

A Free Press
Can Look at a King

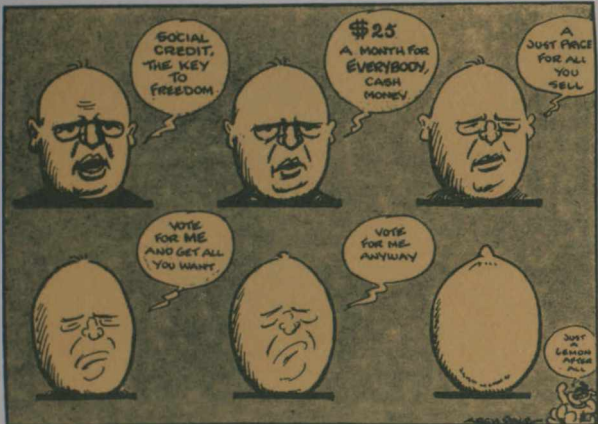
Canada changed radically in the first third of the twentieth century. Wheat prices slumped after World War I, and new parties formed in the prairies. The Progressives sent sixty-five members to the House of Commons, but within a decade, most of them had been absorbed by the Liberals. The Great Depression created the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, which was a socialist party, and the Social Credit party, which was not. The CCF controlled Saskatchewan from 1944 into the 1960s and then evolved into Canada's third national party, the New Democratic Party.

The Socreds and their leader, William Aberhart, became a favourite target of Arch Dale of the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Aberhart, known as "Bible Bill," was the principal Canadian apostle of a novel theory of monetary reform. Put simply, it called for a monthly payment of twenty-five dollars to each adult. The federal government blocked the Social Crediters' attempts to create new money, but the party dominated politics in Alberta and in British Columbia. Today, much altered in philosophy, it has a premier in British Columbia and a variation in Quebec, the Ralliement des Cr ditistes.

It was the Liberal party which emerged from the thirties in the best fettle with William Lyon Mackenzie King as its skilled leader. A man of unemphatic personality and appearance, cartoonists were reduced to drawing him matter-of-factly and labeling him "KING." Still he was a marvel — an awkward bachelor, a mystic, a loner whose closest friend was his dog, a consummate politician and prime minister for twenty-two years — longer than any other prime minister in British parliamentary history. He first held office from 1921 to 1930 (except for a few months in 1926). After allowing the Conservatives to be blamed for the Depression, he was re-elected in 1935 and endured triumphantly until his retirement in 1948. He held Canada together with unobtrusive skill during World War II, manoeuvring endlessly, cleverly, cautiously, avoiding absolute positions and measuring the winds. Dale, one of the first of the modern cartoonists to be a commentator rather than an illustrator, pictured him as a round-bottomed punching bag, easily knocked over, but never, ever knocked out. It was an image that was

more disrespectful than inaccurate. The scholar H. Blair Neatby has proposed that King's "guideline" was the simple but fundamental conviction that Canada was a political association of diverse cultural, regional, and economic groups. He saw it as a voluntary association, a political partnership. . . . His never-ending task as leader was to identify the policies. . . which would be acceptable to all even if no group was fully satisfied."

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SOCIAL CREDIT FROM A TO Z



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