

CHAPTER FIVE

As a high school teacher I was called upon by the Department of Education to mark high school examination papers each July and during every successive year met Mr. Aberhart. I was present with him when he was discussing with other members of the marking staff various aspects of the depression and was explaining the conditions he saw in his own school and comparing them with conditions described by other teachers. It was on one of these occasions, when he was asked by a teacher from Edmonton, Mr. Charles Scarborough, whether or not he had ever read any of the writings of Maurice Colborne who was advocating the program outlined by Major Douglas as the cure for the economic ills which by this time had become world-wide.

He loaned Mr. Aberhart the book to which he referred and the very next day Mr. Aberhart was able to say that he had sat up most of the night thoroughly enjoying what he was reading. This was the beginning of the Social Credit movement in the Province of Alberta.

Mr. Aberhart at this time was undoubtedly the most widely known school teacher in the Province. Crescent Heights High School had been honored time after time as his students received top awards. Besides, his work for years as an evangelist had taken him by radio into almost every home. During his Sunday religious broadcasts, he began to discuss the world-wide depression and quoted from the Bible time after time to prove that the restriction of goods and the destruction of foodstuffs, while people starved, was not only unChristian but completely wicked.

It was not long before he was able to report to his Sunday audience on the tremendous number of letters pouring in to him from his listeners who wanted more and more information on Social Credit. While the writings of Major Douglas were becoming much more widely known, his books were such that the general rank and file of people asked for pamphlets and booklets to be written which would outline in simplified form what, in effect, were the theories of Major Douglas.

The next step was for Mr. Aberhart to undertake to prepare such information. As soon as a leaflet or a pamphlet was issued, it became the subject of attack by the press, radio commentators and political speakers of the old line parties. Mr. Aberhart endeavored to point out that the only thing lacking to bring the benefits of our productive system to all those who needed food, clothing and shelter was an increased supply of money. He pointed out to the public in fearless fashion the policies followed by banking institutions and though he had become so recently acquainted with this subject, he read everything he could secure about those men of the past who had criticized the operation of the money system and began to quote at length such people as Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, President Jefferson, President Woodrow Wilson and also prominent bankers, such as H. D. Macleod and Vincent C. Vickers, who, though bankers, were very critical of the powers bankers possessed.

Political leaders in different countries, such as Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald, Disraeli and others were also quoted at length and it was soon obvious to all that Mr. Aberhart's speeches were having a tremendous impact upon the people of the Province. It was not long before the banking fraternity sponsored large ads in daily newspapers and without reference to Mr. Aberhart or the Social Credit movement, clearly indicated that this was the only reason for such advertisement.

Anyone who listened carefully to the arguments of the Social Credit leader on the one hand and read the bankers' advertisements on the other could easily see that those who control the monetary policy of the country were well aware that the monopoly they possessed was being exposed to such an extent that they had better appeal to an uninformed public for support before too many of the public became fully convinced of the rightness of Mr. Aberhart's contentions.

It was not long before people who were capable of speaking in public, organized small groups of individuals wherever possible and took the lead in explaining what they believed to be the Social Credit remedy for our economic ills. As one would naturally expect, it soon became obvious that those who disagreed with Mr. Aberhart did a similar thing and anti-Social Credit meetings were called from time to time to be addressed by speakers who did everything possible to discredit what had now become a Social Credit movement.

Shortly after Mr. Aberhart had commenced talking about Social Credit during his Sunday afternoon programs and it was evident that interest was being shown on the part of the public, he made a plea one Sunday afternoon for people to submit to him names of those whom they considered to be one hundred honest men who were concerned, as he was, for the welfare of the public and who would be prepared to devote much of their time to bringing before the public eye the same message he himself was attempting to bring: namely, that of showing the public the reasons for poverty in the midst of plenty, together with the proposed Social Credit remedy of monetary reform. Before the end of the week I had received from Mr. Aberhart a letter stating that my name had been submitted to him by one of the listeners from Rocky Mountain House, the late Jack McLean, who was at that time an employee of the Canadian Pacific Railways at Rocky Mountain House. I replied to Mr. Aberhart to the effect that I was vitally interested in what he was attempting to do and told him that I'd be glad to assist him in any way that I could. I was, at that time, the president of our local Social Credit group which had already held three or four meetings at the home of Mr. McLean.

