



Only twice have Alberta voters changed provincial governments. The second, and the latest time was August 22, 1935—30 years ago tomorrow—when William Aberhart's Social Cre-

dit party won 56 of the 63 legislative seats. Perhaps no other Canadian election has stirred more passions than did that phenomenal victory by an unknown party and an untested

leader. Albertan staff writer JOE CLARK traces the progress of Social Credit, from the basement of a Bible Institute to the corridors of power.

*A desperate people turn to Social Credit*

By JOE CLARK  
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It is said that William Aberhart, standing in his place, his pulpit, in the Prophetic Bible Institute was shaken suddenly to realize the magnitude of victory.

From distant London, founder Douglas, and the Dean of Canterbury, wired. "There will be others, but only one first," said Douglas. "Alberta will kindle a world-wide torch," said the dean.

And away from the Institute, where all was joy and clamor, on the farms and in the towns and cities, countless individual lives were deeply marked and suddenly transformed.

Some businessmen prepared to leave the province. Others wondered of their safety on the streets.

The politicians of the other parties were dismayed.

And in the poor places, where drought and depression had struck at bellies and at hope, heads began to lift again.

## None impartial

Of those who lived through it, no one is impartial about that election of 30 years ago, August 22, 1935, when Alberta elected the first Social Credit government in the world.

If they themselves were followers of Aberhart, it will always be a watershed in the

story of the people's struggle with adversity. And if they were among the minority which opposed, they will remember hooligans, emotion run amok, and a stab of fear.

Social Credit, as devised by Major C. H. Douglas, the Scottish engineer, was far more than a simple formula for dealing with Finance. Douglas was a compassionate and impatient man, convinced that the individual was in danger of becoming overwhelmed by forces too massive for him to control. A technician, he saw technology giving birth to size — big unions, big business, big government — and he worried about the fate and the frustration of lonely man.

At first, he sought only to expose the danger. But then he thought he perceived a particular evil — an error in accounting . . . which had been passed on to price . . . and which assured that the goods would always cost more than the people could pay. Douglas believed that the error was plain to see and that it persisted only because a handful of the powerful would not change.

The two major instruments on which the Social Credit believe were the establishment of a "just price," and the issuance of a basic dividend.

The theorem was "A plus B".

But the enemy was Finance. And that, in Alberta, was enough.

See over



WILLIAM ABERHART  
... the prophet at his peak

cont- from reverse side

hausting debate at the U.F.A. convention.

The Liberal party, which thought it could replace the U.F.A. in 1935, didn't want to offend anybody, and expressed interest in the scheme, but little more.

The Conservatives were adamant. "Lunacy" one member said of Social Credit.

And so the Bible Institute machine, established for the works of propaganda, was mobilized for a campaign.

Groups existed in all 63 ridings, and Aberhart invited Social Crediters in each constituency to suggest four persons who might stand for Social Credit. With an Institute committee, and local advice, Aberhart named those who would run.

He himself was not among them. And, though he campaigned, it was as a non-candidate, a man without ambition, seeking only to advance his plan.

## Opening rally

Aberhart opened the public campaign with a rally in Edmonton which was equal parts honky-tonk and hallelujah. There were hot-dogs and hymns, bands and Bibles, a stirring prophet's speech, and the narration by William Aberhart of a horse race, in which a horse named Social Credit started out-of-sight and came on to win.

And that, indeed, was how the campaign went, but it wasn't really a race at all. For one thing, Aberhart and the people had won before they started. And for another, the other parties, as they traced their way around Alberta's outer shell, and talked to their own, and argued with one another, didn't realize

until the final days that Social Credit was even in the field. They thought this Aberhart a nuisance, not a threat.

So the business of the election, the choosing of the government, was done almost silently, out-of-sight. But the spectacle was public, and it has left the legacy.

From platform after platform Aberhart, this massive man with his great voice and skill and conviction, would thunder at the people. "You remain in the depression because of a shortage of purchasing power, imposed by the banking system. Social Credit offers you the remedy. If you have not suffered enough, it is your God-given right to suffer more. But if you wish to elect your own representatives to implement the remedy, this is your only way out."

