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JOHN EMMS

Mr. Emms worked for many years as an Indian agent for the federal government and later as a community development officer in Saskatchewan for the provincial (CCF/NDP) government.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Work in the Kamsack area of Saskatchewan as a community development officer.
- The department of Indian Affairs; attitudes within the department.
- The CCF/NDP government and their plans for the Indian and Metis peoples of Saskatchewan.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

John Emms was an Indian agent for many years until the late fifties when, due to frustration and disagreement with Indian Affairs Department policies regarding Indians, he quit that department. Subsequently, he became employed by the CCF/NDP government in Saskatchewan as their first "community development" worker and informal liaison with the Indian population of the province. He also acted as adviser to the government on Indian policy when the province was pushing for provincial jurisdiction over Indian affairs. In the fall of 1964 he was fired by the newly elected Liberal government of Ross Thatcher just as that government was establishing its new Indian-Metis Branch. In this interview, Emms talks about the history and practices of the Indian Affairs Department, the community development and native policies of the Lloyd (NDP) government up to its defeat in 1964 and about the apparent

Liberal policies towards Indian and Metis people after the spring of 1964.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am speaking to John Emms of Regina. Mr. Emms, you were hired by the NDP government, I think, in 1963 specifically because of your experience in working with Indian people. You'd been an Indian agent before. What prompted the NDP do you think, at that stage, to hire a person like yourself? What was their motivation?

John: It was in 1962, in the spring of 1962. To be specific, there was a conflict between the Indian people in the Kamsack area and the townspeople. The townspeople were quite concerned about some of the, I suppose you could call them, anti-social actions of the people from the reserve and the reserve people had very little respect for any of the town's regulations, requirements.

Murray: There were several reserves around Kamsack.

John: Yeah, there were three. Kee, Keeseekoose, and Cote Reserves. Quite a heavy population for a small community to absorb that number of Indians. I was with Indian Affairs at the time but felt frustrated at the lack of progress we were making.

Murray: At a policy level?

John: At a policy level. The types of programs that could be initiated and the types that couldn't be, and I felt I'd like to do some field work, actually working with the Indian people to get the other side. I'd had fourteen years of the federal side so in discussions with the provincial representative indicated

they'd like me to take a job at Kamsack as a community development officer. At that time, "community development officer" meant something. It meant a person capable of working in the community.

Murray: Right.

John: And so one thing led to another and I accepted the position and went to Kamsack.

Murray: The problem around Kamsack was largely an alcohol problem, is that an accurate...?

John: Not necessarily, it was sort of a breakdown of the society on the reserves. There hadn't been a band meeting for six years when I went there.

Murray: On any of the...?

John: On any of the reserves. Council just went on year to year to year to year and the people weren't involved in

anything of any kind at all. There was never any meetings between the townspeople and the reserve authority.

Murray: Really no community at all?

John: It was just the hot spot.

Murray: Just people living in a place.

John: Just people. And transportation to and from the reserve was very poor. The reserves weren't electrified, they didn't have any telephones. Their rate of unemployment was very high, mostly welfare state. Any farming, or the bulk of the farming was done by non-Indians leasing land on the reserve. So the problem was to try and build some kind of a social awareness among the Indian people. And of course, on the other hand, the town of Kamsack is made up largely of early Doukhabor settlers, very hard-working people who had very negative views about anyone who didn't work and consequently the Indians weren't too welcome in the town. There was a good deal of social unrest at that point in time. The problem was to try and bring them together and ease the situation in whatever way possible.

Murray: Right. Kamsack, of course, was only one town. The problems may have been more severe but this was evidently a problem in many towns in Saskatchewan and generally in the rural areas.

John: Oh yes, but not to the same degree because of the smallness of Kamsack and...

Murray: The particular circumstances there.

John: The adjacent reserves were bordering on the community.

Murray: But did the NDP government see it as a more general problem as well? Did they understand the implications of the particular situation at Kamsack?

John: Oh yes, there was many discussions on the matter and, as I say, they evolved loosely, a policy of extending normal services to the Indians if they wished on a basis that, within the Indian Act, there is permission to contract out services.

Murray: The band could do that?

John: Yes. It's possible to contract out social services, education, things of this nature.

Murray: And the federal government would reimburse the province?

John: ...would reimburse the province. And that, in a nutshell, was sort of their overall policy - to try and normalize the situation. As and when the Indians became ready, they could ask for the service. There was never any thought of

imposing or anything else.

Murray: Or even initiating the idea.

