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PHYLLIS CLARKE

Phyllis Clarke, who ran as the Communist candidate in the general election of 1953 in Prince Albert, knew both Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Politics in Prince Albert in the 1950s.
- Mistakes made by the NDP.
- Political beliefs and affiliations of Norris and Brady.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

A member of the Communist party and political associate of Norris and Brady. Talks about political atmosphere in Prince Albert area in the fifties. Norris' and Brady's contributions.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am speaking to Phyllis Clarke of Toronto, formerly of Saskatchewan. Phyllis, you were in Prince Albert at the time that Malcolm Norris was and you were involved in the Communist party and I believe Malcolm was a member of the party as well. Could you describe a bit of what his activities were in the party, if he was active at all?

Phyllis: When I was in Prince Albert, he was not in the party. The year that I spent the most time in Prince Albert was 1952-53 when I was the candidate in the federal election in 1953. And at that time, Malcolm was in the CCF and not in the party. So I can't speak about what may have happened later.

Murray: Right.

Phyllis: If he did join the party later.

Murray: So he wasn't a member up until what? When did you leave Prince Albert?

Phyllis: Well, I left Saskatchewan in 1957. I was in and out of Prince Albert after the election but never again did I live there consistently.

Murray: Right. I gather from Norman Brudy that the party had a fair number of people right after the war. And that probably extended, you know, for a few years and was more active publicly than it was, say, after 1960 when... he has described that period to me. Could you describe some of the public activities that the party was involved in in the years that you were there?

Phyllis: Well, for the 1953 elections, we ran candidates right across the province and I was the candidate in Prince Albert. It was the election that Diefenbaker moved up north too. He did slightly better than I did but we won't talk about that. The party at that time had party clubs in the Foxford, Choiceland, that area on the line to Nipigon (Nipawin?) and a club in Prince Albert city. And a number of people scattered in various ways through the whole of that constituency. And there was a fair amount of activity by members of the party in municipal politics, in the Farmers Union, which was quite strong in the north. Now my memory is not that good of exact

details. It seems to me, at that point, one of the members of our party was either the district director or assistant district director or something of the Farmers Union. And we also had contacts among the trade unionists in Prince Albert, in the plywood factory that was then in existence. It's a long time ago. Twenty-three years. In the far north, well, we knew some people. They were mainly members of the NDP who we knew and worked with. In my own election campaign, I had the support of quite a large number, relatively speaking. The people who were in the CCF were not too happy with their own candidate and the way the candidate had been chosen particularly, and as a result, gave me some assistance in the campaign. Preparing materials and financial donations and other support. Malcolm was one of them.

Murray: Did he campaign for you actively, like, door to door or was it primarily...?

Phyllis: No, no, it was...

Murray: Working on materials.

Phyllis: With all of the people who supported me in the CCF, this was still part of the cold war years and it was very much behind the scenes. Not terribly public, not public at all.

Murray: So it was only open party members who were publicly campaigning?

Phyllis: Yes.

Murray: Right.

Phyllis: The assistance was invaluable in terms of knowing some of the issues and how to place them. I know Malcolm and others were particularly helpful in preparing material for the northern polls which were very highly concentrated Metis and Indian concentrations. And polls that I had no way of getting into because, while I was getting rather good financial support, it didn't go to the extent of private plane trips.

Murray: Right, which is what you'd need.

Phyllis: Which is what you need to campaign in that northern area. But I did send leaflets in and Malcolm and others assisted in writing and as a result I got fairly large votes. Relatively larger votes in the northern polls actually than in the city and in the farm areas.

Murray: No, go ahead.

Phyllis: You were going to ask something?

Murray: I was going to ask you if you remember any other native people besides Malcolm who worked for you on that campaign at all?

Phyllis: Well, Jim Brady also. I didn't know Jim as well as Malcolm. He was in the north, only came into town... It always struck me he was the closer person to an understanding of Marxism than Malcolm and perhaps had a greater appreciation of the need of a long-term strategy for the native people. But he was also one of the people that assisted.

Murray: Did he actually come down from the north then and help?

Phyllis: Well, he was in and out of Prince Albert.

Murray: So he would help with preparing material as well?

Phyllis: Yes. And I think probably he did some speaking to people that he knew about voting for me. It's hard to know.

Murray: You can't remember the details. You mentioned earlier that there was some dissatisfaction with the NDP in the way the candidate was chosen and the candidate. Could you expand on that a bit?

Phyllis: Well, there were two things about the... well, it wasn't the NDP, it was the CCF. We're both doing this.  
(chuckles)

Murray: Right.

