

CHAPTER SIX

Jack Marshall was one of the most remarkable men I have ever known. He kept completely abreast of everything of any consequence that was happening throughout the world, with special emphasis, naturally, upon the political affairs of the whole of Canada. His memory, as a result, undoubtedly, of his blindness, was developed to the nth degree. All one had to do was to call him by name on the telephone to be recognized by him instantly, even though the acquaintanceship had been little more than that of a mere introduction. He was a capital "L" Liberal through and through.

I had met Jack many times between 1926 and 1935 and on every occasion, for some reason or other, the discussion seemed to get around to politics. I had always insisted that he should explain to me what constituted a Liberal, as I was sure the only reason he was one was that his father was one; that, undoubtedly, his grandfather had been one, too. I was free to admit that my sole reason for having Conservative leanings was the fact that my father was a believer and that I had heard from one of the greatest authorities, the Right Honorable Arthur Meighen, that Conservative stood for opportunity for youth. While Jack agreed that he undoubtedly had been greatly influenced by the attachment of his ancestors to the Liberal party, he could not understand how in the world anyone who gave politics any serious thought could be anything but a Liberal.

When he heard in 1934 that I was speaking on behalf of the Social Credit movement, he called me long distance to tell me that while he could in the past excuse me for my Conservative leanings, I had now committed the unpardonable sin, as no one surely could take Aberhart seriously and that he wanted me to visit him the first time I happened to be in Edmonton, when he could tell me face to face what he really thought, because there were certain laws in effect preventing him from expressing himself on the telephone as forcibly as he would like to do. All of this, naturally, was being done good naturedly and provided both of us with a laugh.

On the occasion to which I have just referred when he telephoned me at the boarding house, he congratulated me for being chosen as the Social Credit candidate and then assured me that the Social Crediters would take the trimming of their lives, as the Liberals were preparing for a landslide.

Shortly before this, he, along with five other Liberals, had been nominated to seek election in the multiple constituency of Edmonton, which at that time was entitled to elect six members to the Legislative Assembly. That evening a public meeting was being held at the Edelweiss Hall, at which the six Liberal hopefuls were to speak. Jack assured me that this was my opportunity to hear a "damn good speech" and told me that if I could meet him on the corner of 101st Street and Jasper Avenue just before eight o'clock, I could even have the privilege of driving him to the hall. He added: "Now don't get me wrong; I don't want you to chauffeur me for nothing; I promise here and now to pledge to you my first twenty-five dollar Social Credit dividend." Incidentally, Jack's sense of humor knew no bounds.

We arrived at the Edelweiss Hall a few minutes after the other five candidates had taken their seats and after assisting Jack to the vacant chair left for him, I took a seat in the front row beside Mr. Joe Unwin, who, as I have said before, had been one of Mr. Aberhart's original speakers, well known in the Province and who had been selected just that day by the advisory board as the Social Credit candidate in the constituency of Edson. Joe Unwin, incidentally, was a man who loved a joke and had, on more than one occasion, matched wits with Jack. The speeches over, the chairman called a question period.

During the speeches, it had become obvious that the majority of those making up the audience were anything but Liberals and were, in all probability, Social Credit supporters. Joe, therefore, wishing to create a little fun at Jack's expense, rose to his feet when the question period was called and stated that he would like to ask a question of Mr. Marshall. While Jack made his way to the desk, Joe stated that he would like to make a statement before asking his question, whereupon Jack, ever alert, said: "Is this my good friend, Joe Unwin?" Joe replied in the affirmative and then stated: "Mr. Marghall, I listened to your speech with all the intelligence God gave me and could not find one grain of good argument amongst all the chaff." Without one second's hesitation, Jack said: "Well, Joe, I don't think you have an argument with me; but you no doubt have one with God." The audience at that moment belonged to Jack Marshall and no one enjoyed the comeback more than did Joe Unwin, who incidentally, forgot all about the question he was going to ask.