John: No, just information meetings. I held thirteen band meetings where I explained that these programs were available to the other people of the province. They could become available to Indians if they so requested. And at those meetings I had specialists from health and from agriculture.

Murray: To explain the programs.

John: To explain the programs non-Indian people had available to them.

Murray: Right.

John: Which could be available to Indians if they requested them.

Murray: There was often, in fact there still is among treaty Indians, the feeling that if they have anything to do with the province, then there is an automatic fear of losing treaty rights. Did you get that response in those meetings at all?

John: There were questions about it but...

Murray: It wasn't a fear.

John: There wasn't any fear because it was put to them in positive terms that no way was this interfering with treaty rights or anything else. It was just a service that was available if they ask for it. They would still remain under the umbrella of the federal government but if they accepted a provincial service, it would be under the provincial regulations.

Murray: Right.

John: They had no child adoption, no child welfare programs or anything of that nature at that time.

Murray: This is one of the things that had been frustrating you as an Indian agent.

John: Yes.

Murray: Was a lack of these kinds of services. I mean, these were the basic services that Canadian citizens were long ago used to having.

John: Yes, and how they expect Indian people to have not exactly similar, but a parallel value system or sense of values when everything that impinges on their life is different, it's kind of naive to think...

Murray: And these were the kind of things you were pressing the department to implement.

John: To implement, right.

Murray: It's interesting, you said before we started taping the interview, that the CCF felt that if you had separate policies for separate groups of people, then this would be a - I'm not sure how you said it. Maybe you could expand on that.

John: Well, it causes misunderstanding to start with and suspicions and is a contributing factor to segregating the Indian people from the rest of the society. How can they

expect to have a normal response to say, the whole social welfare milieu when it's always been handled by a single agency like the Indian agent on a reserve? How can they be expected to know how to go about making an application? How can they be expected to understand it's necessary to make an application?

Murray: Right. If all these things were done for them.

John: It's always been handled under a different kind of an administrative set-up through the Indian Affairs department.

Murray: In going through a lot of the documents of the CCF and NDP government, there seems to be frequent reference to the problems of Indian people but only on occasion do you come across the word Metis. Did they distinguish between the two groups in terms of...?

John: Oh, absolutely. The federal accepts responsibility for treaty or registered Indians.

Murray: Right. I meant the provincial government in terms of...?

John: The provincial government is the responsible body for the non-treaty Indians and Metis, as they're so called.

Murray: There seems to be few references in the provincial government documents to Metis. I'm wondering if...?

John: Few references to the Scotch or the Irish or the Jewish or the Ukrainians. (chuckles)

Murray: Yeah, but the Metis had very similar problems in terms of adjusting to the dominant culture, at least in parts of the province.

John: In parts of the province, in the hinterland areas they do.

Murray: But in the south that wasn't the...?

John: In the south that isn't really very relevant.

Murray: So in your estimation, the situation with the Indians and Metis say, south of the P.A. - North Battleford line, was quite different?

John: Oh, yes.

Murray: The Metis had made most of those adjustments? Was this the feeling with the government?

John: Well, yes. Their children were brought up in non-Indian schools. It's only those that lived in isolated Metis communities like out at Broadview. North of there on the Crooked Lakes, there was a bit of a Metis community there.

Murray: Green Lake was another.

John: And Green Lake is an example but there you are getting close to the edge of the hinterland sort of line.

Murray: Right, so in a sense, the government had its northern affairs branch which dealt with the Metis who were in a similar situation, and in the south they felt that the Metis weren't a particular problem.

John: Not under the CCF or NDP government. There is only, ..

Murray: Well, it was a branch of DNR...

John: All ethnics came under the umbrella of the majority groups committee up until 1962. At that time, it was decided that there had to be more impetus put on minority groups. And that included Hutterites, Metis, and treaty Indians, lots of Finnish people out north of Moosomin in there, and all sort of deprived or poorer segments of the country, no matter what community or what ethnic. So they set up the community development branch under the department of municipal affairs.

Murray: Right. So that minority groups committee was sort of subsumed under that branch?

John: Right. It evolved from the minority groups to community development branch, where we were involved with a lot of ethnic groups, didn't matter...

Murray: Right, whatever group was at the lowest standard of the general system.

John: The heavy demand was in the Indian/Metis area. But we did a lot of work with the Hutterites in terms of getting agreements about location of settlements and things of that nature.

Murray: Manitoba, from my understanding, was one of the first provinces to implement a community development program. I think they started almost 1958 or 1959. By the time the NDP

was defeated in 1964, did it have a fairly substantial

community development program or was it still in the development stages?