Phyllis: First of all, when the announcement was made that Diefenbaker was going to contest Prince Albert rather than staying in the south after the redistribution of 1951 (of the seats), the secretary I think it was, now I'm not sure of his position, one of the leading people on the executive of the CCF in Prince Albert, immediately offered the support of CCFers to this great champion of the north who was going to come up. So that there was a certain feeling that whoever was going to be chosen as a candidate was going to be somebody who was more of a token than a really serious candidate out to hold the seat

for the CCF. Because the CCF had held Prince Albert though not in the directly previous election. And then the man that was chosen was one of the people who worked for the northern development bureaucracy. I don't know what the situation is now in the north of Saskatchewan. At that time, the government had this northern district office in Prince Albert which had people in charge of fisheries and people in charge of hunting and various and sundry things. All sorts of schemes and plots and plans. Many of which were either not understood by native people or, if understood, disliked. It was combined with all the people from the northern district office running around in northern resources I think they called it. Running around in uniforms which gave them somewhat the appearance of a subform of the RCMP or something. And the candidate they chose was one of the people from the fisheries division.

Murray: It wasn't Chan McLean was it?

Phyllis: No, no, I'm trying to remember his name and I can't. His only claim to fame besides being a civil servant and one who wasn't terribly well liked (because there had been a lot of difficulties with the fisheries branch and some of their mad schemes), was that he could play the piano. And so at his public meetings apparently played "O Canada." This was reported in the paper, I didn't personally... And he could play the piano quite well I'm told by all who knew him. So that he was not the sort of candidate that people who were concerned about what was happening with the CCF in those years... These were the years that the CCF was going right down the line in support of the foreign policy of the Liberal government and a whole number of things in terms of federal problems.

Murray: CCF federally and provincially.

Phyllis: Federally. Not so much provincially but certainly federally. So that there was a certain disquiet among socialist-minded CCFers that what they had on their hands was, on the one hand, people who really didn't want a big campaign because we should give it to the great hero Diefenbaker, or on the other hand, people who wanted this bureaucratic civil servant who played the piano and ran around in his uniform telling Indians how to fish better. Neither of which was

terribly appealing. And he was not a man to rock any boats when it came to foreign policy or any questions like that. So I found that there were quite a number of socialist-minded CCFers who figured the only thing they could do is to support me and to vote for me. But because it was cold war, of course, all that was not too public.

Murray: Right. You mentioned that one of the officials of the CCF executive had come out. That was his personal thing, that wasn't an executive decision or was it?

Phyllis: No, no, it was his personal thing but it was not unrepresentative. I don't remember the exact details of how many there were but the executive of the CCF was distinguished in that election by either supporting Diefenbaker or supporting me. And they did split in that sort of way without any great enthusiasm for their own candidate. I mean, I think there had been some interference actually, if not in that election, certainly in other elections, from Regina as to who was chosen as the candidate in the north. The natural tendency in the north of the CCFers there was always to choose more leftwing people. The reaction of that from Regina had always been to disallow the nominating convention decision and to throw in somebody that would be more of their liking.

Murray: They would manage to do that on a legal basis would they? Because the convention was too small or something?

Phyllis: Oh, they'd find some bloody excuse. I mean, I was never in the CCF so the ins and outs of it were never very clear to me. There had also been at that point, just before that, a big fight in La Ronge over whether or not it should be an open, a place for the sale of liquor in La Ronge. Until 1952, there was no liquor store or beer store in La Ronge and there were enough problems of the use of liquor as it was with people bringing it in from wherever they came from. The people who lived there were very concerned to keep it out. And they felt one way that you could at least reduce the amount of liquor was by not having a store in the area. So that a person could bring it in but once they ran out, they were...

Murray: They were dry.

Phyllis: They were dry. And there were less incidents of, well, I suppose you would call it statutory rape because it wasn't always rape though sometimes it was. And less incidents of fights and that sort of thing. The rest of the province had local option. And part of Saskatchewan was dry and part was wet. And as a Saskatchewanian, you know there is quite a history of temperance in that province. The decision made in Regina was that La Ronge was not to have a vote because it was a special kind of area and so there was no local option allowed and the liquor store was just opened up. Which aroused a lot of resentment against the CCF.

Murray: That's peculiar. In what way was it special that they

would make that kind of decision?

Phyllis: They had northern district or something. I mean there was some way they got around the local option. But it really was a catering to American tourists who were the most demanding of getting liquor into the place and did create all the problems or did add to the problems that had already existed. And it was those sort of things that I think led some CCFers to feel that, first of all, they preferred having a candidate who was avowedly socialist, not just a good piano player, and secondly, there was a certain amount of resentment to the Saskatchewan government at different levels that led to that.

