

Jim Sinclair, Jim Durocher, and Ron Laliberte:

Métis Political Activist Interviews (April 17, 2004)

Tape 1

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RON LALIBERTE: How would you get around in terms of funding for all of this back then because I'm sure that, you know, that you didn't have much money that was **(inaudible)**...

(Video Tape: 3:25.48.09) JIM DUROCHER: When, okay, when, when we first started, when Jim and these guys first come up North, they, you know, they, they hired me, like, you know, there was not a whole bunch of money there. There was actually nothing for the first three or four months or something I guess. And we used to go to the, bum rides, so we always had, we always, you know, you'd, the strangest thing but we got away with it for a little while anyway. You'd get a ride, the social worker would want to go fly someplace, like to Pinehouse from Ile a la Crosse. So, you ask them, "Hey give me a ride," you know, there's just one of you, there's a big airplane eh. So yeah okay we'd go there and then we would get to the god damn place and I'd organize a meeting **(inaudible as Jim Sinclair speaks over)**...and go after, after the social worker for being so god damn cheap, with you know, with the people there hey. And try to get them, hey give these people their right you know, their, they have a right to social, social assistance. There's no jobs and it's your.... Finally, it dawned on them they're not going to give me no more rides. But by that time Sinclair had gotten a, some kind of a challenge from, from Thatcher, remember Thatcher said "Hey, I'll, I, I bet you, you couldn't organize, you know, a thousand people in a meeting or something and if you do I'll give you ten thousand dollars," he said or something like that.

JIM SINCLAIR: Yeah, yeah, that's what he did.

RON LALIBERTE: Ross Thatcher said this hey?

JIM DUROCHER: Yes, Ross Thatcher said that and by, you know, about, within, within two weeks we organized a meeting, I think it was in Prince Albert here.

JIM SINCLAIR: Yeah we got the meeting to go on.

(Video Tape: 3:27.11.24) JIM DUROCHER: Yeah in Prince Albert and we had about 1500 people at that meeting and, and they were ready to go and we had a couple of cabinet ministers in there and Thatcher said, you know we had a meeting with Jim I guess shortly after that and gave us that money. And we used that money of course, what we'd use that ten thousand dollars for was to organize a meeting in Ottawa.

JIM SINCLAIR: Yeah.

JIM DUROCHER: Because we knew that that's where, you know.

RON LALIBERTE: Where the power is.

JIM DUROCHER: Yeah, where the power is.

(Video Tape: 3:27.34.15) JIM SINCLAIR: Well I think Trudeau was a great help to us. Trudeau became a personal friend of mine after we started to meet and I think that it was, was the one who was talking about his "Just Society" and "participatory democracy." That's the two things we started to get money on. And Ross Thatcher hated us to the point where he told Trudeau not to give us money and Trudeau was, both Liberals, and Trudeau

said, "I don't give a shit what Ross Thatcher says, we're giving you money." And they gave us money and then we organized. Because Trudeau thought we were one, some of the best organizers around and, he, it was sort of fulfilling his dream of getting these social...

JIM DUROCHER: Well he liked the grassroot work that was happening.

JIM SINCLAIR: Social justice movement, communities on the move and, so we were well liked at that time by him and, and he helped us out and I remember, like Jimmy says, I always stayed in Sally Anns places when I was organizing and go to Prince Albert even in those ten bed units and I had to sleep there for twenty five cents a night and even when I got a plane ticket to Ottawa, we had to take the, what they called the "Red Eye." I'd have stay in Winnipeg for maybe six hours and I'd have to go and sleep in the Sally Anns there. You know, and I have my ticket, make sure I hung on to my ticket to catch the bus back to the airport and people would be laughing at me because here's a guy that's going to Ottawa in an airplane and he's sleeping in the Sally Anns. And the same thing in Ottawa, we had to sleep on the streets sometimes until we got Trudeau starting to listen to us. Those days it was you either met with the Indian Affairs Minister or the Health and Welfare Minister, who was delivering social programs. It was Trudeau who got us to meet people from, from the other government departments. Some of the high ministers like the Quebec ministers, what are they called, the, there's the big fellow there, they called it them, what the heck did they call those people from Quebec, they got a name for them? Very powerful leaders from Quebec, we met with those ministers, Jean Marchant was one of them. We then got, Glen Marchant just got into parliament but he was in a, he was, we were at a conflict with him in those days even he became a strong ally because they felt he was in the system, we didn't realize he was trying to change the system too from inside. So we, we became people who would, went to Ottawa with our grievances and we took trainloads of people to Ottawa to meet with CMHC for housing. We filled out a brown paper one time

on our housing needs in Saskatchewan with a little 5000 dollar grant and instead of putting it in a real nice report we wrote it on brown paper. In fact I still got some copies of that, Dumont should have some copies of that.

RON LALIBERTE: Yeah, I think Dumont's got it.

JIM SINCLAIR: And it showed that we were living in a space that was less than a jail cell, each one of our people and that's when we signed later on, we signed for 50,000 units across Canada.

JIM DUROCHER: With Ron Bassford, yeah.

(Video Tape: 3:30.23.50) JIM SINCLAIR: Ron Bassford. So we were able to move, move things along. We went there to meet with the, with the minister of Man Power that time and remember we, our guys of course, you know, we're still drinking in those days and that's the guys that could really organize the demonstrations. Had a meeting with a minister, went in there, Nappy and I were sober of course and we went into the meeting and pretty soon two more guys come in, another three more guys come in and the more they came in the rougher they looked. Finally the minister got, Bud Cullen was his name.

JIM DUROCHER: Bud Cullin yeah.

JIM SINCLAIR: Said look, "If this is what is going to happen I am getting out and walking out of here." And I said "You walk out of this room," I said, "I am going to sit here and wait until you come back." I said "You're not man enough to face us and deal with us." And he came back and he sat down with us and that's the time things started to move again, because we got the rinks going in Ile a la Crosse, the old folks home in Buffalo Narrows, the rink in Cumberland House and a bunch of our offices were built at that time, because...

RON LALIBERTE: You got funding for that?

(Video Tape: 3:31.26.02) JIM SINCLAIR: We got, we got funding for that. We were told by the province if we get the, the money from Ottawa for the labour they'd provide the materials, so we played one against the other. We went to Ottawa saying we got the materials now we need the money and then we went to the province and said we got the money, we need the materials. So finally we got, and people were, were so anxious to work and do something. We took old tires out in Ile a la Crosse and started burning them around the perimeter to start making the foundation.

JIM DUROCHER: For the rink.

JIM SINCLAIR: And the province was so embarrassed, pretty soon the few days after that the lumber started rolling in.

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