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BILL HARDING:

Mr. Harding was a Saskatchewan civil servant in the 1950s. He met Malcolm Norris at a human relations training institute as well as at meetings of a left wing group within the CCF party.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mr. Harding describes his impressions of Malcolm Norris and of the two groups in which they met.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Bill Harding was a Saskatchewan civil servant in the 1950's and met Malcolm Norris while participating in human relations seminars put on by the government. He also met him as part of a left group within the CCF party. He describes his impressions of Norris and the activities the two groups were engaged in.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I'm speaking to Bill Harding of Regina. Mr. Harding, you were mentioning that you met Malcolm at a sort

of yearly seminar. Could you describe that?

Bill: Yeah, this was a human relations training institute that was conducted by a group of civil service, primarily David Smith and Murray Thompson. And it was designed to provide, primarily to civil servants, a training experience that would improve their ability to produce democracy in the work place. Fundamentally, that's what we were in.

Murray: So it was a socialist exercise then. In fact it would relate to the CCF goals in particular or...?

Bill: Yeah, but even more than that, I think that many of us civil servants were upset by the contradictions between the goals of socialism on the one hand and the limitations of being a socialist within a bureaucratic framework.

Murray: When did that start? What year would that have...?

Bill: Well I would guess about '48 or '49, and it was very much hooked up with the Bethel Institute in Maine, which took the lead in this group dynamics philosophy based very much on the German philosopher; I forget his name. But we tried to get the government to recruit civil servants to come to the course. This was our primary aim, and at one year Malcolm came from Prince Albert. Now keep in mind that, at that time, people in the south knew even less about the north than people do today. And we're still extremely ignorant and really separate from the north.

Murray: It's just been opened up in the last two or three years that...

Bill: And so that even Prince Albert was really very far north to those of us who lived and had our being and had been brought up in the south. And so that a lot of the concerns that the northern people, and particularly a person like Malcolm, brought to the institute were very foreign to us, to our background. And while there was a good deal of sympathy and human understanding and so on about problems, there was really no intellectual grasp of the Metis, the native people, the north.

Murray: The whole history of that situation?

Bill: That's right, yeah. And that was typical of the WASP upbringing in the south, of course. Now the human relations training institute was a very frustrating kind of a training institute because you were thrown into a completely unstructured situation, and the intention of the training course was to build whatever structure seemed appropriate to satisfy the needs of the participants. But sitting silently and waiting for somebody to take the leadership, and waiting for some leader outside to lay down the rules of the game and so on...

Murray: Give directions or something.

Bill: Became an extremely frustrating thing. In fact the second year, we had to put a psychiatrist on staff to take care of the (laughs) problems created with people.

Murray: This would be a tense sort of situation?

Bill: Oh very. Very much so. And Malcolm obviously had more difficulty with this than most people, because he wanted to get at the problems that he had brought down with him, but he found it difficult to verbalize these things. He found it difficult to operate in this kind of a situation. But at the same time, he probably expressed more of the real heart and guts of the exercise in his efforts to get understanding with his white brothers and sisters, and he came through the experience as a very, very strong person and made some very, very close friends in the process. And I think two of his closest friends that he established at that time were Charlie Smith, who was with the Saskatchewan Power Corporation and who was in charge of the rural electrification program and consequently very much more aware of the hinterlands...

Murray: Right, right.

Bill: But who was a very, very fine person too; since dead. And myself. Charlie and I were good friends; Charlie and Malcolm and I became a very tight little community too. So, now the other way I met Malcolm was through periodic meetings that we held during that period - I guess it would be '49 to '53 or '54. The left wing of the CCF at the time was very concerned about where the party was going and very concerned about the lack of depth and comprehensiveness of the electoral platform.

Murray: Was there a concern about the growth of the professional bureaucrat in terms of power? Because that was a problem in DNR, I think, during that period.

Bill: I don't think that was the concern so much as it was the... That was our concern as individuals in our particular positions in the civil service, but the left wing was much more concerned about issues. Issues of education and health and so on, resource development and certain... And gradually becoming concerned about native problems as well. Now we organized - we tried to do it quarterly, we never succeeded - but we organized a little left wing caucus, the only activity of which was an occasional meeting at Fort Qu'Appelle to discuss some of the issues.

