

Jim Sinclair, Jim Durocher, and Ron Laliberte:

Métis Political Activist Interviews (April 17, 2004)

Tape 1

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RON LALIBERTE: When you think back on the political process in the community when they started the movement, was there one party in the communities that they said, "Well we don't want to go with the Liberals, we'll side down with the, with the NDP," I mean the CCF. Or was there any, or did you sort of play one party against the other, cause you mentioned that or was there actually one party that everybody said, "Well this is the party that we should actually support," as opposed to the Liberals say? Cause I think that, you know, the church was with the Liberals.

JIM SINCLAIR: (inaudible)...much on that. We, we, we never really, I always argued that the parties were the ones that put us in the position we were, nobody ever went to bat for us. We had to go to bat for ourselves and, and that's why we run independent candidates and we almost won. We almost won with independent candidates and...

JIM DUROCHER: Yeah, we put them all in the same, in the same mold. I mean they were all just as guilty and whether we...

RON LALIBERTE: Just as oppressive.

JIM DUROCHER: That's right, just as oppressive. It doesn't matter what political label you put on them there. You know, whether you're left-wing or right-wing, they were all...

JIM SINCLAIR: They all hated us.

(Video Tape: 3:40.51.28) RON LALIBERTE: Was is, was it, you, you probably got together, it sounds like, with, you know, Métis organizations from the other provinces and so on. Was there any, was it also, was everybody on the same wavelength when you talked about it between the prairie provinces or was there a lot of difference there?

(Video Tape: 3:41.05.04) JIM SINCLAIR: We didn't realize until we, this is much like going to the North. When we first started out it was like when I lived in Punnichy and Lestock it was like our own community that faced all these problems and nobody else because we were told by government that everybody else was happy, because we had no communications. But when we went to Fort Qu'Appelle we found out things were the same. We went here and there things, come to Prince Albert, things were the same. We started getting communications from the North, they were the same. And once we got together and we, we said, "Hey, we're all in the same boat. We got the same issue. We got the, we got the same agenda. Let's work on it," even though each community might have an added agenda and maybe fishing and trapping. Another one maybe a more economic. That's how we started to organize and then once we got our own act together, then we had Alberta which was already fairly established because of the Métis colonies, the *Métis Betterment Act* in Alberta and Stan Daniels at that time was the leader and Stan was a charismatic leader whether you like it or not, Stan was a good leader in his own way. And they came to Regina and we exchanged meetings and we said, "Hey, let's, let's spread this across Canada and see what happens," and then we started to deal with other groups. Pretty soon we had a national organization which was very powerful.

JIM DUROCHER: Spence yeah.

JIM SINCLAIR: Powerful organization.

JIM DUROCHER: Spence in Manitoba.

(Video Tape: 3:42.19.00) JIM SINCLAIR: Spence in Manitoba. We had people in BC who organized. Oh man, we had some good people. We had some excellent, excellent people who were, were, were always with the rights, always with the rights. We felt that, we felt that, I always felt that programs belonged with institutions, you know, and we wanted as much as possible to stay out of the programs and keep a political organization. Because if they were to cut us off as a political organization, our institutions would stay alive. If you connected it, everything together, then they could cut off everything at once. So that's why I said when we lost our money for a year, for almost a year, we never took over one job from anyone of our institutions, Dumont or sports or housing. We stayed on the outside and we had to go hungry sometimes even though I had family of seven children. Because we didn't have a pay cheque and we wouldn't take anything away from anyone and the government realized how dedicated we were at that time.

JIM DUROCHER: And they were waiting, they were just waiting in the wings.

JIM SINCLAIR: They were just baiting us to take over these jobs.

JIM DUROCHER: They were waiting for us to do that.

JIM SINCLAIR: We never.

JIM DUROCHER: You know, and we didn't...

(Video Tape: 3:43.24.04) RON LALIBERTE: That is tough when you think back on it, you know, being a politician and you don't get the benefits that a politician from the provincial or federal government would get.

JIM DUROCHER: Even today, you look at today, you look at Jim for example. I'll use Jim for an example. He's been 25, 26 years in, you know, in politics, close to 30 probably...

JIM SINCLAIR: Forty.

JIM DUROCHER: Forty, and he never, he never, he, he doesn't have any pension, nothing, to fall back on.

RON LALIBERTE: Yes, exactly.

JIM DUROCHER: I don't, I spent twenty-eight years in here and nothing.

RON LALIBERTE: What is it now, if you are in office for two terms or something, you get a pension for life after that?

JIM DUROCHER: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

RON LALIBERTE: If your federal or provincial I think it is or something like that and that's not, that didn't, never has happened as a leader.

JIM DUROCHER: That's right and this is my choice you know. You know...

JIM SINCLAIR: That's the saddest part I think of our people today is that...

JIM DUROCHER: That's unfortunate.

(Video Tape: 3:44.03.28) JIM SINCLAIR: We, we talk so much about our Elders, yet we've forgot about them. You know, in a sense that they, they, they're not recognized the way they should be. You know, they're one of the first peoples to ever do this with us in a sense, to try to get some sense of history. We've heard so much of Dumont and so much of, of Riel and nothing in between. And you know, the great leaders that came between those eras...

JIM DUROCHER: The forgotten doers.

JIM SINCLAIR: The forgotten guys like, even like Joe Amyotte, who had such a struggle to hold a job.

JIM DUROCHER: Oh yeah, women, you know.

(Video Tape: 3:44.35.05) JIM SINCLAIR: And to try and speak for us at the same time and we looked down at Joe because we said, "This guys got nothing," and this is the same way they looked at me. You got nothing, you know, when I first went up North, "How and the hell can you help us when you got to hitch-hike up here?" You know and that was the truth.

JIM DUROCHER: That's true.

JIM SINCLAIR: You know, "How can you help us if you can't even help yourself?" And I said "But together we can help ourselves, you know, together if we do this..."

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