The election campaign which followed was undoubtedly one of the bitterest ever fought in the Dominion of Canada. It seemed that Mr. Aberhart was either dearly loved or viciously hated. Social Credit candidates soon found they were not only facing bitter attacks from political rivals but a hostile press and, for the most part, hostile chambers of commerce, while at the same time new organizations hastily came into being, just as dedicated to the destruction of Social Credit as its advocates were for a victory at the polls. One such organization was the so-called Economic Safety League and from the pen of one of its writers came letters in quick succession in the Calgary Herald, Edmonton Bulletin, Lethbridge Herald and the Medicine Hat News. These papers had a large reading audience in the province, situated as they were in the four major cities.

About a month before the election, a booklet of this organization suddenly flooded the Province. It was extremely cleverly done and the front cover attracted the attention of supporters and opposition alike. A quick look seemed to indicate that the contents undoubtedly would be an argument for the support of Social Credit. Consequently, every Social Crediter wished to read it.

In order that this may be significant to my readers, I should mention that it took only a suggestion from Mr. Aberhart that certain papers and certain publications were nothing but low-down trash, carrying vitriolic attacks against the Social Credit movement without making the slightest attempt to reason, but rather only to ridicule, to have people by the thousands refuse to allow such publication to enter their door. On one occasion he stated from the platform in Calgary that he was going to cancel his subscription to the Calgary Herald because he was so sick and tired of seeing himself misquoted and of quotes being taken out of context and of the unfair editorials which appeared day after day. He reported on the following Sunday over the air that during the week he had received hundreds of letters from supporters telling him that their subscriptions had been cancelled, too.

The booklet to which I referred, however, was widely read and, as a result, much talked about. Those who opposed Social Credit

argued that the Economic Safety League was doing a tremendous service to Albertans by analysing very fairly the Aberhart plan. Actually, however, it is true to say that Mr. Aberhart always stated that no such thing as a Social Credit plan ever existed but that, rather, he was advocating a common sense set of principles which when applied to our economic problems, would solve the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty.

Social Credit supporters were sometimes at a loss to understand whether the writer of the booklet was praising or condemning Mr. Aberhart, as he seemed to be perfectly fair in his analysis and this could not help but convey the impression that his criticisms were entirely just and reasonable. To illustrate, it is only necessary to read directly from page twenty-four of the booklet under the heading "The Leader and his Party":

"William Aberhart is the manner of man who, equipped with a good cause, would carry it to triumphant success, but weighted with a mistaken theory, in which he had complete faith, would drag the province down to disaster.

"He is so much the body and spirit of the present movement that it is essential to know more of him before deciding on the wisdom of entrusting him with the management of much the biggest business in Western Canada, at the most critical period in the life of the Province.

"For the last quarter of a century he has been a school teacher in Calgary, for a short time principal of a public school, but for nearly twenty years principal of the Crescent Heights high school, now the largest school in the entire province. He has been very successful as school principal, not an outstanding teacher, but a competent executive, inspiring loyalty in his staff and respect of pupils. He has shown himself to be resourceful, efficient, determined, strong and resolute. The school has had more than its share of departmental and other successes. It is a very creditable institution, popular among parents and citizens.

"During these years, Mr. Aberhart's other interest has been in church work. At first he was connected with a small church, either as a lay minister or in full charge. This took up most of his spare moments, and he took no part in political, professional or social organizations. His reading was evidently centered on his school and church work. His church activities during these years did not attract very wide attention, and the little church seems not to have expanded.

"With the advent of radio came the change. With keen insight into the value of this form of propaganda, he was one of the pioneers in broadcasting. By such time he had created what is called the Bible Students' Institute—I am not quite certain of the name—and did his broadcasting under its auspices. His sermons were unusual. They were strongly fundamentalist and of a prophetic nature, interpreting certain less understood references, particularly from the Books of Daniel and Revelation, in the light of present-day happenings. By the use of charts, which he made, and the interpretation of symbolic language of scripture, he revealed the date of the millenium, and Rapture, the second coming and other such periods, and described in modern terms the Beasts, and the anti-Christ. His methods were prophetic and interpretative, but he was critical of certain long-established religions and most scornful of the claims of modern science, which he condemned with much vigor and no tolerance."