In due course Mr. Aberhart received the names of one hundred individuals and he kept in touch with them regularly to make sure that each and everyone was telling the same story to the public. These one hundred men represented many walks of life: laborers, tradesmen and professional people, banding together for a single purpose—that of convincing the people of Alberta that the depression was completely unnecessary, and that there was a simple solution to bringing about the distribution of the goods we were producing in such great abundance.

Interested people contacted Mr. Aberhart's office every week asking for speakers and pointing out that arrangements had been made to hold meetings in the little rural school or community halls and even homes throughout the length and breadth of the Province. During the broadcasts he would read off the list of requests and having previously checked the geographic location of each place, would speak then to one or another of the one hundred names and ask them to let the people know that they could come and address the proposed meeting. His system worked well, although the requests came in so thick and fast that some of us who by this time were also becoming known to the public, were addressing meetings every night of the week.

It was not unusual to drive over exceedingly bad roads to find the little rural school jammed to the doors by eight o'clock. Every means of conveyance had been used by the people to get there—a few cars, plenty of Bennett buggies (automobiles without engines,

drawn by horses), saddle horses and every sort of horse-drawn vehicles were parked around the school yards. Benches were arranged in appropriate parts of the room where babies and young children slept while the meeting was in progress. In places of affluence, one occasionally found two Coleman gas lamps burning, one placed where it could be advantageously used by the speaker and the other suspended from the ceiling over the audience. On many occasions, however, one found that a single coal oil lamp sitting on the teacher's desk was the only illumination in the entire room. The stove at the back of the school room not only supplied the heat, but also served as a means for keeping the coffee hot, as no meeting was complete without the sandwiches, cake and coffee supplied by the women of the neighborhood. To defray the expenses, if any, of the speaker, a collection was always taken up and a twenty-five cent piece on the plate was usually a large donation. Occasionally one found a dollar bill and it was not unusual for remarks to be made to the effect that there must be at least one plutocrat in the crowd, or perhaps a poor fellow who had inadvertently used his only dollar bill and not the kids' play money or the flour coupon he had intended. Mr. Aberhart used to say jokingly that it was possible to judge ahead of time approximately what the collection would be by counting the number of people in the audience and multiplying by three cents. On more than one occasion I tested his theory and found it was very close to being correct.

I shall never forget the first time Mr. Aberhart spoke to me on the air, asking me to address a group of people several miles west of Olds who had not, up to this time, had an opportunity of having a Social Credit speaker in their district. The distance from Rocky Mountain House to the hall in which the meeting was to be held was about forty miles as the crow flies, but in order to get there I was obliged to drive from Rocky Mountain House east to Red Deer, then south to Olds and then west to the district concerned, which meant that the drive one way was about one hundred and sixty miles. I arrived at the hall at twenty minutes to eight, leaving my car on the road and working my way through a maze of teams and sleighs, in order to get to the hall door. The hall was jammed to capacity; saw horses had been placed around the outside edge, planks placed upon them, in order that young children would have a place to sleep before the meeting was over. On the desk in the front were two coal oil lamps and at the opposite end of the hall was the usual large log-burning stove on which sat cans containing several gallons of coffee.

Following a short introduction by the chairman, I commenced to speak at eight o'clock. I attempted to close my talk at nine-thirty but was urged by the crowd to continue to supply them with further information. Although I felt like a rank amateur, which no doubt I was, it seemed that I possessed a great deal of information the crowd was anxious to obtain. On several occasions I ended my discourse, only to be pressed into continuing the story. By eleven o'clock the ladies served coffee and sandwiches and a lively question period took place during this time. I shook hands with the chairman at twenty minutes to one and started for home. This was my initiation as a speaker for William Aberhart. It was at this meeting that I gained the reputation of being the type of Social Credit speaker who, rather than needing a watch in order to time himself, could be better suited by using a calendar.

