

Jim Sinclair, Jim Durocher, and Ron Laliberte:

Métis Political Activist Interviews (April 17, 2004)

Tape 2

Start Clip: 6:40:12.21

(Video Tape: 6:40.12.21) RON LALIBERTE: So how did the creation of the MNC change the political process for the Métis right after that?

(Video Tape: 6:40.18.02) JIM DUROCHER: Well then we started concentrating on our issues then. We didn't have to worry about, you know, fishermen in Labrador or, or, or, you know, the, the other issues that those folks from, from, you know, down East are concerned about because, you know, we were concerned about, about rights for the Métis, you know, about right, about, you know, those kind of things that, that, that we're talking about today, like, you know. And that made, that made a big difference because then we could concentrate on, on those kind of things and it's right here and it's right at home. We didn't have to worry about something, some place else.

RON LALIBERTE: Was one of the first orders on the agenda to start preparing for the first ministers conferences on Aboriginal rights?

JIM SINCLAIR: Oh of course.

RON LALIBERTE: You must have spent a lot of time on that?

(Video Tape: 6:41.06.02) JIM DUROCHER: Oh yes, you better believe it. We concentrated very heavy on that. And one of the first things that we had to do was we had to go back to the communities to tell people where things were at because they were always, you know, we didn't have the kind of TV

like we have today in those days. We have no, none in the North actually. So we, and that telephone service wasn't there either. There was no faxes, there was no, we just had, we had to go to the community.

(Video Tape: 6:41.30.28) JIM SINCLAIR: That's a, that's a funny thing you mention that because, you know, I, I, I people can call me a liar but, one thing I always believed in is I always said the same thing in each community I went to even if it had to be, offend some people in some of the communities I was at because I always felt if I, if I contradicted myself I would then somehow get used to with, wouldn't know what story was which. So I'd be taken to task and I remember go out and politicking, and without mentioning any name again, you would hear some of our guys in one big community that said Ile a la Crosse come up and say they're going to do this thing and do all this, you know, mention a certain issue and say I'm going to do this when I get elected. Go on to Cumberland House at another meeting of three, four hundred people say exactly the opposite. You know, like I couldn't take them to task because I didn't want to get into that kind of an argument. So, you know, it, it, it was, but it was the kind of meetings where people would be drawn out in the end and they'd have to, they'd have to be, you know, they'd have to eventually, it would catch up with them, you know, it would catch up with them. And, and like I said, if it wasn't for Durocher I wouldn't have been leader of the Métis for twenty years which to me is, is probably, you know, no one else has done that since Riel, so that's something at least I got to look back on. And it was days when things were really, really tough. So we went through some of the toughest times in history since the Riel Resistance and, and again, you know, it's, it's so much to look back and so much to be grateful for and I, and I wished I could have each one of those people that we knew, you know, a few people had the resources to do a real history of those people in each community who contributed, and how they fought, and how they went to work, and how they supported us, and fought governments in order to make sure that our rights were protected. How they stood up and fought the church tooth and nail, you

know. And we done that as a, as a, as a basis of, of not that we wanted to take people away from their religion but we wanted to separate church and politics, church and, church and governance, you know. The missionaries...

(Video Tape: 6:43.38.17) JIM DUROCHER: And take, and take the missionaries, you know, take them, take them, you know, because they, they mistreated our people, you know. There was no doubt about that, you know, they...

JIM SINCLAIR: That was a well-known fact.

JIM DUROCHER: It was a well-known fact. They, they wouldn't allow you to speak your language, for example, and that's what so many people in the North, you know, the younger people, people that went through the, the, the residential schools, you know, in the North can't speak their language. They don't, you know, there's such a gap there, there's a, you know. And they did, they did mistreat people and they had to be taken to task for that, you know, it's...

(Video Tape: 6:44.10.12) RON LALIBERTE: Yeah I understand that they even, there was even cases where the priest would say well you're not going to get the right to be buried in this church.

(Inaudible due to over lapping talk)

JIM DUROCHER: I was told that Jonas Favel was told that, you know, and, you know, those...

RON LALIBERTE: Unless you voted for the Liberals...

JIM DUROCHER: Yeah.

(Video Tape: 6:44.25.10) JIM SINCLAIR: You know, I don't think we should leave this meeting or this session without talking a bit about Rod Bishop because I think, you know, that Rod Bishop to me again, we had our arguments. We used to have our tooth and nail arguments and he ran against me a number of times, but without people like Rod Bishop there would never been the Métis movement that is here today because he spoke up, he believed in what he said, and he was, you know, he died a poor man with nothing. And yet we stood and accused each other how rich we were getting off the Métis people, you know, and, we, you know, we had those arguments, but his dedication to the rights of Métis people is unquestionable, you know. We disagreed on some of the processes, we should, how we should get there and we might have disagreed a bit on philosophy here and there but the end result was the rights of the people and I was, I was thought of that many times. I went to his funeral and then I thought this man fought his whole struggle, his whole life for the Métis people and what did he get for it, really nothing. But, you know, I was so impressed by the fact that he resisted right to the end, to the point where he didn't buried, get buried in a cemetery. They buried him on a hill beside his house, you know, and I thought to myself that guy is still showing government, that he is still not being bought off.