(break in tape)

Phyllis: I think it's out of something like that that... certainly Malcolm was one of the people, and Jim, that felt that one of the things that was needed was the right for native people to have says in the decisions about their own life and their own...

Murray: What kinds of development were going to take place.

Phyllis: Development. I know one of the things that Malcolm did take from me and circulate among a wide number of people was a Soviet book called Alitet Goes To The Hills which was a story of the northern peoples of the Soviet Union. A fictionalized account of the sort of developments that took place there which were very much development taking place but taking place controlled by the people of the area. I know he was very impressed with that sort of concept that...

Murray: That took the culture into account as well as the need for improved living standards.

Phyllis: Yeah. And that didn't move at a pace beyond what native people themselves wanted to move. Or in directions that they didn't want to move. Which didn't mean aimlessness but did mean that they would have some control. And in that sense, I suppose he was one of the early 'Red Power' advocates without using the terminology of the 1960s and 1970s. There should be control by natives over what was happening to their land. I don't know if you've ever looked at an article by a man, a sociologist named Valentine. A sociologist or anthropologist.

Murray: Yes, I've read that article, yeah.

Phyllis: But that was written after Valentine was given this book by Malcolm and long discussions with Malcolm about... he's a person you should see incidentally.

Murray: I tried to see him but he was too busy.

Phyllis: But I remember Malcolm later telling me about discussions he'd had with Valentine and how he was trying to

convince him about the problems of the way that the CCF...

Murray: Well Valentine was actually brought in to tell the CCF why there was a backlash against their policies.

Phyllis: That's right, yeah. So that it seems to me that if you're talking about a strategy, that that was the centrepiece of Malcolm's thinking.

Murray: That book.

Phyllis: Well I don't think that book but those sort of ideas and the book just reinforced what he had felt was necessary. That one shouldn't impose from outside. I guess the last time I saw Malcolm was in 1966 which was when I went back, the only trip I've made back to Saskatchewan. Oh no, I've made one again since then. But up until then, up until the time he died. And at that time, he was terribly concerned and had had some input into the Indian pavilion at Expo.

Murray: I didn't know that.

Phyllis: Yes, the sort of concept of that pavilion he had had something to do with in writing letters and stirring up people. And it also was very much on the theme of the right to self-determination. It would seem to me the sort of thing that is now happening with the Dene nation in the north was the approach, not as rounded out, not as well thought out, that Malcolm did have towards the Metis and native people.

Murray: He was just beginning to develop those thoughts.

Phyllis: But just beginning to develop those thoughts. It's later that he was active in establishing the Metis organization.

Murray: Almost ten years later. Yeah.

Phyllis: Yes. Now one of his constraints was that, at that point, he was a civil servant in the Department of Northern Resources on the mining side. And I think felt, in an atmosphere in which Liberals were more likely to get jobs than CCFers, leftwing CCFers were the least likely to get jobs, that he really couldn't do some of the things that he would've liked to have done in terms of the Metis and the native people.

Murray: Do you think that had he not had those constraints, that he would've, at that earlier time, been organizing a Metis Society? Was that something that was one of his goals or...?

Phyllis: Well, he and Jim of course had organized the society in Alberta in the 1930s and I think they still felt that that form of organization was a useful form. And, yes, I think that the combination of Jim dying and the constraints on Malcolm probably retarded it. He was one of the people, well, as early as the middle 1950s, who was looking at what was happening in

Africa in terms of decolonization. And saying, "That's what we've got to do. It's the native people here." So that he was fairly perceptive about what was a trend in the world and the direction that would make some sense. It was not a direction of becoming white, in integrating into white society and giving up the culture, but very much the preserving of the culture.

Murray: So he saw that colonial model as one that was quite applicable to the north?

Phyllis: Was useful to him, yeah. Now again, in a very, you know...

Murray: Loose way, I suppose.

Phyllis: Loose way. And this was years before other people began to take up this sort of...

Murray: This sort of approach.

Phyllis: Approach, yeah.

Murray: You mentioned earlier, I think, that it was about this time that he started thinking in that direction. Was it that disillusionment with the CCF that brought him to that conclusion? Had he had more hope in the CCF up to that point, do you think?

Phyllis: Yes. In discussions with him and Jim, I think there is no doubt that the end of the war and with the election of the CCF in 1944, there was great hope that, well, now we've got a government that will be responsive to the needs of our people. And it took a certain number of years until it began to be apparent that one had replaced the Hudson's Bay Company and its paternalism by a different form of bureaucracy but one that was just as difficult for native people to participate in. I don't remember which year it was (years are now a bit hazy for me), when the federal government announced that a whole area of the north was going to be reserved for bombing practice and that the section of the natives were just going to be moved out of their area, out of their trapping lines and etcetera and the complete....