I tell this story simply to illustrate the tremendous interest which was being shown in that day by people who had experienced and were still putting up with, the effects of the great depression and who were looking earnestly for some measure of hope to enable them to secure at least the bare necessities of food, clothing and shelter for their families.

Throughout the length and breadth of Alberta, Social Credit groups were being formed and regular monthly meetings were being held by all of them under what would be considered today the most adverse conditions. By 1934 it was obvious the Social Crediters meant business and would do everything legally possible to bring pressure upon the government to try to secure their support for a Social Credit program.

By this time many members of the U.F.A. government were becoming fully aroused as to the need for some sort of a change and as far back as August, 1932, representatives of farmer and labor organizations from four western Provinces were meeting with their counterparts in Eastern Canada. The result of these meetings had been the organization that year of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, commonly known as the C.C.F. This organization stated in its manifesto its belief in Socialism.

In January of 1933 the U.F.A., at its convention, agreed unanimously to support the principles of the C.C.F. and went so far as to advocate a planned system of production, distribution and exchange of all goods and services, together with the socialization of banking and natural resources. The U.F.A., however, continued to retain its own identity and autonomy. Among the Ottawa "ginger" group were men who had become convinced monetary reformers, while others of them definitely leaned to the left and favored the C.C.F.

In the 1934 convention, two conflicting resolutions were introduced, one asking the government to draw up a platform for the 1935 election, based upon the proposed C.C.F. program. The second resolution asked the government to investigate carefully the Douglas Social Credit proposals with a view to the introduction of a Social Credit program, if a majority of the members of the Legislature believed such program to be feasible.

By this time many members of the U.F.A. had become members of the Social Credit League and were not prepared to accept the first resolution. The second, therefore, passed with a good majority, the result being that the government at its spring Session convened the Agricultural Committee of the Legislature and invited Major Douglas, Mr. Aberhart and others to give evidence in support of the Social Credit cause. Major Douglas and Mr. Aberhart accepted the invitation, as did three other men not so well known to the public. One was Mr. Herbert Boyd, who represented what was then known as the Douglas Social Credit League of Canada, two others being Mr. Larkham Collins, chartered accountant, and Professor Elliott from the University of Alberta. Major Douglas himself appeared for two full days, April 6th and April 10th. The main result of these meetings was a firm resolve on the part of Social Credit supporters to continue unabatedly their organization, insisting that if neither of the parties represented in the Legislature would espouse the Social Credit cause, some other means would have to be devised to gain their ends.

Pressure was being brought upon Mr. Aberhart by many Social Crediters to form a Social Credit party but this he resisted until he was left with no alternative. A "straw" vote was organized early in 1935 and volunteers went from door to door with ballots upon which qualified voters could declare themselves for or against Social Credit. The result was overwhelmingly in favor.

By this time the U.F.A. government had problems other than economic ones with which they had to cope and as a

result the Liberal party was already proclaiming their success at the polls, knowing that an election would be held sometime in 1935. They promised that when returned to power they would "employ three of the most expert Social Credit advocates to carry on full investigations into the proposed claims of Social Credit and evolve and submit a plan suitable for the Province of Alberta which the Liberal party pledges itself to submit to the Legislature for its consideration."

One would have thought that Social Crediters would have accepted this promise as genuine, especially as it was reinforced by none other than the Liberal Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King, when in Ottawa on January 27th of the same year, he declared with astonishing candor: "Until the control of the issue of currency and credit is restored to Parliament and recognized as its most conspicuous and sacred responsibility, all talk of sovereignty of Parliament and of democracy is idle and futile."