John: It was still fairly well developmental, although they had undertaken to upgrade the Green Lake farm activity and some of these kinds of projects. We were getting field staff together and what have you when the election took place. And then the Liberals introduced the department of Indian Affairs.

Murray: Right.

John: And again segregated them out and went along parallel with the federal structure as it were.

Murray: Right.

John: Which, in my opinion, was a disaster. (chuckles)

Murray: So, you were in close agreement with the NDP in their approach to...?

John: I was, yes.

Murray: ...to drawing out Indian people as they were prepared to come into society.

John: To make access available, where under the department approach, it's a single agency and restricts and builds fences. I was in favor of tearing the fences down.

Murray: Right.

John: That's the way I looked at it anyway, at that time.

Murray: This was the government's position right from the beginning. There wasn't really any evaluation of alternatives. This was an obvious solution to the, or approach to the problem as far as the government was concerned.

John: Right. It was the only alternative that was available at the time within that framework at that time. We're talking quite a few years ago now, you know.

Murray: Right. In the mid-fifties, the CCF turned down the possibility of approaching the problem, of Metis at least, from the point of view of the Alberta experiment, where they set up colonies in northern Alberta.

John: They did have a few Metis colonies. There was one out at Lebret, I mentioned one at Crooked Lake, there was one at Green Lake. There were three or four of them around the province. But I think mostly they were carry-overs from the Liberal administration in 1940 up to 1942 or '43 when Douglas was elected.

Murray: Right. So all these colonies you just mentioned were

established previously. And they were established, I think, on a piecemeal basis. They weren't all established at the same time I don't think.

John: No, I think one at a time.

Murray: As the situation developed, they applied that solution to it. Did the government view the absence of popular native organizations, mass based organizations with any concern? Did they view the possible development of these as being a positive thing?

John: Oh yes, they were very much behind my being involved and trying to build up the status and believability, you know... (chuckles)

Murray: Right.

John: ...of the Indian organizations at the time. I'm talking now of oh, 1958-1964. When I first became involved, it wasn't a very popular activity with the Department of Indian Affairs but they didn't object to my being involved in a remote kind of way, attending their conferences and....

Murray: This is why, in 1958, you were still with the department?

John: Yes, up until 1962. Then I went with the province. When I went with the province, they were providing a grant of about \$5000 for the holding of one meeting a year of Indian chiefs.

Murray: This was the FSI, I guess, was it?

John: Yes, well it evolved to the FSI. I forget what they called it before that.

Murray: There was a Union of Saskatchewan Indians at one point, yeah.

John: Yeah, it evolved to the FSI. And the government itself used to make all the arrangements for the accommodation. They paid all the bills, all this sort of thing - did all the administration.

Murray: All the Indians had to do was to arrive at the meeting.

John: Was just to arrive if possible. (chuckles) Over the two-year period, we managed to get it through that the money was turned over to the organization and they made their own arrangements.

Murray: This was by the time you started working for the government?

John: It would be about 1963, in 1962 we got, I think \$7500 turned over to the organization...



Murray: That's right.

John: ...so that they could hold their meeting at Valley Centre.

Murray: And the next year they held it at Banff.

John: The next year they held it at Banff and I forget, I think it was in the neighborhood of \$11,000 or something. But it was turned over to the organization.

Murray: This was done when they felt they were capable of organizing that.

John: Well, they became used to the idea that Indian people might be able to, and if they weren't able to, they had as much right...

Murray: To make a mistake.

John: ...to hire the skills required as anybody else has the right to hire people with skills to perform functions.  
(chuckles)

Murray: Oh, right. So it took the government a while to get rid of this racism.

John: It took a long time. It was one of the crucial things with the federal department, that if it wasn't purest Indian, it wasn't Indian. And they would not accept the fact that Indians had the right to hire skills the same as the federal government has the right to hire skill.

Murray: They were still a separate group.

John: It was just a simple thing but it was a very, very difficult and long process before the federal government came to accept that Indians had a right to hire skills.

Murray: And the provincial government recognized that about six years earlier.

John: Oh yes, there was no problem. It took time to get the thing worked up to the point where it was actually working.

Murray: As far as the federal government was concerned, was it simply a bureaucracy that was trying to perpetuate itself? Was this the source of the resistance or could you tell?

John: I was never at the Ottawa level so I haven't any idea but, as you mentioned earlier before the machine was turned on, John Laurier was a big help to Indians in Alberta. But, had the government accepted the fact that they had the right to call upon other skills, he could have been much more effective.

Murray: He was still up against a wall.

John: He was blocked at most of the turns he tried to make, rather than having the door opened and saying, "Well, come in. Let's discuss this."