Murray: It was around Green Lake wasn't it?

Phyllis: Hum?

Murray: Around Meadow and Green Lake.

Phyllis: Yeah, Green Lake I think it was. I mean, just that sort of incredible disregard for the whole, not just the human life, but for the whole culture and pattern and development. And a frustration that here it was in Saskatchewan and yet it wasn't something that the CCF felt was something they could fight.

Murray: They didn't bother, or did they?



Phyllis: Well, I think they squawked a little bit but not very...

Murray: It wasn't a priority as far as they were concerned.

Phyllis: No, no. And so that and the whole bureaucratic handling of the hunting - and Valentine does a good job on the fur trade and what happened with that. Jim had some horror stories (I wish I could remember them all) about the fishing and the way fishing co-ops were set up. Which included things like bringing in skilled people and setting up the co-op around them, not for the training of people in the area to become skilled, but they would remain as the semi-skilled with the skilled getting higher wages and so on.

Murray: And from the south basically.

Phyllis: And from the south basically and that sort of thing which was just using the natives in a different way. Private enterprise hadn't answered the needs but then neither had the CCF.

Murray: I know. I remember reading a letter from Jim to Bob Deverell in Saskatoon saying - and it was written in 1952 or 1953 - saying that he had become almost completely disillusioned with the CCF and had let his membership lapse. Did he then join the Communist party or was it later that Jim joined as well?

Phyllis: It was later. It was about 1957, 1958 I think that they joined. Or that Jim joined.

Murray: That Jim joined.

Phyllis: Yeah. I don't know when Malcolm joined. I had heard that. But, it was a combination, I guess, of disillusionment with the CCF and then the need of a certain easing of the cold war. For the party, there was a sort of steady decline for certain years of the cold war. And even people who were not opposed to the party, the joining of it was a step that required a certain amount of courage. I'm not saying that they weren't courageous people but it required thinking out whether that would allow you to do the sort of things that they wanted to do. And certainly up until the time I left Saskatchewan, they were still both quite hesitant about whether they could accomplish what they wanted to and be members of the party.

Murray: Had they been members earlier in Alberta?

Phyllis: I think Jim had. But then I didn't know him then. I mean, I only moved to Saskatchewan in 1951.

Murray: But from conversations perhaps, you got the impression that he had been?

Phyllis: I got the impression that Jim had been. If he hadn't

been in the party in Alberta, he certainly had worked with party people.

Murray: A sympathizer.

Phyllis: Yeah. And the organization they set up in Alberta had echoes of both the Workers' Unity League and the Farmers' Unity League in some of its declamatory statements.

Murray: Right, when Malcolm was very influential in it.

Phyllis: Yeah.

Murray: You mentioned earlier that perhaps Jim had a better understanding of Marxism and the need for long-term strategy. Could you compare the two men in their understanding of the Marxist analysis of the situation?

Phyllis: Well, it just seemed to me that Jim had done more studying on Marxism and that he approached some of the questions from having some knowledge of Marxism. I always had the feeling with Malcolm that it came from his heart and he arrived sometimes in the same place but it was a different route to it. And Jim, it seemed to me, was much more the analytic thinker and Malcolm intuitive, if you want to use that.

Murray: I get the impression too, and you can correct me if this is wrong, that Malcolm was a doer, was much busier and moving a lot more than Jim perhaps. Would you get that impression?

Phyllis: Yes and no. I mean, I think they were both doers. Certainly Jim was, I guess, also constrained by the problem of how to earn a living. He had already left government service because he really had got fed up and yet what the alternatives were were not so great. And the whole problem of prospecting which isolates you from activity. Whereas Malcolm was living in Prince Albert and while, he had to go out of the city for work a lot, he was also able to maintain certain consistencies.

Murray: So, it was their circumstances as much as anything that...?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Murray: Can you think of any differences at all in their political thoughts or political strategies that were significant or were there any?

Phyllis: It's hard for me to remember at this stage whether there were any.

Murray: Right. What about in regard to the CCF? I got some impression that perhaps Malcolm had a little more hope that the

CCF would accomplish something and that Jim had given up earlier than he did.

Phyllis: Jim gave up earlier. I think Malcolm gave...

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Phyllis: ...maybe you remember. Whereas he lived on the right side of the river in not a pretentious house. Later on in life, he had a much newer... and when I knew him he lived in a house not far from the river actually. A very old, well-kept but very old home. And that that was a contradiction. It was based on, obviously, an income level that was well beyond the average native.

Murray: Right.