Murray: This was separate from the training thing?

Bill: That's right. It was another activity in which I got in touch with Malcolm. And Malcolm often came to these things from Prince Albert with the rest of the Prince Albert people. And then of course that meant that a lot of us were visiting

back and forth. When Malcolm would come to Regina, he would drop in and see Charlie Smith and Bill Harding. And when I went to Prince Albert I would drop in and see Malcolm Norris. But really it's that period from '49 to '53 that I knew Malcolm and I only knew him in this tangential way, you know.

Murray: What kind of action did that rump group take? Was it an action-oriented thing in terms of the party or how did it operate in terms of its goals?

Bill: Its primary concern was to try to improve the understanding of its members about issues and to try to develop common approaches to problems. Now it was assumed that we were all active in the party and that we would work as individuals within our own clubs, within our own constituency organizations, to sponsor resolutions and so on. There was a lot of talk in that group about a left wing caucus within the party, which finally happened with the Waffles, eh. But

we discarded that as a frivolous type of activity because the party still, at that time, had a lot of opportunity for democratic discussion within it.

Murray: Right.

Bill: So the other thing that we contemplated but never got going was a journal, a publishing kind of centre where we could actually write articles and get them published; but that never got off the ground.

Murray: That wouldn't necessarily have been critical of the CCF but just putting forward positions on various issues. Is that...?

Bill: Yeah, but it would have implied a lot of criticism because we were really concerned about where we were going at that time.

Murray: But it was only because the resources weren't there that that didn't happen. There wasn't any other reason?

Bill: That's right, that's right, yeah. And I think every single person that was attending these discussions, they were so damn busy, their jobs, you know - most of them, I guess half of them, would be union organizers and a quarter would be civil servants and the other quarter would be made up of farmers and teachers and odds and bods of people.

Murray: Everybody dedicated to what they were doing, I suppose?

Bill: That's right, and extremely busy doing their own thing. And a...

Murray: That would have been one of the frustrations I suppose in terms of just trying to get together in one place?

Bill: Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah, we had a hell of a time

getting a date that was suitable to everyone. But I would guess that during that three, four year period we probably met, oh, eight, ten times. I don't know whether anybody kept a record of it but I'm sure I've got some notes in my files up in the attic.

Murray: Well did these two things, the training group and the rump group, did they both sort of fade out of existence after '54?

Bill: Yeah. Why was that now? I don't know. Let's see - '52 election? No, I don't see any historical reason. I think it was mainly the change of population. The people who were active in the human relations training either moved up the ladder and became unavailable because of the importance of their jobs, or moved out of the province. See, Murray Thompson and David Smith both left the province and I think that's what finally closed that thing down. I got involved in the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life as secretary. That pretty well took care of me for five years. Meyor Brownstone, also with the Royal Commission.

Murray: And Malcolm wouldn't have been the initiator of the thing in any case though, he would have just...

Bill: No, primarily because of the difficulty in getting away from Prince Albert, he wasn't the most active in this seminar series, but he would get to it every time he could.

Murray: It's interesting because he was, on and off, I think, a member of the Communist party. And there's always been an attitude among many Marxists who were more rigid, that the psychological aspect of politics is generally ignored. Now Malcolm, obviously, who's taken part in this thing, didn't feel that way. Or did he? I'm wondering what his attitude was.

Bill: Well, we were not organized as a left wing CCF group at all and maybe explaining it that way may have left the wrong impression with you. This was a group of left wingers (laughs) in the province. And we weren't asking any questions of each other as to what kind of left wingers we were.

Murray: Right.

Bill: And I'm sure that there were lots of eyebrows raised in Regina about Bill Harding meeting with so and so, and Meyor Brownstone - well no, Meyor wasn't so active but... But you see within the party even, there was the right-left split and the right considered the left to be members of the Communist party whether they ever heard of the Communist party or not, you know. So there was a hell of a lot of that thinking going on.

Murray: But Malcolm took part in these things. I'm wondering if it was partly because he missed that kind of stimulation in Prince Albert and in the north. Would that have drawn him as

much as anything? Or was it explicitly the idea behind the

seminar that attracted him, the idea of...?