No matter where one went in Alberta, monetary reform and Social Credit were being freely discussed. The names Douglas and Aberhart were household words. Mr. Aberhart was given an invitation to speak to the 1935 U.F.A. convention and during the lengthy debate which followed his speech, he pleaded with the U.F.A. government to adopt Social Credit proposals and to employ them in the Province. Little did they realize at the time that their refusal which followed was to result in their total annihilation as a government. The convention did, however, pass a resolution urging the government to employ Major Douglas as chief reconstruction advisor for Alberta, this being announced in the Legislature on February 21st of that year.

The result of Douglas' subsequent visit was a report known as the First Interim Report submitted to the Cabinet on May 23, 1935. Briefly, it recommended the provision of a news circulation system, particularly the providing of radio facilities, the organization of "some credit institution" and the accumulation of "foreign exchange".

By this time, however, Social Crediters throughout the length and breadth of the Province had become convinced that "if you want a job done well, do it yourself" and consequently clamored for direct political action. A convention was called in Calgary on April 4th and 5th and in Edmonton on the 25th and 26th. The delegates formulated a Social Credit platform which they believed, when carried out, would go a long way to solving the many problems which faced the people of that day. The platform consisted of ten planks, as follows:

Social Credit Platform 1935

TEN PLANKS MAKE ONE PLATFORM

1. FINANCE AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF GOODS

- (a) The Cessation of Borrowing from Outside Sources and the creation of our own Credit, thus gradually eliminating heavy interest charges and retaining our own purchasing power.
- (b) The Distribution of Purchasing Power to bona fide citizens by means of Basic Dividends sufficient to secure the bare necessities of food, clothing and shelter. This distribution is to be based upon active willingness on the part of the individuals to co-operate in the welfare of the people of the Province.
- (c) The Establishment of a Just Price on all goods and services, and the regulation of the price spread on all goods sold or transferred within the bound of the Province.

This Just Price is to be just and fair:

1. To the producers and to the distributors.
They should not be required to sell goods for less than the cost of production or of import.
2. To the consumers.

They should not be exploited or unduly deprived of fair returns for their purchasing power.

(d) The Establishment of an Authority to deal with production loans.

2. THE PRESENT PROBLEM OF DEBT

(a) Private, or Mortgage and Tax Indebtedness.

1. The Distribution of Basic Dividends and the Establishment of a Just Price will at once begin to give our citizens the ability to cope with the

Mortgage Indebtedness at present against their farms and their homes.

2. The increase in Consumption will of necessity make a greater demand for services and that will produce wages to help settle these debts.

3. The debt Adjustment Act will be amended to prevent hasty foreclosure on all property and adequately to meet the requirements of all classes of debtors.

4. Later, as prosperity returns under Social Credit, interest-free loans may be granted to liquidate or refund the present interest-bearing mortgages.

(b) The Municipal and the Provincial Debts.

1. Bonds could be offered to our citizens to liquidate this indebtedness at a lower rate of interest.

2. This would decrease the amount of taxes levied in proportion to the success of this proposition.

3. THE PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT

(a) Social Credit at once removes the demoralizing effect of Unemployment by the issuance of Monthly Dividends based on the Cultural Heritage of Citizenship.

(b) The Increase in Consumption would of necessity result in increased employment.

(c) The Issuance of Basic Dividends would retain our young people longer in schools of training and thus prevent them from entering the Labor Market.

The increase in Dividends for people who have reached the age of fifty would tend to remove older men from productive employment. Thus, there

would be more employment for those who were better able to perform it.

(d) Every sympathetic consideration will be extended to those in immediate need.

4. THE PROBLEM OF EDUCATION

(An Eighteenth Century System can never handle a Twentieth Century Problem)

(a) Our schools should at once be made to supply the training that the New Social Order demands.

Up to the present the University requirements for an academic preparation has predominated our Educational System. Only a small percentage of our students ever enter University.

(b) Further attempts should be made to bring the various Provincial Educational Systems into greater harmony.

(c) The Basic Monthly Dividends will at once remove the hindrances to any student proceeding along any line of instruction that appeals to him.