Murray: Right.

John: A complete rejection.

Murray: Would it be fair to say that the first real success, in terms of what we've been talking about, was when the matter was taken out of the hands of bureaucrats and put into the hands of a political person like Chretien or Trudeau? Did it take that level to change things?

John: No, it's deeper than that. Prior to that, the Indian organization was a paper tiger.

Murray: Didn't have the clout.

John: It took three years. Each year introducing at their annual meeting, before they would, the Indian people themselves, would accept the need to have a constitution or a set of bylaws and some recognized method of representation. Prior to that, the organization was, in fact, a group of self-elected...

Murray: Self-appointed, yeah.

John: ...people. The government, in a sense, was quite right in not recognizing them as representative of the people because they didn't represent any people on any measurable... No matter how you measure it, they didn't represent any people.

Murray: Did that change in when, 1963? Is that about the year?

John: That changed in, I think it was in 1962 or 1963 or - I forget the year they adopted the constitution. But once they adopted a constitution and had their representatives elected on a formal basis...

Murray: A methodological basis.

John: ...then the government began to start to recognize them.

Murray: What accounted for that? Was it the fact that they had some funds and were able to go around and talk to people? Was it the funding that helped them get to that stage?

John: Well, no, because they didn't have any money. (chuckles) The only money they had was that grant money for that annual meeting.

Murray: And that was just for a meeting, that's right. So they didn't really have an organizing fund.

John: They really didn't have any funds for any organization or anything. And it wasn't until 1965, I think it was, that

they got their first financial program as it were. And that was through ARDA of which the Liberal government contributed some funds and were sort of the key administrative structure that had to be worked through. We got a program through for \$45,000 to hire community workers. Well, they weren't really supposed to be political workers in the sense that just building up the - they were supposed to be community development officers, but by that time, community development officers were such nasty words that we called them community workers. (chuckles)

Murray: Tantamount to communist almost.

John: That was in the years of the CYC or whatever.

Murray: CYC, yeah, right.

John: And so, we got this \$48,000 deal going and for the first time then they really had some funds to work with. And that program was increased then to \$78,000 in that same year.

Murray: That period, 1962-63, when you say that the organization finally became representative, what do you think accounted for that? Was it just that after so many years people started to understand the need for that?

John: Yeah, well, for three years in a row, it was pretty well the same chiefs and what have you. And we'd gone through the thing and explained what the bylaws were and all that.

Murray: The purpose.

John: The ramifications and the fact that unless they did become registered as a benevolent society, the governments couldn't turn over funds to them and it was a real block.

Murray: It was a learning process those three years.

John: And I can remember being quite pleased when they finally voted (phone rings - inaudible).

(break in tape)

Murray: So up until this period that we're talking about, the Indian leaders were in a situation where they knew the problems and they were taking them to the government but were getting no response and didn't really understand the political process necessary to make those demands felt.

John: Right. Because they hadn't had the vote or anything else. It was in 1960, wasn't it, that the vote was extended to the reserves?

Murray: Right. That was the provincial vote I think, wasn't it?

John: Well, and federal.

Murray: And federal as well, yeah.

John: Which is another, sort of, bone of contention. To this day, they've never had a practical familiarization program on the reserves as to what the vote is, and what political parties are, and what part it plays in their day to day life. I've always felt that there should be.

Murray: Right. Well, the Indians, in fact, for years, many Indians, anyway, opposed the vote. One of the arguments was, "Well, until you meet the obligations that you were supposed to meet in terms of education, then we're not prepared to vote - therefore we don't want it." Were there still people...?

John: Most of it was fear of endangering their treaty rights.

Murray: Was that right? It was mostly that issue because I know that in some of the...

John: Now they all vote. There is no problem.

Murray: Right. But some of the conventions in, well, when Malcom Norris was involved in the Indian Association of Alberta, there were those arguments expressed - that we want to be brought to the level of Canadian society so that we can then participate as knowledgeable citizens. But I suppose that might have been a...

John: See, Malcolm was dealing with the Metis more than the treaty and I've been dealing all my life with the treaty and there is a distinct gap in the socialization approach that's between the Metis and..

Murray: Right.

John: Except when you get up around a place like Canoe Lake.

Murray: Where it blends in.

John: Where the Metis are brothers and sisters of the treaties on the reserve and they are all exposed to the same socialization pressures.

Murray: Right. Right. There were no Metis organizations, at least not that I'm aware of, up until 1964-65 when Malcolm started organizing and Joe Amyotte started organizing the south. Were there any Metis representatives that the government was aware of in the years that you were working for the CCF?