Phyllis: And even the average Metis. On the other hand, life wasn't that simple because his children were discriminated against in school. And one of the things, at least as I remember, seeing him in family situations, was his insistence on his children feeling the pride and not allowing the beating of them in schools, which did go on, for them to disassociate themselves from being Metis and proud of it. I can remember one incident with one of the very young girls who was in kindergarten or first grade, so you can imagine the age, coming home in terrible tears and travail because she had been called a dirty Indian at school. The cutest little, neatest little kid you could imagine. And you know, and just didn't know how to handle such a...

Murray: Remark.

Phyllis: Remark. And Malcolm didn't sympathize. He sat down and explained to her why one should be proud about being Indian and now to go back and stand up for her rights. So that, yes, I think he saw the incongruity. On the other hand, I think he never felt that he was part of that white community of Prince Albert nor did he want to be. Nor did he want his children to feel that they were just merged into an assimilated society. That they had something that was special.

Murray: The whole thing with his family, it must have been, and I've heard that it was, a burden for particularly his wife who wasn't that political. Do you recall any of that aspect of Malcolm's life?

Phyllis: Yes, I think she had a hard road to follow. Particularly later. It struck me when I saw them in 1966, he had already, I guess, retired by then and was sick and there was still a lot of young children and I think she felt that some of his political activity wasn't helping with the family and that she had to do an awful lot of things to make up for it. I never got to know her as well as him, partly because she wasn't as political and partly, I guess, because she was with a

bunch of small children in the years when I was there.

Murray: Which means she was very busy.

Phyllis: Which meant she was terribly busy and terribly confined. And I mean, when I would be over at their house, Malcolm would tend to not exclude her from the discussion but, if there was any problem with the children, she was the one who had to look after it which meant she never really was part of discussions.

Murray: So there wasn't a kind of consciousness that exists today about the roles that women are given, or was there, do you think, on his part?

Phyllis: No, I don't think it was. It was no different than other people's consciousness. He was not in advance of his time, let's put it that way.

Murray: Right.

Phyllis: And I suppose I also had the problem that what little time I would have when I went to see him was because I wanted certain specific information. They weren't social calls in that sense.

Murray: They were business calls.

Phyllis: So, I never did get to know her as well. And I always felt very badly that there had never been a chance to really get to know her.

Murray: You mean that was a common feeling among his political friends, that she was separate from that?

Phyllis: I don't know. I mean, you would have to ask other people. That was certainly my impression.

Murray: Do you think that it may have been - it's hard to phrase this right - in part his marriage to her, that he had

that kind of lifestyle, that he felt that they deserved that themselves even though he was fighting for a different kind of thing? Do you think that was part of it? That she put those demands on or he felt that she deserved that sort of...?

Phyllis: I mean their lifestyle when I knew them was a very modest lifestyle. So that, I mean they were a cut above the Indians across the river.

Murray: But they weren't by any means middle class?

Phyllis: But they were not middle class by any means. And it was only, I guess, when they moved to their new home up in the northern part of, not the northern, the southern part of Prince Albert I guess, as I remember the geography. Sort of up on the hill.

Murray: Halfway up the hill as I was told one time.

Phyllis: Halfway up the hill. That you began to see them as middle class people. They were living in a completely working class area when I was there.

Murray: Do you ever recall hearing when they moved to that other...?

Phyllis: I have no idea because when I left the province in 1957 they were still down by the river and when I came back in 1966... So it was somewhere in those 9 years that they moved into this bungalow or split level, whatever they call those. They had a nice little working class home up until then. I had heard that when he left the service he was able to make certain money out of mining stocks and things. I don't know if that's true. That may be possible. I suppose also the fact that some of his children had grown up and left home.

Murray: The burden wasn't as great.

Phyllis: The burden wasn't as great. I don't know, though, when they moved.

Murray: You mentioned that his children faced discrimination in Prince Albert. What was the situation there? Did the native community sort of stick to itself or was there quite a serious problem of racism then?

Phyllis: Oh, there was a problem of racism. And there were very few people who were Indian or Metis who were accepted at all into the Prince Albert system so to speak. And this shanty town across the river just exemplified it. The problem of finding a place to live. I don't remember Malcolm ever specifically mentioning problems in getting the house he got. But I remember hearing that they had had a terrible problem when they first moved in, with the neighbors. And it took quite a while until the neighbors began to accept that they were, well, the typical you know, 'my best friend is...' sort of thing. They're different. Which never made them very happy either.

Murray: But it made it easier for them, I suppose.

Phyllis: But at least made it possible to live in the area. On the other hand, it would have been rather ridiculous to set up a tent on the other side of the river just to prove that something, when one could afford to live fairly decently. So that, yes, Indians were regarded as, what was it, the lesser breeds.

Murray: Right. But was there, at the time that you were living there, much of an influx from the north of native people into Prince Albert or was it pretty much that native people on the other side and a stagnant sort of situation as far as community population?

