

those contradictions would flourish. He was John Brocklebank, Sr., a moderate in the party and a man of considerable integrity, but a man who held that the civil service should be free of political interference. The minister established general guidelines; the professional bureaucracy implemented the policies. Under Phelps the innovators in the DNR held sway; under Brocklebank the conservative bureaucrats would regain their traditional power.<sup>30</sup>

Changes were not long in coming. Accommodation with reactionary elements was the guideline. Hiring was now done strictly through the Regina office of the Public Service Commission, and the objective of "sympathetic" personnel was abandoned. Suspicion of the Catholic role in education changed to active co-operation. In the fur industry general co-operation and joint programs with the HBC guided policy decisions. Saskatchewan Government Trading stores were instructed not to create unfair competition with private traders. The initiative in developing local village councils quickly faded. "Community development" lost out to resource conservation. The new bureaucracy's enthusiasm for the future of the tourist industry would soon result in southern hunters and fishermen competing with native people for the already meagre wildlife resources. For the first time Indians and Metis, already excluded from forest and mineral development, began to fear that they might even be deprived of fish and fur resources.

The conservative hierarchy of the DNR wasted little time in eliminating its political opposition. Allan Quandt was one of the first to go. In March 1949 Quandt wrote to "Comrade" Brady, "Personally, I have faced a very bitter struggle with these men in the past few months. I feel that they want to get all the progressives provoked to the point where they resign."<sup>31</sup> Quandt had confronted Brocklebank and his senior officials, and demanded a statement of confidence in his performance. He refused and Quandt resigned.

With Quandt, the senior progressive in the department, out of the way, the writing was on the wall for others as well. Quandt encouraged Brady to stay on and "give this thing a whirl for a period of time," discouraging any move by Brady to resign in his support. Brady agreed to continue his political work in Cumberland House until forced to stop. For others, in the months ahead, it would be a choice between compromise or forced resignation.

At about this time Malcolm Norris transferred out of the DNR and into the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) and removed himself from the internal DNR struggle. Norris had already decided to stay in the government. Independent political action by native people, as an alternative to initiatives by the DNR progressives, was not, in Norris' assessment, a practical possibility. He told Quandt that he was going to



be "a good little piggy and not get my feet in the trough too often." He would bide his time until political action was feasible.

From the fall of 1949 to the summer of 1951 Brady vigorously pursued his community development work in Cumberland House, gearing his adult education work to the establishment of co-operative enterprises in the settlement. First he established the Sturgeon Lake Fishing Co-op and later was instrumental in setting up a credit union, a co-op store and a timber co-op. By 1951 Brady was planning the reorganization of the local fur conservation block into a trappers' co-operative.<sup>32</sup>

Brady's experience at the Wolf Lake Colony had caused him to lose faith in his cherished image of an alliance between the nomads and the "progressives"—and even to doubt the role of producer co-ops among the Metis. Yet the particular features of Cumberland House seemed to verify that the Metis' national liberation struggle could renew itself under the right circumstances. The presence in Cumberland House of a group of war veterans provided that crucial ingredient. Among these veterans was Pierre Carriere, perhaps the most respected and trusted man in the settlement. Like so many of the Metis leaders in the Alberta struggle, Carriere was of the middle class, not a land-owning Metis but an entrepreneur involved in the tourist business. Brady saw in Carriere a man with an intuitive grasp of what was needed to build the community and the commitment to carry it out. Carriere saw in Brady a man he could respect for "his sound business approach." Carriere, the politically cautious small businessman, and Brady, the Marxist revolutionary, spent countless hours discussing the issues facing the community. More often than not they agreed on what had to be done.

Brady constantly tried to prove to his administrative superiors that, as he wrote in a report to the CCF in northern Manitoba, "The people of Cumberland House...can bring about concrete changes if the widest opportunity is provided for expression from below."<sup>33</sup> But this opportunity was not given. On top of the general problem of promoting unfamiliar co-operative principles among the semi-nomadic Metis, Brady faced constant pressure and criticism from the DNR hierarchy. Even though his conservation work was on a par with other field officers and his co-op work highly praised by the Department of Co-operatives, Brady was continually advised to put less time into community development and more into conservation. Brady's job with the DNR permitted his community development work, but at the same time his employers were undermining it. The steady opposition from the bureaucracy, including his immediate supervisor, was wearing Brady down. Though not a single family in Cumberland House received welfare in 1950, Brady was becoming disillusioned.

