

Jim Sinclair, Jim Durocher, and Ron Laliberte:

Métis Political Activist Interviews (April 17, 2004)

Tape 2

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(Video Tape: 6:22.25.10) RON LALIBERTE: When I, when I look at both your political careers and, and what you did, you know, like here you were going to take Trudeau to court and, you know, the highest, the most powerful man in all of Canada. Where did you find the strength to do that? I mean all of the voice to do this and, you know, I think back, you know, on the Aboriginal Conferences when you stood up and, you know, your work that you've done over the years. Where, where, where do you get the strength to do that because I know from my personal experience that it takes a lot of strength to do that, you know, to get up and, and to voice what you believe in.

(Video Tape: 6:22.58.10) JIM DUROCHER: Well I think, I think, you know, I don't know, you know, Sinclair, you know, talked about this, you know, a lot in the past. I think you get a lot of your strength from the community, you know. You know what you're trying to do is right. It's the right thing to do and you look at a little bit about the history and then you look at the racism, the institutionalized racism that you had to live under, you know, the terms and conditions and those things. And you know that hey it's not right, so you got to go and try and change it. You got to try and do something and that is what you're expected to do. That's why you're a leader. And when you're in a leadership position like that, you know, it's tough sometimes. It's, you know, its, sometimes you're, think that you're alone and, you know, and, you know, I have seen Sinclair in those kind of situations many, many times, where you get actually physically sick because what are you going to do, you know. You get, you get so wound up inside of

you, what if I screw up? What if I don't, what if I'm wrong in this and than, and than just before you go do that then you go to the communities and you say, okay here is what I think, here's the vision that I have and here's the direction I would like to go because here is the end result and here's how we get there sort of thing, you know. And then you do that and nine out of ten, if you get community support, the end result will, will, will be alright. And, you know, you'll have, you know, felt a little bit better about it and so you carry on like this over, over a, you know, over, over a period of time and it's never easy but.

RON LALIBERTE: I can imagine it's never easy...

JIM DUROCHER: No.

RON LALIBERTE: Because like you say you never had a blue print to do this stuff, you know, you're blazing through new territory here, you know, it must have been, must have been highly stressful. Any comments on that Jim?

(Video Tape: 6:24.37.22) JIM SINCLAIR: Yeah I think that, you know, that if you go back to '74 where we were always community oriented. We were always community oriented. All of our work was done with the communities and everything we done was, it led to a board meeting or led to a larger meeting with talking to community. I remember Durocher, people telling us that we needed these high price consultants. Durocher said we don't need it, we got a hundred thousand consultants with us, you know...

JIM DUROCHER: Everybody in the community is a consultant.

JIM SINCLAIR: And, and I think that's what really helped me as a leader because I never had to worry about what was happening at home. I never had to worry about a coup being done while I was in Ottawa because these people are out organizing to fight for these rights and everybody knew we

had to get. Here is another issue, every time I'd go to a meeting there would be a vote of non-confidence that I wasn't maybe doing things enough but it kept me on my toes. And I think that again, like I said, it was a homework that were done by people like Jimmy who organized in the North and others who organized, of course, in the South and, and, and kept this momentum going so that when I had a problem I could phone home and people would support us. Even our enemies, like, were always on side. So that was a phenomenon that I'll never forget and I think that again when you, when you look at it from that perspective you will see why that our homework and our groundwork was done so well in the beginning that we really couldn't fail in that sense. Even if we'd lost everything, we couldn't fail because our community came, our communities came alive. They, they came to rush to help each other and they threw aside their differences, even the political party you belonged to didn't matter. It was these issues that were important to them and that's something that I think that we can never forget. And the leadership like myself, it's just like almost I was already prompted and rehearsed to what to say and what to do and I knew if I made a mistake in terms of the word sell-out was always used. If I'd made a mistake I was going to pay more than a price of getting ousted, I would pay a bigger price because I would fail the people that had so much faith in us. So, we, like we had no choice. Things had to move ahead and we had to fight other leaders, who again, including union leaders, who didn't support us. Really the union didn't support us in those Constitutional conferences. We were completely on our own.

JIM DUROCHER: Absolutely.

JIM SINCLAIR: Absolutely on our own because we had, I got into fights with George Erasmus, the Indian leader, which would say one thing in a private meeting with the Prime Minister come out and say something different when we got into the larger meeting, so I raised hell with him. I

said, you know, you're not going to step and trample on our rights. We had the PTA at that time, which was called the Preaty Trairie.

JIM DUROCHER: Prairie Treaty.

JIM SINCLAIR: Prairie Treaty.

RON LALIBERTE: Alliance.

JIM SINCLAIR: Alliance, that were left out of the AFN because the AFN wasn't fighting on the basis of Treaties, and of course we always supported Treaties as well as the *Manitoba Act* which I thought was the Métis Constitution. And these people were left out and they were on the side. You couldn't get into the conference unless you had a pass. There was police, of course everybody was there, and these people were left on the outside and they were looking in. And Durocher...

JIM DUROCHER: We brought them in.

JIM SINCLAIR: We brought them in and gave them a seat at our table.

JIM DUROCHER: Gave them some passes yeah.

(Video Tape: 6:28.10.05) JIM SINCLAIR: And let them speak on their behalf and to be honest with you, we were the only people at that conference that actually supported the Treaties being put in the Constitution. There was an argument by some of the major chiefs that saying we don't want our Treaties in the Constitution. They can stand alone, which I agree with, not, not, not. But I said look but if you want further guaranteed protection make sure every time there is a step, get those Treaties there so they're protected. And we fought for the protection of Treaties and treaty rights to make sure they're included in the Constitution. That same pot coming from Métis

people. So, we weren't just on an Aboriginal rights thing for ourselves, we were there for everyone, you know. And I think the best cooperation we actually got was from the Inuit because they were much in the same boat as us and they had very good spokespeople. We were at a time when the spokespeople at that table were some of the best you'll ever see, you know. And of course they had their consults, they had their people, but they had good spokespeople and that made a hell of a difference when you went into those conferences and you knew that. And you faced some of the most intelligent, I wouldn't say intelligent maybe, let's use the word educated people in Canada. Justice ministers. We had to deal with the, with the premiers. We had to deal with all their high priced consultants. It was just us fighting with them and we had to go into meetings with all of Canada's Attorneys General and argue with them where our rights should be. But one thing I found out from them when we were at the meetings, once we were included in fighting on the basis for land that there never was one Attorney General or Justice Minister or Premier that ever said we didn't have rights. It was a matter of how we implemented them and how we dealt with them.

JIM DUROCHER: How you interpreted them yeah.

JIM SINCLAIR: So I always tell that to people today, they don't ever believe that we don't have rights, every, every province and every federal Prime Minister that we dealt with has said our rights were guaranteed. And Trudeau's own words, "Don't come here and cry about your rights, go home and practice them." I never forgot that so, that's the kind of thing we had to struggle with during the Constitutional conferences and we had to fight for those issues and we had to deal with those issues and we had to, you know, we, like Durocher said, some of us became actually physically sick over the fact that we had to stay up sometimes 24 hours a day and have, have some real arguments, or discussions, about how we go about things because you know the half-breeds, the Métis are not easy people to deal with because they have never accepted a leader since Louis Riel, you know that? They've

never accepted a leader to the point where we could gather the people and pull that kind of strength together. So it was one chance in a lifetime to do that because the Métis were very strong entrepreneurs, you know that as well as I do, that they had their own way of looking at things and they had their own way of dealing with things and they've done it well so it was hard for them to get together to really support one leader.

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