Phyllis: Yeah, there wasn't yet much movement in. I don't know how much movement there has been since either. There were Indian bands close to Prince Albert and it's always been an area of fairly heavy Indian and Metis population. There was certainly nothing like the Metis Centre which later got established or anything like that. Generally the attitude was, it was a sliding scale upward, that at the bottom of the heap were the Indians. The next were the French and then there were, you know, up to the Wasps.

Murray: Right, Ukrainians and others would be in there somewhere. It was a typical Saskatchewan community in that sense then, I suppose.

Phyllis: Yes, yes, it was no different. Diefenbaker was, his vision of the north didn't include much about racial equality.

Murray: That wasn't part of his consciousness.

Phyllis: No. Nor was it an issue in quite the same way that it would be today.

Murray: Did socialists at the time see it as an issue then or was it something that was not in the forefront?

Phyllis: Yes, yes. And I think that was part of the problem of the CCF, that there was a thought of homogenization I think from the CCF viewpoint. Rather than the right of self-determination. Whereas our position was on the right to self-determination for native people. And, which is, I guess, the reason that Malcolm and Jim both joined the party eventually that that was more in keeping with what they saw as the needs of their people.

Murray: Did they ever talk about, in a sense, their mistake in thinking the CCF could do anything in there? I mean, you could look at the kind of party the CCF was through European history, social democratic parties. Did they come to see the CCF as typical of that tradition in some way?

Phyllis: Yes, I guess so though I don't know that I remember anything specific on that. I mean, I didn't live in Saskatchewan through the depression and through the years of the Gardiner government, the Anderson and then through the Gardiner governments. Those who lived through it, described the feelings of people in 1944 when the CCF was elected as a euphoria that had nothing to do with the reality of the CCF, in a sense, but what people hoped the CCF would be.

Murray: A purging of the Liberals and a hope of the...?

Phyllis: Yeah. And that in that sense, anything was obviously preferable to the really horrible political situation before. And so it took time to see that the CCF really wasn't what you conjured it up to be. I don't think that it was so much the people studied European social democratic parties and said,

"Here is a party like it."

Murray: It was a day-to-day feeling.

Phyllis: Yeah. And certainly the sort of phraseology of democratic socialism sounded very appealing in 1944. And, as far as people like Malcolm and Jim were concerned, it took a few years to see that essentially things were still being run for the same interests and that, as far as the native people and the Metis were concerned, there wasn't that sort of an improvement that would be worthwhile.

Murray: Right.

Phyllis: I mean, the first couple of years you say, well obviously the government can't do everything at once so you don't become disillusioned, you know. I think it really took until after 1948, by the time of the second term that then the feeling well, instead of getting what we had hoped for, we have got this monstrous bureaucratic set up.

Murray: That was the growth of that bureaucracy too. Do you think it was partly a difference in ministers? Phelps seemed to be someone who was more willing to cut across bureaucratic lines. That's the impression I get from some people.

Phyllis: Yes, I wasn't there when Phelps was the minister of Natural Resources. Brockelbank had already taken over. Brockelbank certainly did not exude tolerance, democracy, self-determination ideas or anything like that. I mean, it really was a business-like bureaucratic setup. And a tremendous expansion. I don't know when the uniforms came in, whether that was a Brockelbank innovation. I'm not so sure it wasn't. But these little green uniforms running around or beige, whatever color they were, was just the complete irritant.

Murray: Right. Almost an armed authority of the government.

Phyllis: Yeah.

Murray: They had cars with big whip aerials as well, I think, as part of their accoutrements.

Phyllis: Yeah. They, as a result, would come into an area in the north looking as if they were very authoritative and then what they would say was authoritative and the result was no meeting of the minds. Plus disrupting the economy. I mean, the whole story of the fur thing is indicative of how they were also disruptive. The people weren't living better. In some ways they were even living worse.

Murray: Do you recall any details of some of those programs and how they affected people?

Phyllis: Well, the fish one I mentioned. And that is that

they set up co-ops that didn't really create the conditions for people to become skilled themselves because they brought in these workers.

Murray: It was top-down co-op.

Phyllis: Top-down co-ops. And without people really understanding why they were being shoved into the co-ops.

Murray: There were good intentions involved, I suppose, at some point.

Phyllis: Yeah, in every case I suppose it was done with good intentions. And the fur thing. It was the creation of the Fur Marketing Board which, for a province which had fought for years for wheat marketing, made a great deal of sense to farmers.

Murray: The same sort of economic situation.

Phyllis: And it was the same sort of set up for fur marketing. And that was that you got an initial price and then after the fur was sold, you got your final payment. Well, farmers had wanted that sort of system. They had lived in that sort of system.