Part of that disillusion came from the DNR's own rehabilitation



efforts at Cumberland House. In 1947 the DNR established an experimental farm on Bigstone Island near the settlement in an effort to provide the basis for a more viable, sedentary life for the semi-nomadic people. In the summer of 1952 the DNR announced it was going to sell or lease the farm, its purpose having been served. Brady was furious. Not only did the DNR ignore the historical native view of the land as communal property, but its claim of success was "false and misleading." Brady accused the DNR of completely failing to appreciate the nomadic history of the local people and of failing to see the project as a long-term educational project aimed, eventually, at establishing a co-operative farm. Instead, local native people were simply hired as casual, temporary labor and then, in 1950, encouraged to take up cultivation of small plots. They expected the native farmers to use primitive horse power, and when some rented DNR power equipment they found they hadn't enough capital to succeed. No effort was made to establish co-operative use of the equipment, and the principle of immediate profitability guided the administration of the farm.<sup>34</sup>

Brady's position in the community made his life difficult and lonely. As an outsider and a CCF employee and supporter he would never be fully accepted by the native community. As a racially conscious socialist he was avoided by the small white elite of Cumberland House. The whites mistrusted Brady and hated his identification with the local population. Residents in Cumberland House could identify with only one community. Brady fitted into neither.

The white population of Cumberland House was like a company in a fort under siege. Virtually all were transient, and their conversations were not about Cumberland House (except for titillating remarks about native morality), but of their home towns and cities and what they would do when they returned to them. DNR employees identified more with the HBC and local clergy than with the native people they were supposed to serve. This white solidarity prevented even sympathetic employees from enforcing conservation laws among whites, while those same whites expected vigorous enforcement when laws were breached by Metis. On one occasion the local magistrate, also the Anglican priest, convicted an Indian of shooting a swan, confiscated the bird and the man's rifle and sentenced him to a week in jail. The next week the white community sat down to a sumptuous meal of roast swan.

Brady's peculiar status in the community underscored his sometimes reclusive disposition, and he often retreated to his books and writing. With encouragement from Norris, he toyed with the idea of writing a book on Metis history. Andre Bouthillette, his young assistant at the time, recalled:



Jim would come in about eight or eight-thirty with a balaclava rolled up on his head and wearing a light shirt undone almost to the navel, exposing his hairy chest, and munching on a raw spanish onion for breakfast. He would sit down and spend a couple of hours translating Giraud's *Le Metis Canadien*. This went on for months.<sup>35</sup>

Nothing came of his plan to write a Metis history, although Brady did assist two Western historians at this time. In a project which revealed his interest in history and his affection for people, Brady took photographs of every adult member of the settlement and many of the children as well. He also established the practice of donating ten dollars to the parents of every newborn child in the area, demonstrating his generosity (in one eight-month period the gifts totalled \$250)<sup>36</sup> and his eccentricity. In return for the ten dollars, Brady was given the privilege of naming the child. To this day there are some residents at Cumberland House who puzzle over their unusual names.

Brady's relationships with women reflected his dual role in the world of the colonized and colonizer. Like most native men he seemed shy of white women—although his contempt for bourgeois trappings on occasion prompted bold rebukes. There were exceptions—those women who proved, over time, that they were serious and competent in their politics gained his respect and attention. Brady's relationships with women took place exclusively within the native community. Rumors abound about the number of children Brady fathered in the north, but only two families, both in Cumberland House, are substantiated. In 1950 two Metis women of that village had children by Brady. One was Cecilia Dorion, with whom Brady openly identified in the native community. That Brady never married Dorion and did not make a home with her and her child, Erich, could be interpreted as irresponsibility. Yet according to Brady's daughter, Anne (born in 1954), this was not the case. She described Cecilia as "a forceful and independent woman. She had her own trap line and worked all the time. Their relationship was an open relationship, a mutual agreement."<sup>37</sup> Brady also had a relationship with Rema Bird, and they had a daughter, Emma Jean, in 1950, the same year that Erich Dorion was born.<sup>38</sup> Brady's relationship with Rema Bird did not continue. His liaison with Cecilia Dorion did, but Brady was evidently conscious of contemporary mores and he seldom mentioned either relationship.