John: Not prior to 1964, but in 1964, a fellow, what was his name? Alec Daniels came to me at the University and met with myself and a couple of professors and asked for assistance in forming a Metis organization. And we helped him set up the founding meeting for the Regina group and helped him draft up a

constitution and...

Murray: Was he a young man? Was this a new leadership...?

John: He's in town here, Alec Daniels, and I can recall, because he was involved in getting it started, we cautioned him not to run for office himself. (chuckles) Because they would think he was just like a [inaudible]. (chuckles)

Murray: Right. So, was it...?

John: So then there was another bald-headed....

Murray: Walter Baldhead?

John: Walter Langan became involved and then he became secretary and then he used to do books for them all the time so that he would have his annual statements.

Murray: This was in 1964 was it?

John: Yeah, from 1964 until when he died about three years ago.

Murray: Do you remember when Joe Amyotte entered the picture?

John: I remember Joe but I don't remember when he became involved. But once the Regina group got started, then they had called upon some with education, and it was there that I believe the thing really spread out and became what's now the MMSSI.

Murray: Right. This fellow came to you at the University. Do you recall, that was the spring of 1964 or what part of the year?

John: No, it would be the winter of 1964, spring of 1965.

Murray: Right. That's interesting because I hadn't realized that that's how....

John: It was then that we started getting involved in the friendship centre activities too, about that time. Started tutoring programs for high schools.

Murray: The CCF had given some small grants to the P.A., Regina, North Battleford centres I think in 1963. I think it was \$3000 to Regina and \$2000 each to North Battleford....

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Murray: Right, no response back. Who was it that initiated that meeting as you recall?

John: It was the provincial government, the Liberals.

Murray: Can you narrow it down to any particular - was it Ross Thatcher himself?

John: I think it was at the request of his office, probably be one of his advisors through him, you know.

Murray: Right. Then he must have had rather poor advice in terms of the meeting with both Indian and Metis.

John: Well, I thought he did all along the line - to set up the department - every one of these fences that you build is going to eventually have to be knocked down. (chuckles)

Murray: What was their attitude towards community development? Did they consider that to be an NDP plot of some kind? What was their attitude towards that?

John: No, I don't think so because they carried on with field workers in that area under Ewald, I think you mentioned that you had been speaking to him for quite some time. But I think that a lot of attempt was made to make political hay out of the whole community development thing to the point where it was completely discredited and still, it has proven a very effective tool in every other underdeveloped area in the world. (chuckles)

Murray: But not in this country?

John: But not in this country. (chuckles)

Murray: It just doesn't seem to fit with the political milieu that exists here, I suppose. It becomes too highly political.

John: It's too suspect.

Murray: The idea of gradually integrating Indian people, I gather, was behind the efforts of the CCF/NDP to pressure the federal government to decentralize the administration of Indian Affairs and to gradually hand over that administration to the provinces. Is that it?

John: Well, to normalize the situation. I don't think that the provincial government wanted to integrate them in the sense that they're losing their ethnics or anything else.

Murray: Right, but just allowed....

John: But to give them an opportunity to become part of the society in a comfortable way.

Murray: Right. That's what I meant.

John: Even today, they're not part of the society.

Murray: Right.

John: And they're not happy either. (chuckles) They might not be happy if normal services were extended but at least those that wanted to, would have that opportunity. Now, they only have one opportunity and that is that reserve up there.

Murray: Right, or to leave it and have nothing.

John: Or to leave it and have nothing.

Murray: And go blind into the...

John: And no skills to cope with.

Murray: So, did you support that approach the government was taking to...?

John: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Murray: Obviously, the federal government resisted that. And in a sense, they had as their ally, the Indians themselves.

John: Right. If you go back into sociology and the fears of change, it's all there. That's partly, too, why the community development was feared.

Murray: Fear of any white man trying to do something.

John: Well, any change, period. (chuckles)

Murray: Right. Even if it wasn't a white man.

John: Everybody crying, "that's not good enough," but nobody prepared to make any change on either side of the street. (chuckles)

Murray: Right. Did you, in your contact with Indian leaders, attempt to convince them that this was the best road?

John: No, I did very little in terms of, you might say, personal missionary work among the leaders. I was there as a resource person and naturally....

Murray: Responding to their expressed needs.

John: And feeding in information, letting them make up their minds. As I say, like, on the constitution, they had no concept or anything of constitution. So it took three years of developing, discussing if it was satisfactory, making necessary changes, getting it, doing the leg work up at the provincial secretary's office to make sure that it would be acceptable in terms of registration as a benevolent society. It took three years before the chiefs, who were the more literate group, in those terms - many of them couldn't read or write but in those terms, they were knowledgeable at the end of the three year

term, and did, in fact, become a registered society.