## No answers

He would not answer questions. Once, when a former U.F.A. cabinet minister sought to question him, he roared at the crowd "Are you going to let this man cross-examine me?" And of course they did not.

His descriptions of the enemy were vivid. "This hideous monster which is sucking the very lifeblood from our people." "The henchmen of the money power." "The Fifty Big Shots." "principles . . . like those of the man who betrayed the Christ."

And some of his followers went to war with more than words. Radio critics of Mr. Aberhart were threatened with tar-and-feathers, and shooting and physical violence. Former U.F.A. Premier Brownlee had a meeting





ERNEST MANNING  
... his constant closest confidante



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disrupted by "a group of big fellows" who honked car horns, and yelled, and pounded logs against the walls and doors of the meeting hall. Reporters were barred from meetings, and often made to feel unsafe upon the streets.

On the highways, a U.F.A. man wouldn't stop to help a Social Crediter in distress.

In the churches, the country churches where so long there had been unity, Social Crediters sat on one side of the aisle, and others on the other, and there was hostile silence after service.

## Two sides

It wasn't all one-sided — Solon Low, who later led the Social Credit party nationally, once had to fist-fight clear of a menacing ring of miners who opposed him — but usually the venom of the anti-Socreds seethed inside, and that of the disciples was more obvious.

And always, on the other side of venom, there was that glorious hope, which undeniably uplifted thousands who had been cast down.

At 10:30, on the evening of that election day 30 years ago, a telegram came to William Aberhart, from the Canadian Press, conceding that victory was his. He was momentarily shaken, but then the audience arose and sang "O God Our Help in Ages Past."

The next morning, on the front page of *The Albertan*, was an editorial which reflected the reaction of one segment of Alberta: "... we will interest ourselves in watching the progress of the experiment, although we had rather it had been tried in Major Douglas' Scotland or Ethiopia, or anywhere but Alberta."

And on the street, in front of the Calgary court house, men lined up to receive their first dividend from Social Credit.

## Moment of truth

It was natural that William Aberhart would hear of Social Credit. A teacher, an evangelist, a force wherever he went, he was the kind of man who heard of things. And he seemed to have that kind of mind which would either dismiss a scheme completely, or swallow it whole.

For at least three years, he had dismissed Social Credit.

And then one troubled summer, the summer of 1932, he went to Edmonton to mark examination papers, and in one night, in St. Stephens' College, became convinced that Social Credit could save Alberta.

That was Alberta's third summer of Depression. Aberhart himself had that year felt Depression's force in both his pocket and his heart. The salaries of Calgary's teachers had been cut; then one of Aberhart's prize pupils, a Grade 12 student, had been driven by his family's straits to suicide. These things were on his mind in Edmonton.

There Charles M. Scarborough, who before had always argued Social Credit economics to his summer colleague Aberhart, put his economic arguments away and talked about humanity.

## Many followers

His convert was already a power in the province. In the '20s, William Aberhart, the Man of God, the so-convincing speaker of the Word of God, had gone on radio, and at his peak some 350,000 people heard his Sunday sermons. Broadcast from the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute.

Gradually, and with permission from his unconverted colleagues in the Institute, he began to slip Social Credit into the sermons. Then the emphasis on secular salvation became more pronounced, and was carried into public meetings, and inevitably inspired a lecture-course in the basement of the Institute. In this almost imperceptible, almost accidental, way, the building was begun of what Professor John Irving calls "the most efficient political machine that Alberta has ever known."

In the summer of 1933, Aberhart and Ernest Manning embarked upon the first of three strenuous summers on the road. Manning was young then, not quite 25, the devoted follower and closest confidante, who had come from Carnduff in Saskatchewan to serve the Institute. He would be at the prophet's side for a decade, until he took his place.

They held two meetings daily, and returned on weekends to Calgary and the Institute, and on the radio announced their next destinations, and on every Monday set out again. Manning driving. The crowds were almost all religious people in that first summer, but these often drove 50 or 60 miles to a meeting, in a time when that wasn't easy. And they went home workers.