In later years Brady referred to Cumberland House as his favorite community in the north, even though his life there must have been frustrating and lonely at times. Ostracized by the white community and only partially accepted by the native population, Brady had few friends



and no one who shared his political views. He seldom went south and relied for socialist company on Berry and Mabel Richards of The Pas, Manitoba.\* Berry Richards was a former CCF MLA representing northern Manitoba in the legislature. After being expelled from the CCF for his left-wing views, he had been elected as a northern Independent only to lose to the Liberals in 1949, when the CCF ran against him. On more than one occasion Richards urged a disillusioned Brady to stick it out in Cumberland House.<sup>39</sup>

It was just a matter of time before Brady would be forced out of his Cumberland House job. In 1950 Brady's boss, Cham McLean, decided to seek the CCF nomination for Cumberland. He asked Brady for his backing. McLean was the DNR's northern administrator and one of those who had attacked Brady's community work. Brady refused McLean's request, telling him bluntly that the people did not like him and that he would not betray their sentiments.<sup>40</sup>

McLean thereupon began a campaign to have Brady removed from his position. This was not so simple. Quite apart from community development, Brady had a good record in his conservation work. He was one of the most popular field officers in the north. McLean was obliged to turn to Brady's personal life to find grounds for dismissal. In a report to the assistant deputy minister, McLean claimed that Brady's personal conduct in the community was "detrimental to the interests of the Department." The "persistent rumors"<sup>41</sup> about Brady's illegitimate children which McLean referred to in his report were, however, difficult to substantiate. Even the Anglican priest in the community, no friend of Brady, refused to repeat the rumors or criticize Brady.

As a result of the loyalty to Brady expressed by people in Cumberland House, McLean failed to have Brady fired outright. But other senior bureaucrats in the DNR had reasons for wanting Brady out of the way. Unable to justify his dismissal, they resorted to a form of exile. Another DNR official visited Brady, informing him that he was being transferred to Uranium City, in the far northwest corner of the province. Brady initially accepted the transfer but in August 1950 changed his mind and submitted his resignation.

Brady knew the transfer was politically motivated. Uranium City was a mining town, a modern white enclave. There was no native "community" as such; most of the local native population still followed a nomadic life pattern, and they were Chipewyan, a tribe and language unfamiliar to Brady.

Brady had become extremely fond of Cumberland House and he was still committed to the co-operatives he had initiated there. After his

\*Economically, Cumberland House was tied to The Pas which had road connections with the South.



resignation, he stayed on to assist his last and economically most important co-op venture, the Cumberland House Wood Products Co-op.

Brady served as secretary and manager of the co-op over the winter of 1950-51, when more than a dozen men were employed, cutting and hauling timber to be used in the saw mill over the summer. The operation showed potential for success in the long run—the workers were enthusiastic and there was a good supply of timber. But the co-op was obliged to sell its lumber to the Saskatchewan Timber Board, a Crown Corporation, and the price it paid was notoriously low. In the winter of 1950-51 the co-op was being paid \$35 a thousand board feet—seven dollars less than private buyers were paying at The Pas. According to Brady, that extra seven dollars “would have made the difference. But it is absolutely impossible for a northern co-op to exist as long as this [monopolistic] policy . . . continues. [The Timber Board is] one of the few vested interests or empires in the CCF . . . that is a sacred cow. Nobody has dared touch them yet.”<sup>42</sup>

According to local people, the co-op also needed a capital loan to upgrade its old machinery, but the government money was not forthcoming. By May 1951 the co-op's chronic shortage of funds forced the elimination of Brady's position as secretary-manager. In a final attempt to bolster the enterprise Brady loaned the co-op \$1,000. It still could not make a sufficient return to keep Brady on. He was flat broke and there was no hope of work in Cumberland House. The Legion took up a collection to pay his fare to Prince Albert and Brady reluctantly left his adopted home. He bitterly recalled the irony of his experience with the DNR:

When I worked for the Alberta government, which was purely a reactionary government, I found that as far as my work . . . among the Alberta Metis was concerned . . . I actually got far better support and understanding . . . than I got from our own CCF government of Saskatchewan.<sup>43</sup>

Brady's disillusionment with the CCF came from a conviction that the CCF not only sabotaged its own best interests but sacrificed many of its strongest and most dedicated supporters in the process. While Brady no doubt understood some of the CCF's suspicion of Marxists, he was puzzled by the party's determined efforts to isolate and undermine its socialist members. He said to Allan Quandt: “No party in the history of Canada has been so vicious with its friends and so kind to its enemies.” It was a conviction which Brady would hold throughout his life.

Brady managed to secure work for the summer with his former employer, the Saskatchewan Fish Board, but when he visited Malcolm

Norris in October he was unemployed once again. Norris put him in touch with the manager of LaRonge Uranium Mines, and Brady arranged to work for him. With a five-dollar loan from Norris paying his bus fare, Brady set out for LaRonge.



## 12

### *The Fifties: A Decade of Political Stagnation*

IN NORTHERN Saskatchewan, as in the rest of North America, the fifties was a decade of political retreat and stagnation for progressives. The critical need for comprehensive social development continued to lose out to the resource management philosophy in the Department of Natural Resources. The contradictions within the Northern Administration Act were borne increasingly by the native people.<sup>1</sup>

The Crown Corporations and agencies in the north were becoming political showpieces for display in the south. Other CCF government enterprises in the south had failed, causing embarrassing setbacks in public ownership. In order that the government not appear to have completely lost its courage and enthusiasm for public enterprise it was doubly important for the Crown-owned operations in the north to be successful. And success was defined by politics in the south, not by the social progress of native people in the north. It was a simple question of numbers; there were thousands of southern CCF supporters watching the government's performance and fewer than 1,500 Metis voters in the north. Thus the Saskatchewan Timber Board had to make a profit, even if it meant driving native producer co-ops out of business. The DNR's Game Branch concentrated on promoting tourism and recreational hunting for southerners rather than ensuring a secure supply of game for trappers and a domestic food supply for the native population.<sup>2</sup>

The objectives of the government's resource agencies in the north, and the subsequent political power they exercised, spelled economic and social disaster for the native people. While other government policies were directed at centralizing the Metis and modernizing their social life, economic policies made no effort to establish a sound economic base for the population. Establishing such a base would have required a political decision to use all northern resources, particularly the forests, as the base for Metis social development. Such a decision was never



even considered.<sup>3</sup> As a result even the DNR's most modest social objectives—the provision of normal, local government services—were unrealistic. No Metis settlement had a tax base capable of even maintaining a sewer and water system—if such had been installed. This was obvious to the government, for it did not install such systems—not a single native settlement would enjoy sewer and water services under the CCF government. Nor did the CCF implement any social policy in the other area of most desperate need—housing. The only decent housing and sewer and water services were found in the three white communities—Uranium City, Creighton and Island Falls.

The CCF's failure in native social development in the 1950s was not a matter of ignorance or blundering. Increasingly, it was a result of conscious political decisions which relegated the condition of the native people to the bottom of the priorities list.<sup>4</sup> Feedback on its policy deficiencies came from numerous sources, including its own field workers, who reported that they had to “twist, distort or completely neglect parts of the law”<sup>5</sup> in order to even attempt to meet the needs of native people. The government got feedback from their socialist critics and other whites sympathetic to the native people. And they received unmistakable feedback from the Metis themselves in the 1952 election, when the CCF was humiliated in the two northern constituencies. Finally, they received formal confirmation of all these criticisms when, as a result of the election results, they hired an anthropologist, Vic Valentine, to determine the cause of Metis discontent. It was not hard to find. Valentine reported only what was obvious: the government's policies were totally disrupting the stability of the Metis' traditional life pattern and replacing it with social and economic chaos.