However, the reader is left with no doubt whatever in his mind of the intent of the writer of the pamphlet as he reads the conclusion commencing on page twenty-seven, entitled "The Immediate Danger."

"If any person reading these articles believes that William Aberhart has organized a political party, with a sensational slogan, which has carried many good Albertans off their feet, merely to get himself into the centre of the stage, or even to sweep into office, he should abandon the idea for there is nothing further from the truth. If anyone has an idea that after reaching office, he would quickly shed the more extravagant and impractical parts of his program, that person is also very wrong. If any party leader has any hope that the Social Credit party, with a band of elected members—not a majority, say, but a group—would make a worthwhile ally in the general mix up that may follow an election, he would be well advised to abandon the dream.

"Mr. Aberhart is resolute, determined and inflexible and will fight unswervingly and without compromise for that program, such as it is, caring not a brass farthing for parties, groups, associations or alliances. If he should be placed in office he will move towards the goal without regard for cost or consequences to province or people. If he should hold the balance of power in a much divided house, he will see to it that the party that rules will accept his mandates, with perpetual turmoil and confusion as an alternative. It would be the alliance of the Nazis and the German Nationalists over again.

"I make these statements of fact before referring to some reasons why some Albertans are supporting the Aberhart candidates.

"'Let him take a chance, he cannot do so very much harm. He is a godly man', one says. 'If he can get us \$25.00 a month, that will surely help. If he cannot do it we shall be no worse off than before.' 'I'm tired of political parties. You say he cannot do anything because of the constitution. He cannot do anything very desperately without bumping into the constitution, which will hold him up, so why not take a chance? It cannot be so very desperate.'

"In reply to these people I shall make four observations.

1.—Alberta has already suffered considerable loss by threat of the coming of the Aberhart party. Bonds have fallen several points, which is a misfortune, not so much for the bondholders as for the province. People are withdrawing their money from Alberta banks. They are selling property and not re-investing. Manufacturers or capitalists with money to invest are delaying until the decision is reached. Those are the mild indications when the storm cloud is far off.

2.—If Alberta were electing Mr. Aberhart merely to make the experiment, though unwise, that might not necessarily be disastrous. If the voters elect sufficient supporters to put him in office no power can prevent him and them from taking full control and holding it for the next five years. There is no recall.

3.—What is very alarming is that at the time when efforts should be made to balance the Alberta budget, Mr. Aberhart and his supporters are sweeping along with a program of extravagance and recklessness which is enough to take away the breath. I am not referring now to the millions and millions for the basic dividends, but to the preliminaries before anything whatever is done. Here is what he plans to do at the very beginning: (I) Take a complete census, among other things to pry into "financial standing of private citizens." Census taking is the responsibility of the Dominion and would involve about \$250,000. (II) Commission of constitutional lawyers to formulate the act. (III) Commission of experts to fix just price, fix wages, etc. (IV) Establishment of credit houses with many

branches in large cities and smaller branches throughout the province. (V) School for educating officials.

"That would likely involve an expenditure of \$1,000,000 before a wheel turned or the act framed, and before he knows whether he can legally do anything he is attempting.

4.—He will then embark on a program of expenditure the like of which has never been undertaken in any other province or in any state in North America. I do not believe that he will be able to issue money but he plans a clumsy subterfuge in his non-negotiable certificates which will have somewhat similar results in the matter of inflation.

"He may not be able to impose an import tax, as he threatens, but he will go so far as to excite retaliation from other provinces and destroy the markets of Alberta manufacturers and producers.

