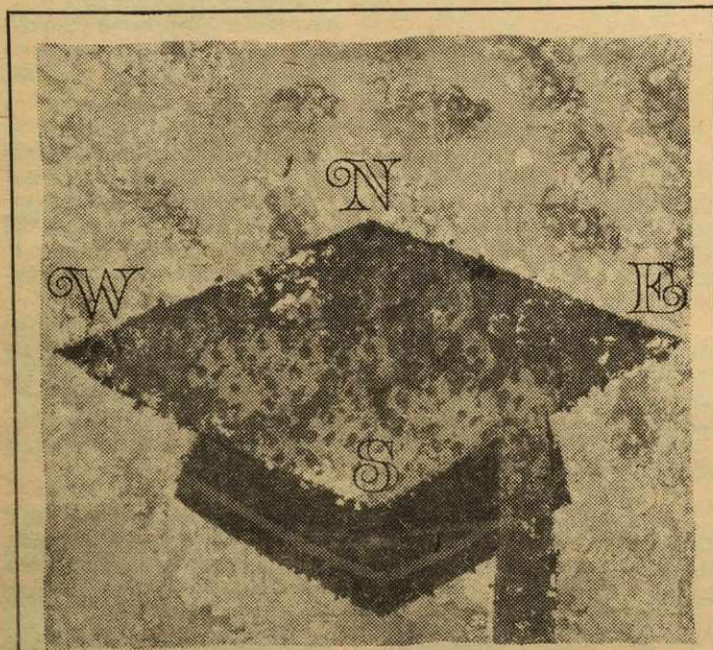
Owing to the elemental nature of things here, it is a necessity, and no doubt, this had had its effect upon the social outlook of the outport dweller. One has to see an outport village to understand this sort of thing. A small cluster of houses, grouped together on a largely rocky shore, scattered here and there around an inlet in the iron-bound coast is the usual thing. There is wharf and a store, and one or 2 other "community buildings." All around is a rocky shore often lined with high cliffs. Gaunt and grim perhaps to the outsider, but it can also be beautiful, and whether they care to admit it or not, this is how most Newfoundlanders see their home. I know I do. I was not born on the Island, but I feel every inch a Newfoundlander, and I am very proud of it.



THE FUTURE . . . .



THE ANCIENT PAST . . . .



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