5. THE BASIC INDUSTRY—AGRICULTURE

(a) The Just Price for all products will remove the necessity of selling under the cost of production.

(b) The Marketing of Agricultural and Dairy products must be assisted:

1. By taking definite steps to find exports markets.
2. By pressing for lower and more equitable freight rates.
3. By seeking a revision of the system of grading farm products.
4. By attending regularly to the Market Roads.
5. By encouraging the feeding, breeding and finishing of better livestock in Alberta.

(c) The Development of the Industry should be encouraged in the following ways:

1. By a careful investigation of the irrigation projects of the Province.
2. By an aggressive policy of Noxious Weeds eradication.
3. By a survey and the formation of a definite policy regarding the Drought Area of Alberta.
4. By improving the regulations regarding grazing and hay leases.
5. By amending the Homestead Laws to make it possible for settlers to establish homes for themselves.
6. We are heartily in favor of assisting in the continuance of Rural School Fairs, and Boys' and Girls' Club Work within the Province.

6. THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

(a) Definite action should immediately be taken to provide satisfactory health attention for the people in all parts of the Province, and any patient of a hospital should be permitted to secure any type of qualified, licensed practitioner he or she may desire.

(b) We are favorable to the ultimate introduction of State Medicine into the Province.

7. THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

(a) We favor the revision of the rules of Court procedure, the reduction of costs, and the introduction of facilities for arbitration and conciliation.

(b) We shall support the maintenance of Order and Law by means of an efficient Police Force.

8. LABOR, INDUSTRY AND COMMUNICATION

(a) We shall encourage the establishment of essential industries within our Province.

(b) We favor a complete reorganization of the Alberta Government Telephone System for the purpose of making it efficient.

(c) We will support and encourage an efficient inspection of all industries to see that all laws for health safety and payment of all labor and industry are safely guarded.

(c) We favor the amendment to the present Compensation Act with a view to providing just compensation to all workers.

9. GENERAL REORGANIZATION

(a) Every Department of the Government needs to be reorganized and to be put on a business basis to eliminate the present enormous waste of taxpayers' money.

10. PLANNING

- (a) A thorough survey of Alberta's productive resources and the relationship of these resources to domestic consumption requirements and export markets must be at once undertaken.
- (b) The methods of taxation must be brought under immediate consideration for revision and improvement.
- (c) The Social Credit Government when in power will pass legislation to the effect that candidates submit to voters right of recall if they fail to carry out the proposals made prior to election.

The biggest job, however, still remained to be done—that being the task facing the Alberta Social Credit League, of preparing for the election. The fact that this was done in a matter of four months, which culminated in the election of the world's first Social Credit government, is a tribute to the organizational genius of Mr. Aberhart and the enthusiasm and loyalty of the people for the Social Credit cause.

During these early days of the Social Credit movement, many names were becoming well known throughout the Province, especially the names of those associated with the Social Credit broadcasts, the most prominent being Mr. Aberhart, Mr. Manning and Mr. Clive Willmott of Calgary. In addition to these, the original speakers who travelled throughout the Province and who had been trained by Mr. Aberhart, were almost equally well known. Jack Landeryou, Fred Anderson, Joe Unwin, Earl Ansley, Arthur Wray and Eric Poole, together with two women, Mrs. Edith Gostick and Mrs. Edith Rogers, constituted the majority of the original speaking team.

Working closely with them, also, in Calgary, but more in the capacity of advisors on diversified topics were such men as Dr. Victor Wright, Mr. John Hugill, K.C., and Mr. Abe Schnitka.

Having decided upon the establishment of a political party, it became a matter of urgency to secure good candidates and to get them known throughout their constituencies. Mr. Aberhart was well aware of the type of tactics which might be used to destroy the Social Credit movement and impressed upon the people of the Province, as he spoke in his broadcasts, the necessity of choosing candidates who were convinced Social Crediters and as nearly as possible to choose such people who could not be swayed from their determination to support the Social Credit movement. He had pointed out time after time that if the Social Credit movement were defeated, it would be from within and not from without. Of late I have realized more than ever how true his words were.