"He may not be able to organize the just price as he plans, but he can create such chaos among the business men that it will take years to emerge from the confusion.

"He may not be able to fix the rate of wages, but he will make enough of an effort to create turmoil among working men and endless strikes.

"He will probably be unable to pay one basic dividend, but before he gets to that point he can load upon the province such additional debt as will keep it under for a generation.

"The selection of that party would be a reckless experiment involving the province in millions even if the people never got any further than to learn that all the fantastic promises could not be carried out. This period would not be an experimental interlude, or a blank, but a serious reaction and a costly mistake.

"The Aberhart Peril"

If you were a passenger among a bus-load of people, travelling through the more dangerous part of a mountain journey, and a fellow traveler insisted that he should take charge of the omnibus because he wanted to test an experiment, you would not likely warm to the suggestion. If he added that he had no knowledge of motoring, had never driven a car and did not know the route, you would not be enthusiastic about his proposal. If he added further, that the experiment, the details of which he declined to reveal, really was to drive over the precipices, to cut down distances you might decide that the time for action had come. In the preceding articles I have examined the different phases of the Aberhart plan with sufficient thoroughness to enable us to reach an unprejudiced judgment on the fact.

"Let us reconsider the essentials of the plan, eliminating all unnecessary association and confusing terminology.

(1) Mr. Aberhart proposes that the province give each adult person \$25 a month, for all time—a total expenditure of \$120,000,000 a year for ever and ever. The fact that he would pay these subsidies in non-negotiable certificates makes the transaction clumsier, but otherwise does not alter the situation.

(2) He plans to raise this enormous sum by creating what he calls the just price, which means government fixing of prices and other revolutionary changes in the way business is transacted.

(3) By means of this just price he proposes to squeeze from every purchase or sale made in the province what he calls unearned increment—excess profits—which he will use towards supplying the basic dividends. I have shown clearly that the unearned increment for a year would not yield enough to supply basic dividends for twenty-four hours.

(4) To raise enough money for the basic dividends for the remaining three hundred and sixty-four days, he plans the following impositions:

- (i) A sales tax on the consumer under some name or form.
- (ii) Tax on producers—levy on farmers' wheat, or coal, oil or power.
- (iii) Import tax on everything coming into the province.

One cannot fail to notice two things:

(1) The people who are to receive the basic dividends are the very same people who will be taxed, as consumers, producers and importers.

(2) The plan does not increase the goods to be distributed; increase the money to be circulated; or make a more equitable or juster distribution of either money or goods among the people.

"That, essentially, is the entire story, and nothing further is needed to describe it as a fantasy and a folly. In order to raise \$120,000,000 a year to be shared by every person, the province at additional expense, with added turmoil in industry, is to tax the same people to the extent of the same \$120,000,000.

"There is something more dangerous than that. The plan is merely a greatly added expense with confusion in business, if the experiment goes as well as the promoters expect. But everything will not and cannot go right, because among other things:

It is unconstitutional in spirit, and in many respects in letter.

It will lead to inflation.

Price fixing will lead to trouble of merchants.

Wage fixing will cause confusion and labour turmoil.

Government interference in industry means trouble.

Import tax would lead to retaliation and in the end destruction of manufacturing.

The plan would lead to isolation of the province.

It would develop into favoritism and throw the government of the province wide open to dishonesty and corruption.

"Taking the experiment at its best, eliminating in some miraculous manner the certain dangers, all that is left is a plan for taking from one pocket and with much effort, expense, turmoil, confusion and peril transferring what is left to the other pocket."