Murray: It was indigenous demand.

Phyllis: Which was that you grew the grain and then sold it. Fur gatherers hadn't lived on that sort of system. They had lived in a system where they got an advance from the Hudson's Bay Company, then went out and got the furs, then came back with their furs, got the advance deducted and then had some money out of their sale of the furs at the end.

Murray: If they were lucky.

Phyllis: If they were lucky. But if they were not lucky, they were also able to get another advance.

Murray: Right.

Phyllis: But then you suddenly change the system so that you get no advance and when you do get furs you only get an initial price, not the full price, and you have to deal with government stores which were not - well, I suppose they were slightly

better than the Hudson's Bay store. But the whole question of transforming an economy that was based on a debt structure into the equivalent of the wheat economy was, I suppose, done with good intentions and that was that the Indian shouldn't have to be so dependent on us.

Murray: Indentured to the Hudson's Bay, yeah.

Phyllis: Hudson's Bay. But it only disrupted their lives and actually, for years there was the problem of people not being



able to set their traps and everything else because they had no money in order to exist out on the trapline.

Murray: So it drew a lot of people out of their natural economy.

Phyllis: Yeah.

Murray: And would those people end up on welfare most likely?

Phyllis: Most likely. And welfare was not that great.

Murray: At that time.

Phyllis: At that time, I don't know if it's so great now. It's expanded.

Murray: More widespread I suspect too, in terms of number of people.

Phyllis: So that instead of creating the conditions for native people to extend their culture and their lives and to live better lives, you made them much more dependent on government handouts. And in the north of Saskatchewan, where people were not treaty Indians or not on reserve - I shouldn't use the term necessarily treaty because some of them were treaty and some were not but they were not reserve Indians - what you were doing was taking people who were not in that sort of a dependent position and creating the conditions for dependency. For no good reason. Not that there was a good reason of putting people on reserves but the problem of the life of people on reserves was because they were on the reserve and if the reserve couldn't produce the financial needs, obviously the government then stepped in with various aid programs. One of the things I should say is that they were very conscious that the change had taken place in the native communities that was

reflected in the 1948, I think it was, Senate-House committee on Indian affairs. Up until some time in the 1940s, native populations in Canada had been decreasing, and so the problems, in a sense, were going to vanish as the population vanished.

Murray: It was hoped, I suppose.

Phyllis: Well, one almost thinks that, reading some of the senators' statements. But that better health care had created the conditions where you were beginning to have increases in population.

Murray: The same as all over the world in situations like that.

Phyllis: Yeah, and I think both Jim and Malcolm who had read all that material very carefully and I know had wanted to do some writing on it (though I don't think they ever got around to it), were conscious that there was a change. And that was that there was a growing population and that as the population would

grow on the reserves, so you would have an increasing economic problem of a finite amount of reserve land for a growing population. And then you add all this disruption in the north for also a growing population and where economically were you going to find the solution? And unless you could find it within the native people themselves beginning to do certain things themselves, you were going to turn people into charity cases.

Murray: Right. I've heard it described that Malcolm was, there was always a sense of urgency about his politics. Do you think that that may have been part of the source, that he saw in the future a much larger population with less and less resources?

Phyllis: Yes, I think so. I think so. And I think he was very conscious that where you had a feeling in Canada that, "Well, as compared to the Depression, we've got affluence," what you were seeing with native peoples was the reverse. That affluence was not coming on to the reserve. What was coming on was actually greater poverty.

Murray: Do you recall what year or about what year those Senate meetings were held?

Phyllis: 1948 I think it was. It was a joint Senate-House committee on Indian affairs. 1948 or 1949, somewhere in there.

Murray: Did the CCF ever do a similar sort of thing? An investigation of particularly native problems that you can recall?

Phyllis: I can't recall anything. There may have been internal material in the Department of Northern Affairs.

Murray: But not a public sort of thing?

Phyllis: Northern Development or whatever they called it. Not public.

Murray: You mentioned that both Jim and Malcolm had followed the senate investigation. Was there much discussion of that or they had mentioned that...?

Phyllis: Oh yeah. They had all the issues of all the reports of that committee and they loaned it to me at one point, which is how I knew about it. And they obviously felt it was a very important set of hearings.

Murray: Did they ever contribute to it as far as you know or was that a possibility?

Phyllis: No. A lot of native people had. There had been hearings and a lot of native groups had appeared. I don't think either of them did personally. Though it was one of the first times that there had been a sort of open hearing at which

native leaders had appeared. I wouldn't want to swear to whether or not Jim may have prepared something for it. I'm a bit hazy.