Bill: Well, I have always had the feeling with Malcolm that he appreciated the fellowship a hell of a lot. He was an awfully sensitive human being; this is my recollection of him. He needed friendship, he needed this kind of association with people, and I know that with Chas Smith... Chas never went to the left wing seminar. Chas was in the human relations thing, and Chas was no radical left winger by any stretch of the imagination. But he was just such a nice guy, you know, and Malcolm and he had such a beautiful relationship, which wasn't based on ideology at all and both of them loved this kind of...

Murray: Really appreciated that opportunity.

Bill: Yeah, yeah. And Malcolm was very much on Chas's mind all the time. He was a real friend.

Murray: Malcolm had the habit, at least in some situations, of being extremely sharp-tongued about racism and that sort of thing. Did he express that at these seminars?

Bill: Yep. And particularly at the human relations thing. When he really got frustrated about the lack of direction, you know, all of the things that we expect in our society, then he started really blasting us and in doing so, of course, he clarified a lot of the goals of the seminar and began to bring people together. But he became also very emotional about the whole thing and was very close to the traditional mental breakdown. And it was only after Chas had spent practically a whole night with Malcolm, thrashing out the problem, the personal problem that Malcolm was facing in this kind of a situation, that he came back into the sessions the next day and apologized for his outbursts and immediately became constructive and saying, "Now these are the questions that are really bothering me. Would you be interested in talking about them and helping me work them out?"

Murray: Right. This was the first time he'd come, was it?

Bill: That was, yeah. He only came to one of the human relations institute because it was intended to be a one time effort. Those of us who went more than once were staff.

Murray: Oh I see, right, and other people were being trained.

Bill: That's right. Yeah.

Murray: How long would those have lasted? Two or three days or...?

Bill: A week.

Murray: A week.

Bill: Yeah. And really very intense.

Murray: Can you remember any other anecdotes about Malcolm in that situation? It was just the one time that first day he was unable to deal with that whole...

Bill: Yeah. But from then on, for the rest of that week, he was really a very creative member of the training institute and we learned more about how groups interact... (laughs)

Murray: With the help of Malcolm?

Bill: Through Malcolm's attempts to make sense out of it.

Murray: I've never met Malcolm, but I get the impression he had a tremendous energy and power about him when he was...

Bill: Yep, and he carried a lot of guilt around with him, I had a feeling too. You know, I never knew him that well.

Murray: Right. So it's guessing to some extent?

Bill: Yep.

Murray: His daughter claims that he was driven by the whole native problem, so-called, and she speculates that it was partly an inferiority complex on his part.

Bill: I had that feeling. Yeah, I had that feeling and in fact he expressed that. He expressed that very, very clearly - that I'm inferior to all you people, he would say.

Murray: Really? That's interesting.

Bill: Yep. And I don't count, you know.

Murray: Was this in the sense of feeling sorry for himself or was it he was stating a fact...?

Bill: He was trying to state a fact. That was the impression that I got although he was very emotional about it too, at times. And I don't think that would have come out had not this been this very intense kind of...

Murray: Personal thing, yeah.

Bill: Situation. But certainly he did express feelings of inferiority to us well-educated...

Murray: That's the key, I think.

Bill: White people. Although many of the people he was talking to didn't have any more education than he did. Charlie Smith, for example.

Murray: His father died when he was 15 and he had a brilliant school career ahead of him, and his father's first family got all the money and Malcolm was immediately without resources and

could never go back to school.

Bill: I see.

Murray: I think that was probably the most important event in his life.

Bill: Yeah.

Murray: In terms of what happened after.

Bill: Yeah. And you know this may be the reason that he and Chas hit it off so well because Charlie and I had grown up together in Swift Current and we both graduated from high school at the same time in 1928. And Chas immediately went to a job and I went to university.

Murray: Right.

Bill: But my dad was a civil servant and had a little bit of money, and his dad was just a small farmer, didn't have any.

Murray: Simple as that.

Bill: Yeah.

Murray: In the other group that met, the left wing of the CCF, you mentioned the word hinterland. I wonder if that concept was developed at that time or whether Malcolm saw the north in terms of a sort of metropolis/hinterland analysis or whether it was implied by things at all?

