This positive tide continued to flow during 1935. The movement still attracted new supporters in larger numbers than were lost to it. The appeal it made continued to be rooted in a convincing explanation for enduring mass unemployment, an attractive solution through a popularised version of the Douglas doctrine and a repertoire of action which caught public attention and provided supporters with real purpose. Optimism continued to dominate the movement’s understanding of its immediate prospects, an outlook which was further enhanced by two important and connected events of the year.

In July 1935 the first ever Social Credit government was elected in the Canadian province of Alberta. It electrified the Social Credit movement in all its dimensions and was to have a series of important impacts which are discussed in later chapters. For the Green Shirts, its immediate effect was to suggest that the possibility of parliamentary action in Britain ought to be given new attention. At the same time, relations with the Douglas wing of Social Creditors had taken a new turn for the worse. In August the Secretariat had relaunched itself under the title of ‘The Only Democrats’ in what Hargrave took to be a deliberate slight upon his own methods of direct leadership. In response he decided to call a special Assembly at which the official title of the movement was amended to ‘The Social Credit Party of Great Britain (The Green Shirts)’.

Despite years of anti-parliamentary rhetoric the change did not cause the level of disruption to movement membership which had been characteristic of earlier departures. A number of reasons contributed to this relative quiescence. The change was handled more sensitively than in the past. Movements are capable of learning from their own histories, albeit in relatively minor ways. Special letters of explanation were dispatched to individuals and groups who had not been represented at the Assembly. The change of title did not mean ‘any change in Green Shirt methods or organisation…. The Green Shirts will form the hard-core of the Party – the
“shock troops” of the agitation.’ If the party now contemplated putting up a candidate for Parliament, ‘it will be merely to use Parliament as a pulpit to get our propaganda across to the general public’ (General Secretary’s File, 16 September 1935). More saliently, the change was one of tactics not purpose. Long-standing supporters were habituated to change, more recent converts were more intent on achieving Social Credit than quibbling over the details of movement methodology.

The chance of using the parliamentary process to ‘send a Green Shirt into Parliament – as a “wasp”’ (Attack!, 32) was actively considered during the summer of 1935. A constituency was sought where putting up a Green Shirt candidate might attract maximum publicity and a reasonable show of support. A visit to Leeds in early September 1935 impressed him with the level of local activity and the calibre of the local District Officer, Wilfred Townend. The General Secretary was instructed to draw up a profile of the South Leeds constituency where Townend lived. He reported that it was a traditional Labour seat which had been narrowly taken by the Conservatives in the 1931 election. The prospects for 1935 ‘look pretty good, but the Labourites will probably make a vicious fight of it’ (General Secretary File). Instructively, such important decisions were now taken following discussions among an inner core. As a social movement, the Green Shirts were overtly hierarchical, and direction would have been expected in this way. The make-up of the core, however, was more surprising. It consisted entirely of old Kibbo Kift loyalists, known among themselves, as ever, by their woodcraft names. To his General Secretary Hargrave wrote, ‘I want to talk to you about this and other parliamentary tactics. Eagle and Keemo are coming down this weekend to Wayside – and we shall talk about this question [about Townend]’ (letter from Hargrave, 27 September 1935). As a social movement, the Green Shirts both benefited from the Kibbo Kift inheritance and were frustrated by it. Chapter 13 discusses the legacy in more detail and assesses its impact upon supporters. The evidence at this point appears clear. When faced with a critical decision, power lay exclusively among members whose loyalty and longevity were most secure. The meeting decided to go ahead, subject to being able to raise the necessary deposit.

A cheque for £50 was immediately obtained from S.A. Harper, an active and committed Hargrave supporter from the North of England. ‘Somehow’, Hargrave wrote again to the General Secre-