Murray: Right. Did Jim or Malcolm ever talk to you much about their early years in Alberta and the organizations and the kinds of things they did?

Phyllis: No. No, you got hints of it but...

Murray: No detailed description.

Phyllis: No detailed description. There was a manuscript. No, there was a minute book I guess it was - I don't know if it's with Malcolm's papers or not - of the Alberta Metis Association which I remember looking through.

Murray: It was a fairly detailed thing then was it?

Phyllis: Yeah.

Murray: I don't recall having seen that. A lot of Malcolm's stuff seems to have gone by the wayside somewhere.

Phyllis: Now this was actually Jim's. And I don't know, you know, what finally happened. Whether Jim had it or Malcolm had it or...

Murray: The cold war years were certainly - I suppose the effect was greater in the United States to some extent - but could you describe a bit how that affected the political atmosphere in Prince Albert, for example, in Saskatchewan? A bit about that and how the CCF government responded to that period?

Phyllis: Well, what you had was a tremendous fear of rocking the boat, I guess. And certainly a great deal of anti-communism. I had, 1952 after I was nominated, the Canadian Soviet Friendship Society had decided to send Dorise Nielson, who had once been a member of parliament in Saskatchewan, on a tour of Saskatchewan with a Soviet film. Part of the area she came into was that line up to Nipigon (Nipawin?). And the businessmen in Nipigon (Nipawin?), and in Smeaton (I have to remember the names of these towns), had organized a, really like a vigilante committee to try and break up the film showings. And I went to the first one in Choiceland and they had come with rotten eggs and rotten tomatoes and flung them around to try and break up the thing. One of the tomatoes was thrown at me and the man had very bad aim and managed to splatter the coat of the woman who was standing just behind me who was the wife of the local MP. A beautiful fur coat. Bill Berezowsky. And as a result, the CCF in the area came in in support of the film showings. Then not succeeding obviously in breaking it up, they then organized for a showing in Foxford and actually came out armed with bars and, iron bars and things. They were really going to break up the thing which they didn't succeed in doing, manage to. But that's the sort

of an atmosphere in which they were doing that, was part of the cold war years. The result really didn't please the businessmen of Nipigon (Nipawin?) because one of them was the Beaver Lumber Company representative or manager or what have you. So one of the people around Choiceland, one of the CCFers actually, a fairly big farmer, phoned up and said he was thinking of building a new house on his farm and how much lumber it would be and had this tremendous order which, of course, the manager thought was a great thing. And then when the manager was really, you know, oh boy, I've really got it he said, "By the way, did I see you the other night down at that Choiceland film showing throwing tomatoes?" And so the

manager, "Well, well, yes, but it's Communist, you know." And so then this guy from Choiceland told him off in no uncertain terms and never will he buy "one stick from Beaver Lumber Company." Well, that sort of got the Beaver Lumber guy out of the scene. He didn't turn up at any more. One of them was a Massey-Ferguson agency guy.

Murray: Pretty vulnerable guy.

Phyllis: Yes. He was from Smeaton and he came out to some farm near Smeaton to try and sell somebody a new Massey-Ferguson combine and got ordered off the farm at gun-point because he had been one of the people to try and... so that calmed him down. The third guy ran the hotel in Smeaton, the beer parlor. There were two beer parlors in Smeaton. And people stopped going to his beer parlor and told him why. So that by about two weeks after... This was in 1952; the election was August of 1953. But after that fall and their trials and travails, this group of businessmen did subside. The Nipigon (Nipawin?) Journal, or whatever the paper was, kept printing editorials trying to urge on anticommunism all through the campaign but nobody else ever took it up in a physical sense again.

Murray: So the press, the media continued, all the media I presume.

Phyllis: Yeah, so that you had that sort of an atmosphere. The sort of thing that... I went into one town and met some people there whose names I've been given and, oh yes, they thought I was right and they really supported our party but they wouldn't dare vote for communists in their town because they were known as leftwingers in their town and if there were any votes for me, everybody would figure it was them. And so they gave me a donation but they wouldn't vote.

Murray: There was a distinct fear of being tied to that.

Phyllis: A distinct fear that if you were tied to it, you would lose your jobs. And it was an era in which people were losing their jobs and being blacklisted and so on. So that it's hard to remember. I mean Saskatchewan was never the centre of cold war activity and by the middle fifties Tommy Douglas had made his famous speech that as long as he's the premier of

Saskatchewan there will be no McCarthyism within its border.  
So that you add....

Murray: So he did come out in....?

Phyllis: Oh yeah. So in that sense, the atmosphere in  
Saskatchewan was so different from other places.

Murray: Right.

Phyllis: It's part of the reason that a whole number of  
people...

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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