Murray: Right. So that process was wholly one of them learning and realizing their needs after the end of three years?

John: Right. But prior to that, there had been no introduction of any knowledge so how could they evolve? (chuckles)

Murray: Right, they were starting from zero.

John: And sadly there is so many of the areas. And as I say, I still think it's that way in terms of the franchise.

Murray: Did the Thatcher government continue on the line taken by the previous government - that Indian Affairs should be decentralized? Did they have an interest in pursuing that?

John: No, I haven't any idea. As I say I was...

Murray: You were out too soon to...

John: I was fired in November, shortly after that meeting in Saskatoon.

Murray: And you didn't, up to that point, you hadn't any impression of what their position was?

John: No, they were just evolving there. When they brought out the department, I was quite unpleasant. (chuckles)

Murray: And that department was, in fact, mentioned at the September 1964 meeting in Saskatoon, I think, wasn't it? Or it was hinted at?

John: It was hinted at, it wasn't specifically mentioned.

Murray: Right, right. And you expressed your view about the department - was that what led to your firing or...?

John: No, I really haven't any idea. I was never able to get any answer but at that meeting in Saskatoon, I didn't speak to the minister with regard to the rural municipal aspect...

Murray: The blunder - quite!

John: ...in very positive terms. (chuckles) And I had a strong feeling that that may have had some bearing, although I was an order in council appointment - not because I was politically oriented, because I was in Alberta at the time they approached me and asked me if I would be interested in taking the position.

Murray: So you were neutral as far as Saskatchewan was concerned?



John: As far as politics. I wanted to work with all the Indians and I stayed out of politics. I've never been a member of a co-op or, (chuckles) never a political party or never went to church or anything because I wanted to work with all the people, not just little segments.

Murray: Right.

John: But I don't know whether that had a significant part to play or not. But as I say, I was an order in council appointment and not because of the political thing but because there was no such animal as a community development officer. I was the first one in the province and there was nothing in their estimates or budgets or no classification committee that would...

Murray: No department that would...

John: There was nothing. So it had to be an order in council appointment. And in the two years we were moving from this minority group committee into a formalized structure of a community development branch, part of department of Municipal Affairs.

Murray: Right. So you, right up until the election, you were the one and only community development officer of the government?

John: Yeah.

Murray: And you were still, were you, working in the Kamsack area at that time as well?

John: I worked there for about a year, about 18 months, and then I came down to Regina, when they started to transfer over, and worked out of Regina as well as working in the Legislative Buildings.

Murray: So you were working towards broadening out that community development program? Did you continue with that up until the time you were fired? Was that still your activity?

John: That was still my designation. And it was interesting that 50% of my salary the first year was paid by the federal government.

Murray: That was the Kamsack Agreement, wasn't it?

John: Yeah.

Murray: Right, I remember that.

John: The Kamsack Agreement. Incidentally, Mike Shimpo, the Japanese fellow that went in and made a study afterwards in Kamsack - I don't know whether you've read that or not, but...

Murray: No, I haven't.

John: It's quite well worth while reading. He went in after I left Kamsack and did quite an indepth study which I collaborated with, and didn't entirely agree with. He places, I thought, much too much on the ethnic aspect and not enough on the social and economic situation. However, over the years he has now come to agree with me that there is a bit of a bias on the ethnic side, that should have been maybe not as...

Murray: As strong, yeah.

John: ...strong. But he's in Australia now doing a research job for Waterloo University. And last year, he went back into the area. He was doing some research on education. He went back into the area and had another look at things.

Murray: Oh, is that right? Did he write anything again or was it just for personal...?

John: I don't know whether he has written any report yet. I haven't seen a report yet. His name is s-h-i-m-p-o and the report should be in the University libraries.

Murray: The archives.

John: I'm surprised that you can't get more information out of the University libraries because they're supposed to have been...

Murray: Well, the Department of Indian and Metis papers have just recently been turned over to the archives and I'm not sure that they're even complete and they haven't yet, the government hasn't yet given permission to look through them so I'm in the process of getting to those, but it's a slow process. That meeting in 1964 was pretty much of a disaster then, in terms of its goals?

John: Well, I wouldn't be able to say because I don't know what their goals were.

Murray: They were sort of vague, were they?

John: The only thing that sticks out in my mind is that donnybrook that developed - not a donnybrook but the conflict that developed between the Metis and treaties and the disaster of giving the treaty Indians the impression that they were going to be all....