Nominating conventions were organized in every Provincial constituency and in order to safeguard the Social Credit movement from sabotage, it was agreed that each constituency nominate as many prospective candidates as it wished and vote upon them until three or four remained, from which the final choice would be made. It was suggested by Mr. Aberhart and agreed to by the Executive of the constituencies that a meeting would be held in each riding, at which the prospective candidates in question would present themselves before an advisory committee made up of three or four of the well-qualified Social Crediters who had worked loyally with Mr. Aberhart and two or three zone directors from the constituency concerned. Each prospective candidate would appear before the advisory committee and answer a number of questions submitted to him, following which, upon a given date, the candidate of each constituency would be made known to the public.

Even though I had become recognized as one of Mr. Aberhart's official speakers, it had never been my intention to seek a political career. Friends, however, insisted that I permit my name to go forward at the convention. The Red Deer constituency of that day, in which Rocky Mountain House was located, consisted of an area bordered on the west by the Saskatchewan River and on the east by the Village of Delburne. This meant that Rocky Mountain House was in the extreme west end and, as I have said previously, had been for years the forgotten area of the constituency. Ten prospective candidates had been nominated at our nominating convention in Red Deer and after the voting was completed four people remained to go before the advisory committee. I, who, incidentally, led the poll, was the only one who came from the extreme west end. The other three were Mr. George Sterling of Benalto, just west of Sylvan Lake, Mr. Scott Hasty of Red

Deer and Mr. Earl Ansley, a school teacher from Blackfalds, who, as I have already said, was one of Mr. Aberhart's well-known speakers.

I felt sure that the advisory committee, which met at Sylvan Lake on May 24, 1935, would be bound to choose one of the other three rather than me. I tried to emphasize this fact to Mr. Aberhart by pointing out that the other three men had lived in the constituency much longer than I had, that Mr. Sterling and Mr. Hasty were well established in business and were highly respected citizens and that it was my desire to make a career for myself in the teaching profession.

I pointed out to him at the same time that the Department of Education had, only a month before, made a proposition to me through Dr. McNally, later to become the Deputy Minister of Education under Mr. Aberhart, and that he, Dr. McNally, was urging me strongly to forget any political ambitions I might possess and to come into the Department of Education. It was his desire to fit me shortly into his staff of Superintendents, after some attendance on my part at the University of Alberta. I remember Mr. Aberhart saying to me: "But does it not mean something to you that you received at the convention in Red Deer more support than the other candidates and do you not believe that your supporters would feel let down if you withdrew at this moment?" Naturally, there was only one logical answer.

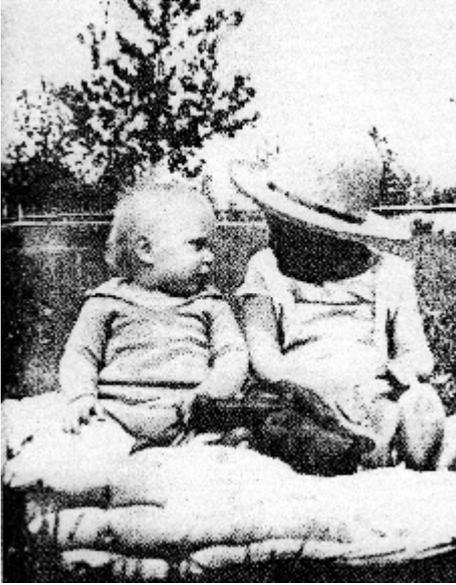
I had spoken to Mr. Sterling, Mr. Hasty and Mr. Ansley, all of whom were good personal friends and we had agreed amongst ourselves that no matter which one received the blessing of the advisory board, each of the rest would do his utmost to see that that man was elected. Mr. Ansley had already been assured of nomination in Lacombe and Leduc and he told the committee that it was his desire to be considered seriously in the constituency of Leduc, rather than in Red Deer or Lacombe. Earl Ansley was a completely selfless man and argued against his own interests in Red Deer and Lacombe, insisting to the advisory committee in each case that although his home was established in that area, those ridings could be won for Social Credit much more easily than could Leduc, which still required much more work. Mr. Hasty had made it plain that he preferred the advisory committee to choose either me or Mr. Sterling, as we were younger, both Normal School graduates who could, in all probability, look forward to a longer period of service.

