

Nora Cummings, Peter Bishop, and Ron Laliberte:
Métis Political Activist Interviews (Feb 28, 29, 2004)

Tape 1

Start Time: 4:45.41.28

Ron Laliberte: If I could talk to you a little bit to you Peter about your political consciousness. Who are some of the people that, that shaped your thoughts and, and, and influenced you besides Métis people?

(Video Time: 4:45.52.15) Peter Bishop: I would have to pick my people. Not mainline politicians. I'd have to pick my father and my brother, Rod. Those are the ones that influenced me an awful lot about politics. I'd seen what they had done or tried to do for their people at the local level. They succeeded for the most part, other times they didn't. Like my father, I have to keep going back to my father. Because he was a CCFer and the CCFers were labeled as being communists by the church. He had a tough time to convince these people to support the CCF. And whenever those people were in trouble, needed assistance, social aid, I have to repeat myself and say that the first guy they went running to was my Dad, Alec. And Alec, he would run down to the LID Inspector's office and raise cane with Jim Elliott, the local LID Inspector. And he'd stay there, almost coming to blows with the man but at the end Mr. Elliott always relented. Says, "Yes Alec, I realize what you're saying." And he would not leave the office until such time that Mr. Elliott committed to help these people and yet these are the people that would not support him politically as a CCFer. He did an awful lot for those people. At

one point he decided that groceries were too high in Green Lake. They were being manipulated by the Hudson's Bay Company and then some, some friends got together and decided to build a Co-op store. They had no money in their pockets. What did they do? They started making money. They'd hold dances. Every Saturday night, and they'd have volunteer fiddle players and guitar players. And they charged admission. And at midnight they'd serve a lunch. But you had to pay for that lunch. This is how they were able to raise funds to get that store going. So after about a couple of years of this, they finally managed to scrape up enough money to get the store going. What they did was they, my Dad contacted Co-operatives in Prince Albert and had meetings with them. Then how do we get this store going? They showed him how and they used to come to Green Lake. Finally got a hold of an old building, an old log cabin and that's where the first store was. In fact, I have a picture of my Dad standing in front of this store. But it initially it went over quite well. And they decided to move to another location where the, they got a bigger building. Okay, because they were making fairly good money. But like, like just about any venture that they undertake, especially in those days, it's going to fail because the people that you serve are always going to have to ask for credit. They only get paid maybe once a month or something like that or they get a pension or assistance from the government and it only comes once a month. You'd have to give them credit. Well a lot of times these people would ask for credit and it was up to my father, because he was the manager of the store, to grant them credit. So that's what happened but then these guys would run up a bunch of bills and then they'd leave the Co-

op and go back to the Hudson's Bay Company. And the advantage the Hudson's Bay Company had over the people was they ran the Post Office. So any cheques came in, whether they were government cheques or cheques from local businesses, there was a sawmill there and whatnot. Cheques came in and they'd, they just made them sign their name on the cheques and take whatever it was that they owed.

Ron Laliberte: Oh yeah.

Peter Bishop: And give them the rest in cash. So nobody ever ran up a, there was a limit to the credit that they could get. So nobody ever owed any money to the Hudson's Bay because the Hudson's Bay Company made sure of that. Whereas my Dad couldn't do it, because he knew that he was in competition with the Hudson's Bay Company. But...

Ron Laliberte: They had an advantage.

Peter Bishop: Yeah they had an advantage over him. Finally because of that they had to shut the store down and yet my father made, initiated that, that, that project.

(Video Time: 4:52.05.09) Ron Laliberte: Was any of that influenced by the CCF because they were big on Co-operatives and stuff and, of course, you...

Peter Bishop: Well, they did, they did get the assistance from the CCF bureaucrats.

Ron Laliberte: Yeah and, of course, ready...

Peter Bishop: Where there was money, not so much no. No they had to raise all their own money.

Ron Laliberte: Oh they did...

Peter Bishop: They didn't get any capital funding or anything like that. No it was all locally raised. But, I guess, having the Hudson's Bay store in control of the Post Office, it was doomed to failure.

End Time: 4:52.37.19