Murray: Turned into Metis.

John: (chuckles) All become our rural municipal government bodies.

Murray: Do you think that had a major role in the antagonism that continued after that, between Indian and Metis

organizations? Was that a factor?

John: I don't know.

Murray: That's a guess I suppose, isn't it?

John: Yeah. I was busy with the organizations but I had nothing to do with the government and I haven't any idea.

Murray: I think that, from some of the accounts I've had of the meeting, you and Mr. Greenwood attended the meeting that Malcolm Norris and Don Nielson held with a group of Metis to sort of initiate the beginnings of the Metis Association. Do you recall attending that meeting?

John: I don't recall specifically, no.

Murray: Was there anything...?

John: If Malcolm was there, I promise you I was there.  
(chuckles)

Murray: You knew Malcolm at that time. You mentioned the hostility between Indian and Metis. Did it manifest itself in any particular personalities?

John: Oh, I couldn't remember that far back. That's fourteen years ago. (chuckles)

Murray: Right. My impression, from some people I've talked to, suggested that John Tootoosis and Norris were two of the people who conflicted.

John: Yeah, well John is very jealous of the treaty prerogatives and I don't know what Malcolm's stand was on whether he felt the Metis should have similar privileges or not.

Murray: I think he generally took the position that there should be unity. That the Indian and Metis faced similar problems and that they shouldn't be divided.

John: As soon as you say that, then that presupposes the lessening of the privilege of the treaty, so-called privilege because personally I think it's been a...

Murray: A detriment?

John: ...a detriment to them.

Murray: That was Malcolm's line always. In fact, one of the things he used to do just to get them debating was that he said, "I'm not like a hog going to market with a number stamped on my ass."

John: (chuckles)

Murray: I'm not sure he changed too many minds with that though. (Chuckles) So as far as the Indians were concerned,

the Thatcher government and Malcolm Norris were a part of the same thing, they were both threatening treaty rights in their individual approaches to that.

John: Yeah. Oh, I think that was a useful exercise. Many of those people that attended the thing had never been in a hotel - period - never mind the Bessborough Hotel.

Murray: It was a good thing for their self-respect, I suppose.

John: It showed also a good many people that, out of 200 people, there was only really one drunk and I can remember Sammy Watson picking him up out of a revolving door and throwing him over his shoulder and taking him up and throwing him in his bedroom and locking the door on him. (Chuckles)

Murray: He wasn't going to spoil the image with one guy. Yeah, I suppose for a lot of native people, who, if they tried to meet at hotels, had often been refused - that having that kind of treatment must have been quite a boost for their...

John: And damn sight poorer hotels. (chuckles)

Murray: That's for sure, right. One room hotels.

John: Yeah, that was a useful exercise, I suppose. Whether it was worth the money that it cost and what have you, I don't know.

Murray: So you weren't able, in the short time that you lasted after that meeting, to get any impression of what the consequences of that meeting might have been in the minds of the Liberals?

John: No, that was in September and I was fired on the fourth of November.

Murray: Barely had time to get back to Regina.

John: Barely had time to finish paying all the bills. (chuckles)

Murray: Mr. Greenwood was fired at the same time as you?

John: No, he left about two months later. I don't know whether he was fired or left of his own volition. He's over in England now. Married an English war bride. I guess they decided to go back. He was down in the Lakehead University for a while and he conned me out of a whole bunch of my papers and he promised to send them back and the bastard never sent them

back yet. (chuckles) But Shimpo has six boxes of papers down at Waterloo University and he hasn't had a chance to go through

them yet. Some interesting things.

Murray: Yeah, I was going to ask, in fact, whether you had any documents pertaining to those years.

John: They are all down in Waterloo University. There is six big cardboard boxes.

Murray: Those are the ones you're talking about, your papers?

John: Once in a while things happen, you know, and I'd take the xerox copy of the letter strictly against the law and everything else, but too good to let pass up. You know, trying to get electricity on the reserve and the head boss of the province writes back and says, "I don't know why you're concerned about electrification on Indian reserves. There are some white people don't have electricity."

Murray: That was the response?

John: (chuckles)

Murray: It's a wonder you lasted as long as you did. (chuckles) What were some of the other examples?

John: Oh, I couldn't recall offhand.

Murray: Similarly in aim...

