

Nora Cummings, Peter Bishop, and Ron Laliberte:
Métis Political Activist Interviews (Feb 28, 29, 2004)

Tape 1

Start Time: 4:36.38.11

(Video Time: 4:36.38.11) Nora Cummings: But I think this is where I, I bring our governments into it, especially, especially our provincial government. I really feel that somehow along the line they're, they're buying some of our people there to create problems. Because they see, if you think about it, and, and this is my way of thinking and, and I had the opportunity go to the Supreme Courts of Canada when they, they did the *Pawley* case and it was quite an experience for me. And it was, it was, it what a challenge it was. And I listened to our lawyers that were up there. And you, you had to be there to be a very proud, I was a very proud Métis. But I listened to the judges and I listened to the province. They had a lawyer from every province to fight our Métis for their land. What is that telling people when our governments will send their lawyers to fight for the rights of us as Métis people? And most of the time them lawyers didn't really know the tradition of the Métis or what, what the issues of Métis were. It was sad because I sat through that. To me that means that government is afraid of us as Métis. They're afraid that if they, we become, get our land, they must think that we'll just go out and take everybody off their lands, any farmer, anybody. And, and, you know, it's scary for them people too. I can understand that. But I think if they listened and sat down across the table and negotiated

with, with our leaders. It's not just land, I think there's a lot, especially for us in the urban areas. There's health, there's education, there's employment, like all of that ties into us as, as Métis. But I don't think they want to hear that so that's why I feel it's important that our Métis people, whether they're women, men or young people, start understanding the process of the political, whether it's within a mainstream and more so with ours, but more so the mainstream. We have some good lawyers there that worked hard. And I think that we still have a long ways to go but I still think, not in my time or any, you know, for down the road, but I still feel that our people are still going to meet that vision and that goal. There's going to be some good. But we have to weed out the ugliness and as long as we have that going on, it's not going to happen. We have our own constitution. Our constitution may not be the best constitution. But it's a start. Our Senate in 1990, 1990, what is it '2, 19-, '94, '5. I took our constitution to court. I didn't take, I didn't take my people to court, I took the politicians of our Nation to court because they were trying to demolish our Senate, and as well as our constitution which belongs to the people at the grass root level. It was, it was a scary thing for me. Very scary. But as I, I talk with the rest of the Senate and I explained what I thought was right, I talked with a lawyer. I went to see the lawyer and I left my constitution there and said, "You know, I'm, I'm concerned. Is there something I can do?" I was called and said that we had a case. And I never forget that Mr. Durocher was the president at that time. And it was nothing personal but I just felt that our people, as well if we're talking about a third of our government here that we better act like a government. I went

to Queen's Bench. I walked in that court room or, or downstairs and gosh, what a scare feeling for me. And, of course, they had their supporters there and, and I had a few people that come over and put and there were men, they come put their arms around me and told we're proud of you. You're a strong lady. Little did they know this old stomach was in turmoil. So I went up, and I'll always remember this because if you ever look at the television you always see, I had three lawyers, they had three lawyers because they had learning lawyers and, and I thought, "Oh my lord. Am I doing the right thing? Is my people really going to think that I'm doing the right thing?" And my thoughts were with them. And then it took seven days for the judgment to come down and I didn't realize what a stir I did. Honestly, I didn't. And I was watched right across Canada from our people. And not only our own people but non-Aboriginal, non-Métis people. The seventh day I, my lawyer phoned and said the judgment came down to come in and I said, "Oh gosh." I said, "What's next?" She says, "Oh, we'll talk when you come in." And then I thought okay. So when I went in they congratulated me and said, "We won our case. We, we congratulate you because you are a very strong lady. You don't know what you've done for your Métis people. This constitution is not just a non-profit corporation document anymore. It's your Nation's constitution. You've taken this constitution and it's your people's constitution now. And if they work within that a lot of good can come out of it." Mind you, the constitution is not, needs a lot of fixing and, of course, the Canadian constitution isn't perfect so everybody has to work on this. I was so excited when I left there, I was just saying, "Oh". Made my little sign of the cross

and thanked the Good Lord, you know. I went home and I got on the phone, phoned all my Senators, all excited. Well, it hit the papers. I had calls from across Canada, all over Saskatchewan saying, "Okay Trudeau you brought our constitution home."

Ron Laliberte: There's that connection again, eh?

(Video Time: 4:43.07.03) Nora Cummings: Yeah. And, and it, it kind of made me laugh. I was thinking about this after. I never, at the time that I was just so excited about it. But then, of course, then the politics started kicking in and it was oh well they took us to court and stuff and I never had an opportunity until I went to Batoche at a big meeting and I gave, told the people about it. And, and our president was there, and, and he was kind of nervous because he had said to me, you know, I didn't think they knew, 'cause they know what I'm like if I have to do it, I do what I have to do. So it was at that point in time where I...**(Inaudible)**...people were excited that they have a constitution. So that's what we work in and I always feel we have a third order of government here. And I think, not only with myself, but other people and when we were entrenched in the Constitution in 1982, when Harry Daniels took our con-, us to the. I think there's a lot of good things if people would just sit down and analyze all of these things. I think there's room for every person in here to do that work. And if they can put all of that work that they're doing to try to undermine for some of them, put, apply all of that energy, there'd be no telling where our government would be.

Ron Laliberte: Interesting stuff.

End Time: 4:44.22.28