The writer of this booklet was not by any means the only writer in the Province who built up straw men in order to knock them down. Books of cartoons flooded the Province caricaturing Mr. Aberhart in such a way as to present him in the most ridiculous light possible. I remember particularly one such book, which, despite the depression, sold by the thousands throughout the Province for, I

believe, 25 cents apiece. Though intended obviously to portray Mr. Aberhart as being the world's leading nitwit, I am sure it was one of those things which rebounded in his favor. Having a good sense of humor, he derived many a good laugh himself from the cartoons, especially one I recall depicting him as a butcher using a knife about two feet long, to slice a monstrous sausage on which were written the words "Alberta Social Credit." The cartoonist had shown the portion of the sausage already sliced to be nearly as thin as tissue paper and underneath was the caption: "No matter how thin you slice it, it's still baloney." I remember Mr. Aberhart commenting: "Well, fellows like this will defeat their own ends by laying it on too thick." In addition to this book, many cartoons appeared regularly in the daily press a few of which are reproduced later in the book.

As the election campaign swung into high gear, the interest in Mr. Aberhart's program developed with the velocity of a prairie fire and everywhere school houses and halls were jammed to capacity wherever a Social Credit meeting was held.

The night before the election I addressed a meeting in the Elks' Hall in Red Deer, the hall being filled to capacity and over-flowing into the street. A couple of blocks away, the Liberals who had expected a landslide, had gathered to hear imported high-powered speakers. When I was speaking a note was handed to me from the audience which read: "The Liberals have four speakers, and twelve people in the audience. One of them left with me and is now listening to you."

The weather on August 22nd, voting day, was made to order and people flocked to the polls in unprecedented numbers. In the constituency of Red Deer, five men sought election, the Liberal party being represented by Dr. Fizzell of Sylvan Lake; the Conservatives by Mr. Payne from Red Deer; the C.C.F.-U.F.A. by a self-styled Communist from Calgary, Mr. Palmer; a Red Deer businessman, Mr. Johns, running as an Independent, while I ran as the Social Credit candidate. Much amusement was created as a car drove through the constituency with a banner on top, on which appeared the following: "Hooke is a Payne (pain); Johns is a Fizzell (fizzle); so vote Palmer."

Within minutes of the closing of the polls, returns started to pour in and the Social Credit committee room in Red Deer was a bedlam. Every phone call brought good news for the Social Crediters and when the counting was over, Mr. Palmer had received 292 votes; Mr. Payne, the sitting member, 612; Mr. Johns, 622; Dr. Fizzell, 788, while the Social Credit vote totalled 3,565. The people of that constituency had accorded the Aberhart cause 60.65 per cent of their total vote and the Treasury of the Province had been enriched by four hundred dollars, as all the opposing candidates forfeited their hundred dollar deposits.

When it became obvious that Social Credit had won the Red Deer constituency, Mr. Payne came to the committee room to congratulate me and in doing so stated: "I didn't realize there were so many liars in existence. If half the people who told me they were voting Conservative had done so, you would have been congratulating me!"

At the same time as the Red Deer results were pouring in, the radio was giving an account of every other constituency in the Province and similar results were being recorded almost everywhere. Every now and again the radio announcers would give out excitedly that a phone call had just been received saying that a baby boy had just been born to Mr. and Mrs. So and So and christened William Aberhart So and So. How many I don't recall. In 1930 the total vote cast in the Province was 188,219 but in 1935, even though our population had increased but slightly, 301,752 people cast their ballot. Of this total, Social Credit candidates received 163,700 more than all other parties combined. The U.F.A. government was swept into oblivion, as not a single candidate came anywhere near election. Out of a total of sixty-three members, Social Crediters elected fifty-six; the Liberals five and the Conservatives, two. The first Social Credit government in the world was now to begin its reign.

On the morning of August 23rd I received a long distance phone call from none other than my old friend, Jack Marshall. It went something like this: "Congratulations you old so-and-so. Didn't I tell you we expected a landslide? But I didn't realize until now how many blind people there are in Alberta. At least I have a right to be blind."

On August 28 a caucus of the newly elected members was convened in Calgary and now for the first time the men and women who were to form the first Social Credit government in the world got down to serious business as a group. It was only a formality to choose our leader, as obviously there was none other than Mr. Aberhart. He had chosen not to seek a seat in the general election, so it was known that one of the elected members would undoubtedly resign to make way for him. Several offered instantly but no decision was made at that time.