John: But, you know, just completely ridiculous. Carlyle had that White Bear Lake there, that beach resort area. They were renting the lots at \$10 a lot. It didn't matter whether it was a lakefront or two blocks back, it was \$10 a lot. And I wrote in and suggested it should be zoned and the rental subrated and so on. And they wrote back and said they'd talked it over with the former superintendent and that he said it was working fine so we'll leave it the way it is. (chuckles) They were losing thousands of dollars every year. It was easier just to think of it at \$10 a lot.

Murray: You must've felt like you were in a Kafka novel or something.

John: You know, these kinds of responses were partly why I decided to leave.

Murray: The Indian Affairs department must have been one of the strangest organizations going at that time. I mean, the men who wrote these letters were obviously not stupid men. What was the motivation to answer questions in that way?

John: Don't rock the boat, just status quo.

Murray: That had been the dominant policy for 50 years, I suppose.

John: Yeah, status quo.

Murray: It was a fear of their jobs; is that basic motivation?

John: Well, again, this thing of, "if it isn't purest Indian," crept in too, all along the line. Like that same beach resort - I suggested that the Indians themselves should be collecting this rent and depositing it in the bank.

Murray: That's white man's stuff.

John: I used to have to drive from Broadview down there and pick up the gate receipts every day. And they wouldn't let the Indians just take it and get a receipt for general draft at the bank. I was the guy from Broadview on this.

Murray: If the Indians hadn't done it 300 years ago, then they weren't going to do it today - is that the standard they used?

John: And then when I wrote in about it, and at that time, I was still with the branch of course. When I wrote in about it, they wrote back and said, "The Indians aren't asking for this and aren't able to handle it. Until they are, I don't think we should change the process." (chuckles) Again, they couldn't hire anybody to do it, or, you know, you couldn't try or anything because they'd never done it before. Of course, now it's all done there and there is no problem.

Murray: It all changed once Trudeau was made aware of the problem.

John: Well, and also, I think the fact that the organizations became registered...

Murray: And did have some clout.

John: ...and we formed the Canadian National Indian Brotherhood and got per capita grants from Ottawa. Then there got to be some communication among Indians and there was able to put pressure on.

Murray: Did the media have a role in this too? The fact that the media finally sort of discovered the conditions of Metis people?

John: Not really. They've always been more or less on the, just human interest sort of side then. They never delved into anything specifically.

Murray: Right. But the organizations gave them that opportunity.

John: For years, you know, and donkey's years, we tried to get rid of that permit system for selling grain and cattle and there was just no way you could get rid of it. It was in the Indian Act. But there was a discretionary clause there. They

could be exempted. Never was that ever adopted, until after the FSI got organized and Walter Deiter wrote a letter to the branch.

Murray: That would be 1967?

John: Somewhere around there. And they wrote back and said well, "If an Indian band asks for it, we'll waive it." So, after all these years, and so immediately all these bands just wrote in and there is no permit system any more. (chuckles)

Murray: Unbelievable.

John: Oh, that was the lighter side.

Murray: I suppose. You'd have to make a lighter side if you wanted to maintain your sanity dealing with people like that.

John: Oh, I used to be so frustrated. But the biggest field of neglect, and I have a feeling it still is, is the lack of child welfare services on the reserves.

Murray: That's been brought up quite dramatically numerous times but nothing seems to be...

John: They've hired quite a few Indian women to work on the reserves and that, but I don't think there is any regulations with any teeth in it. All the rest of society has found it's necessary for the protection of children to have these regulations. I don't think Indian people are any more unique than any other person.

Murray: No.

John: (chuckles) They're people.

Murray: Right.

John: I think it's a bloody disgrace that they're not receiving the benefits.

Murray: Right.

(Break in tape)

John: The organization are going on the wrong track. All this program money is being funnelled to the FSI. The FSI has now become a single agency administration. The money should be funnelled to the band implementing the program with a cost factor going to the FSI for provision of skilled guidance and things of this nature. They should have enough per capita grant to be able to keep their field staff working. But they should be in the role of advisers and it should be the bands themselves that are doing the administration.

Murray: Rather than another government.

John: It isn't much help to the administration, or the gaining of knowledge of administration at the field level, if it's all done in the FSI office in Regina or P.A.

Murray: It's like an Indian Affairs department.

John: That's the feeling that I have. And I sort of blame the governments. Because after all, it's all government money, you know. And they could've had some insistence that...

Murray: That it be used in a certain way.

John: ...the FSI play its political role and provide resources, in terms of personnel, to the reserves, but the program management should be at the reserve level.

Murray: This gets back again, to some extent, to the concept of community development. That has to take place at that community.

John: They're never gonna learn as long as it's done over there.

Murray: Right.

John: (chuckles) Damn it. That's one thing I feel....

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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