During the interview, Mr. Aberhart stressed the absolute necessity of complete dedication to the Social Credit cause and the questions we were called upon to answer from the committee were framed in such a way that our answers left no doubt whatever in the minds of the committee members that we had at least a good working knowledge of the subject and that we were not in any way at that time affiliated with any other political party. This qualification was a must.

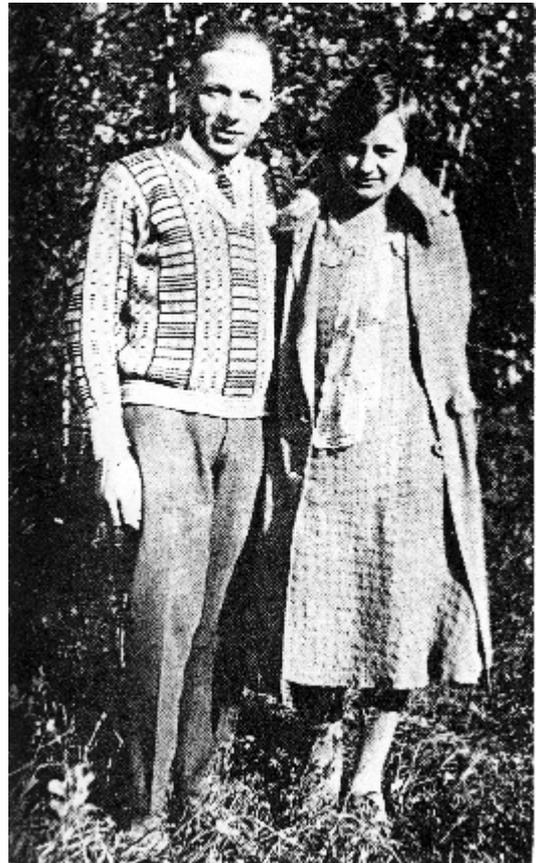
As I look back on those years, I believe that the vast majority of the men and women who took an active part in the Social Credit movement were completely dedicated and almost totally lacking in the desire for personal aggrandizement.

By the time the government announced the date of the election, August 22nd, I was in Edmonton marking high school examination papers. When at dinner time I returned to my boarding house, a telegram was awaiting me, telling me that the advisory committee had chosen me as the candidate for the Red Deer constituency. That evening the newspapers carried the story and every radio newscast assured the people of the Province that the Social Crediters had nominated candidates in every one of the sixty-three constituencies and were definitely a force to be reckoned with. The campaign was on! Telephones rang incessantly that night as well wishers phoned to congratulate the successful candidates, pledging their support and offering to work in any capacity whatever to assure a Social Credit victory at the polls. The first one to call me at my boarding house in Edmonton was my friend Jack Marshall, who, as I have previously mentioned, was a young man I had met at University Summer School.

Jack had by this time graduated in Arts and Law and was well established in business with the Sun Life Assurance Company. Jack was well known in Liberal political circles, his father being none other than the late Honorable Duncan Marshall who had been the Minister of Agriculture in the Liberal Government until 1921 and who subsequently was to become Minister of Agriculture of Ontario under Premier Mitchell Hepburn of that Province and who later, until his death, served as a member of the Senate.



Author's family, Aug 22, 1935.
Dennis 15 months, Keith 4
years



Author and future wife at picnic at
Bowness, May 1926



Author on day of first election,
August 22, 1935 and on day of
ninth election May 23, 1967