It was obvious that Mr. Aberhart was deeply moved by the tremendous confidence that had been shown in him and his followers by the vote of the people. While there was a general feeling of joviality, it is true to say that the pervading atmosphere in the Bible Institute was something much deeper, more sincere and devout, especially as Mr. Aberhart in prayer called upon Almighty God to guide and direct all those present in such a way that nothing would ever deter us from the task we knew lay before us. I am sure that everyone was deeply moved when that fine old hymn "Oh God our Help in Ages Past" was sung and I expect many felt as I did that even though this hymn had become our theme Song, and we had opened so many meetings by singing it, it meant so much more now to us than it ever had before.

There is no doubt that when Mr. Aberhart spoke about humility and expressed how humble he felt when he realized that he had been called to perform the tremendous task of solving the economic ills of our people, all were touched, as I was.

Though it seemed so easy during the political campaign, when debating with a political opponent to be confident, I experienced, and others must have, a feeling of inadequacy and most must have realized that we required a Power greater than our own if we were going to justify the tremendous faith the people of the Province had placed in us.

Mr. Aberhart read a list of forty-one elected members, asking them to stand as he did so. These were the candidates who had secured a clear majority on first count. Alberta in those days used a transferrable vote and though nearly all the remaining fifteen had maintained a good lead, a second count had been necessary to bring them beyond the fifty per cent and give them a clear majority.

The following day Mr. Aberhart journeyed to Edmonton to confer with the defeated Premier, Mr. R. G. Reid, successor to Mr. Brownlee, to make arrangements for the changeover. On September 3, 1935, the new Cabinet was sworn into office with Mr. Aberhart as Premier and Minister of Education. Mr. J. W. Huggill, K. C., of Calgary, became the Attorney General; Mr. Charles Cockroft, who represented the constituency of Stettler, became Provincial Treasurer and Minister of Municipal Affairs; Mr. W. N. Chant, representing Camrose, became Minister of Agriculture, while Dr. W. W. Cross, from Handhills, became Minister of Health. Mr.

W. A. Fallow, who had been mayor of the Town of Vermilion and who had carried on on behalf of the Town an unorthodox monetary system with marked success, and who now represented the Vermilion constituency, became Minister of Public Works, Railways and Telephones.

Realizing the vast potential of our natural resources, and believing that an intensified search for oil and gas should be quickly undertaken, Mr. Aberhart invited Mr. Charles C. Ross, an engineer well qualified in this field, to become Minister of Lands and Mines. It is interesting to note that Mr. Ross had never been known as a Social Crediter and, in fact, had had no connection whatever with the Aberhart movement. Mr. Ross, however, accepted the invitation and the Athabasca constituency was made available to him following the resignation of Mr. Tade, who had won the election. Mr. Ross indicated to Mr. Aberhart that he had always leaned toward the Liberal party in his political thinking. His appointment is an indication of Mr. Aberhart's desire to place the right man in this extremely important department, even though he had to go outside his elected representatives.

To fill the post of Provincial Secretary, and, shortly after, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Mr. Aberhart appointed his young protégé, Mr. Ernest Charles Manning, destined to become Mr. Aberhart's successor eight years later. Mr. Manning, still in his twenty-sixth year, was thus the second youngest cabinet minister ever sworn into office in the British Empire. When, eight years later, he became Premier, he was the second youngest man in the history of the British Empire to hold such a post, being superseded in each case by Pitt the Younger, who, at the age of twenty-three, became Chancellor of the Exchequer and before reaching the age of twenty-five became Prime Minister of Great Britain.

The swearing in of the Cabinet took place in the Assembly itself and all available space for visitors was filled to capacity. The first Social Credit government in the world, consisting of nine determined men, faced the gigantic task of bringing about in Alberta a condition of economic security for all, with individual freedom guaranteed.