Bill: I don't know. I think I'm using the word hinterland in a much more modern sense.

Murray: More modern, yeah. I don't think that particular concept had developed at that time.

Bill: No, no. And you know the north was so out of our thinking that we wouldn't even have a theory about it.

Murray: Right.

Bill: We knew it was up there someplace. We knew there were a bunch of natives up there, but they really didn't come into our consciousness - in fact they didn't come into my consciousness fully until I returned here in 1975 and found Regina full of Indians. (laughs)

Murray: And you'd never seen them before?

Bill: Yeah.

Murray: Right. How did the other people in this seminar react to this sort of new information about the north? Were they sort of at a loss as to how to deal with it or...?

Bill: Yeah, and I think our answers were the typical Christian do-gooder answers, "We got to do something about this, you know those poor people out there, we got to..."

Murray: Help them.

Bill: Help them.

Murray: Noblesse oblige.

Bill: Yeah. It would be interesting to search back into the CCF provincial convention resolutions about that time to see what we were saying.

Murray: I have done that; I came across a few. The records aren't as complete as they might be.

Bill: They're not, eh?

Murray: Yeah. I don't remember any of them off the top of my head but I know I went through and picked them out.

Bill: God, the records should be complete because the... at least The Commonwealth.

Murray: Yeah, yeah. I haven't gone through The Commonwealth. I went through the actual papers of the CCF.

Bill: Well if you want the resolutions the best place would be to just go to The Commonwealth.

Murray: The Commonwealth, yeah.

Bill: Because they printed them, reprinted all the resolutions that were passed every year. And...

Murray: And this group, this left group that was one of the things it did, was put forward resolutions through its constituency groups?

Bill: Yeah, yeah. Sometimes we would do it quite formally. We would set up a group to draft a resolution and to send it around to people to make sure that it was presented. But in most cases it was an informal thing where something would come up in a discussion in Qu'Appelle and half a dozen of us would make a note of it and it would interest us and so we'd push it a little bit. And that's the way it happened most of the time, informally.

Murray: Did Malcolm initiate some of the particular resolutions?

Bill: I don't recall. My recollection of Malcolm at these things is that he was pretty much a silent member. He didn't participate a great deal. Of course we had some real power-houses. I didn't participate very much either. Very

articulate labor organizers particularly.

Murray: Would Malcolm have felt somewhat intimidated or was he just there to listen? Because he was a pretty powerful speaker himself when he wanted to be.

Bill: There may have been some intimidation but I think it was a pretty unified kind of group, you know, and we had some very articulate people. And when you have a situation like that there was no great difference on policy, and you got articulate people, you don't have to debate things, you see.

Murray: Right, right.

Bill: And so the articulate one will make the statement and if it's half satisfactory to everyone, we'd sit back and relax and have another cigarette and another cup of coffee. And the articulate people were mostly the trade union, Len Wallace, Walter Smishek, (laughs) Clarence Lyons.

Murray: Was Morris Shumiatcher ever involved in any of those things?

Bill: No, Morris had already turncoated. Well Morris Shumiatcher was always considered by the left to be a leper.

Murray: Is that right?

Bill: From the day he came. There's a lot of misunderstanding about this. They talk about the Saskatchewan Mafia in Ottawa. And whenever I go and meet some of these old friends, quote, like Don Handsley, and Tommy McLeod, and Al Johnson and so on, they very magnanimously include me in the Saskatchewan Mafia. Well I was never a part of that Saskatchewan Mafia, you know.

Murray: Right.

Bill: And the civil service from day one... I was called back. I was in Alberta at the time and I came back to work in the adult education division with Watson Thompson which soon was chopped within a year because it was so progressive and outgoing, issue-oriented. And so there was a left and right wing within the civil service from day one. The right wing was Tommy McLeod, Morris Shumiatcher, Tommy Shoyama, David Levin...

(END OF SIDE A)

Bill: The most recent comment I heard about him was, Flaman, the executive secretary of AMNSIS, at the Bayda inquiry made the statement... paraphrasing some part of his presentation, that they still believed that Jim Brady was killed.

Murray: Right.

Bill: But what is the story about Jim Brady?

Murray: I don't really know.

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