RON LALIBERTE: That in protest to the church, is that why he did that?

JIM SINCLAIR: Well he just...

RON LALIBERTE: Because, yeah, he was buried on the hill. Interesting.

JIM SINCLAIR: So his cross is still there and I think that Bishop is, Bishop along with a number of others should be...

JIM DUROCHER: Jonas Favel.

JIM SINCLAIR: Really, really, appreciated in their communities and I think that to me is a, is a very important aspect of, of our life to be dedicated to those people.

JIM DUROCHER: Josephine Pambrun.

RON LALIBERTE: The women yes.

JIM SINCLAIR: Worked so hard...

(Video Tape: 6:46.22.18) RON LALIBERTE: So many women that, you know, like they toil every day in the communities and so on and they go unrecognized.

JIM SINCLAIR: Well in our co-...

JIM DUROCHER: Mrs. Morin from Turner Lake, you know.

JIM SINCLAIR: We had, I think, in our heyday, we had more than half the woman in our locals and communities were the leaders.

JIM DUROCHER: Yep they were the leaders in the communities. They were the ones that did...

JIM SINCLAIR: That did all the work.

JIM DUROCHER: If you needed to go to a community that's who you went to.

JIM SINCLAIR: They organized.

JIM DUROCHER: Because they organized, they were the ones.

RON LALIBERTE: I really think they are the unsung sort of group that, you know.

JIM DUROCHER: Absolutely.

RON LALIBERTE: Nobody really gives them a credit.

JIM SINCLAIR: They worked at it.

RON LALIBERTE: For what they done.

(Video Tape: 6:46.51.18) JIM SINCLAIR: Yeah they worked. And a lot of them choose not to be at the front table, not because they couldn't speak, but because they worked in the community and raised the issues and got people to the meetings to speak for themselves. And, you know, those women really, really were part of the, more than part of our whole process of acquiring our rights. You know, they were so dedicated and so hard working and we had older women that worked with us in the field.

JIM DUROCHER: Elders.

JIM SINCLAIR: Josephine Pambrun you know, so many of these people...

JIM DUROCHER: Rose Schneider.

JIM SINCLAIR: Rose Schneider, old Agnes Stanley.

JIM DUROCHER: Agnes Stanley.

(Video Tape: 6:47.33.15) JIM SINCLAIR: People who just worked so hard to make things happen and, you know, and these people, some of them

are still alive today, but they're sort of put in the background, you know, they're sort of put in the background and I think that's a, that's a danger of us leaving our history where, our community history is so important. Each community's got a story to tell and each community contributed to our whole movement and each community should be respected for that, you know. And I don't know how the leadership gets back to that Durocher? I don't know how the leadership gets back to where Durocher is, sometimes we'd need knock on doors and just walk in people's house and help themselves to the soup on the stove...

JIM DUROCHER: Oh yeah.

JIM SINCLAIR: That's the way it was done in those days, you know. But now a days people, I don't want to go there, I don't want to knock on a door, you know, it's, it's, it's, you know. And, I, my belief is you can never get anyplace without knocking on people's doors and visiting in their home, you know, and I think that's what got people moving. And our big struggle, I think Durocher we never talked about this much, is our, is our struggle with the church of how we, we had to sit down and look at how do we get our elders who believe so much in this Catholic church to support us like they wanted to in our movement, and to, and to actually give us the kind of support we needed without out trying to say what they, trying to take the church away from them. And that started our meetings with the Pope. That's how we got to meet with the Pope and to get a letter finally from the Pope, supporting our rights...

RON LALIBERTE: What year was that?

JIM SINCLAIR: Supporting our rights for self-determination. He gave us a letter in 1987.

JIM DUROCHER: Yeah you, he met with the Pope three or four times.

JIM SINCLAIR: Six times altogether.

RON LALIBERTE: Was that the first time in '87 or...

JIM SINCLAIR: No, the last meeting is when he gave us the letter.

RON LALIBERTE: And you met him before that a number of times?

JIM SINCLAIR: Oh yeah, I met him five times and once in... **(inaudible)**

JIM DUROCHER: Five times, with me it was just once because I had less
sins hey than Sinclair. Sinclair had to go five visits.

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