## Education campaign

In the fall of 1933, the campaign began in earnest—the education a l c a m p a i g n, because there was then no thought of politics. People who had studied Social Credit in the Institute went to their home districts and became tutors themselves. Some went knocking door-to-door. All established study groups, and

in time, from this beginning, there grew up in Alberta some 1,800 local groups devoted to the study of Social Credit.

In the meantime, quite apart from Aberhart, other Albertans were looking in to Major Douglas. Local service and discussion groups in Calgary considered his teaching. And members of the monetary reform wing of the United Farmers of Alberta—a strong wing—began to talk of Social Credit and ask its investigation by federal and provincial governments.

Alberta society was not created whole in the early '30s. Certain forces shaped it, and the foremost was that Alberta was a young and agricultural province, so distant from the Eastern centres of government and finance that it often felt its fate in foreign hands. Much more than now, Alberta's economy was agricultural, and her people prized the sense of independence which came from working on the land.

Her politics were peculiar. There had grown up, in older places, a party system in which the various interests of the community would be worked into harmony. In Alberta, everybody's interests seemed the same, and there never really were parties in competition.

Just one party, first the "business government" which called itself Liberal and then, when that seemed stodgy and touched by scandal, the United Farmers of Alberta, inspired by the gentle philosopher Henry Wise Wood, and controlled, in its workings, by the people themselves.

## Depression toll

And then there was drought.  
And Depression, and despair.

No one can know the full toll of those desperate years. What is known is that markets closed, and prices plummeted, and mortgages were foreclosed, and jobs and holdings lost.

And schoolboys suicided.

And a decade later, when war came, scores of Alberta boys were rejected from service because of rickets, the disease of the undernourished.

Into all this, Social Credit came; not just the theorems of Douglas, not just the passion of Aberhart, but both together. Here were proud people uprooted, torn from their future by forces they could not control, could not even understand. And suddenly in Social Credit, was an explanation and an answer.

Finance was doing this. The East. The 50 Big Shots.

And Social Credit could solve it, first by taking control, then by making adjustments in the monetary system. William Aberhart said it could be done.

There were countless reasons why it should take hold—fresh scandals had broken in the U.F.A., there was the persisting suspicion of "Finance", the fondness for re-

form, the tradition of popular action, the respect for Aberhart. But there were two reasons chiefly.

One was desperation. In the summer of 1934, when the opponents of the scheme spoke darkly of constitutional and economic obstacles. The *Consort Enterprise*, an Independent weekly newspaper, answered: "The hope of the people, long deferred, has made hearts sick. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. Perhaps people cannot be blamed for accepting unconstitutional and unintelligent prescriptions when constitutional and rational ones are platitudinous."

## Other reason

And the other reason was organization and central control.

If Aberhart was a prophet on the public stage, he was also almost a genius in the private planning room. The tours, that he and Manning began alone, mushroomed, and working people drove and spoke all night and were back at work in the morning, and the unemployed went on the road full-time, eating and sleeping where they could, spreading gospel.

In the Institute, pamphlets were produced, public speaking courses given, and remarkable radio scripts devised. There was the "Man From Mars", who twice a week for five months came as a visitor from another planet and wondered out loud why Albertans endured this poverty in the midst of plenty, and asked his radio audience why they didn't solve it all with Social Credit. There were the appeals for 100 Honest Men, who would come forward and unselfishly serve their province.

There was the gradual infiltration, sometimes the total takeover, of local groups of the U.F.A.

As time went by, there was Aberhart's insistence that the people talk only of "results", of the wonder that would be worked, and not bother themselves about the details of applying Social Credit. He told the parable of turning on the lights.

"You don't have to understand electricity to use it, for you know that experts have put the system in, and all you have to do is push the button and you get the light. So all you have to do about Social Credit is to cast your vote for it, and we will get experts to put the system in."

## Late decision

The decision to enter active politics was taken late, and only in March of 1935 did a confidante of Aberhart's announce it. He had earnestly sought other means, and had tried particularly to have the U.F.A. adopt his "Social Credit" as a fundamental policy of their own. That hope was finally dashed in January, 1935, after a vigorous and ex-