According to the old pattern, a Metis trapper stayed in the bush for extended periods using the credit—up to \$400 for a proficient trapper—of the Hudson's Bay Company to buy supplies. When he returned with his harvest of fur, he would pay his debt, take any surplus in cash and begin the whole process over again. Cash itself was incidental to the credit system. It was used for entertainment or conspicuous spending on small luxuries, symbolic of his prowess as a trapper. Money, what little there was, was rarely saved.<sup>6</sup>

The government's new policies undermined this traditional pattern. The compulsory sale of the two most marketable furs—beaver and muskrat—to the government meant that the HBC, and other private traders, were no longer willing to provide large amounts of credit. Allowed only fifteen or twenty dollars credit, the trapper was continually going to and from his trap line, selling a few furs and buying supplies. When the season was over, he had to wait for the arrival of the final payment for his beaver and muskrat. Often this meant pitching a tent beside the nearest post office and waiting up to



two months for a check—which was usually smaller than expected. In the meantime what cash there was had been spent and often the final payment check had been signed over to a private trader to secure more credit. When the check did arrive, reported Valentine, the trapper “very often finds himself, after his long wait, broke, without credit, without a food supply and in debt.”<sup>7</sup>

The new marketing system was not the only policy which undermined economic and social stability. In a joint provincial-federal education initiative, native families had to have their children in school as a condition for receiving monthly family allowance payments. Most Metis wanted their children to go to school, but under the CCF's scheme they were faced with maintaining two households—one on the trap line and one in town—during the peak trapping season from fall until spring. In education, as in all other matters, the Metis were being forced to adapt to an alien system; the CCF was incapable or unwilling to make concessions to Metis social and economic life. While government programs had increased income slightly, their side effects had more than doubled the income needs of the native people. As a result, relief payments, rather than a new resource economic base, was replacing trapping as the native people's economic mainstay. Economic and social insecurity\* plagued the Metis. Brady wrote:

The native, especially the untrained young man, has fears for his future within the constricted confines of a trapping and fishing economy. Their mentality is not being transformed; no new concept of life is evolving where life can be exciting, challenging and interesting.<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-fifties welfare, family allowance and old age pensions typically accounted for half a family's income. For the native people there was no stigma attached to welfare, which was not seen as a handout but as an obligation of a government which had systematically destroyed their self-sufficiency.

The increasing dependency on government had effects beyond simple economic security. In the past the amount of credit a trapper could command from the HBC was a source of prestige. Under the new system that prestige was gone and, worse, the husband's inability to provide for his family undermined his self-esteem and his family life. Metis men were being forced to leave their families, for months and even years, to find work in Alberta or the Northwest Territories. As

\*Ninety percent of the native population was involved in trapping and fishing, activities which brought, respectively, an average \$300 and \$150 in yearly income. Those fortunate enough to obtain wage labor received anywhere from \$1,200 for work on a religious mission to \$2,400 as a DNR patrolman.



government payments accounted for an ever-increasing proportion of family income, large families became desirable, and it was common for one brother to give up a child for legal adoption by another brother whose wife was unable to have any, or many, children. The government's one area of success was in health care, which resulted in a decrease in the infant mortality rate. Tragically, the indirect effect of this increase in population was increasing pressure on the already inadequate wildlife resource.

In 1952 the CCF contributed the final element to the catastrophic equation which would characterize the north for years to come. Against the advice and vigorous opposition of the CCF socialists in the north, the government allowed the establishment of a beer outlet and bar in a new hotel in LaRonge, an enterprise incidentally, whose three partners represented all three political parties—CCF, Liberal and Progressive Conservative.

The increasingly desperate conditions of the native people was reason enough to explain their growing hatred of the CCF. Yet it was more complex than that. The CCF, after all, had brought education and health care to the north, and conservation had reversed the dangerous depletion of game. Many Metis were loyal to the CCF and recognized the good the party had accomplished. But most still voted for the Liberal Party—a party which showed absolutely no interest in, or compassion for, the native people, which represented the interests of the most oppressive elements in the north and which shamelessly exploited the Metis voter in every election. In part the continued Liberal victories were a result of a protest vote by the Metis. But white Liberals in the north, exploitive as they were, often spoke Cree, married Metis women and had connections with the daily lives of the people. In contrast the CCF was arrogant, aloof and suffered from what Brady described as a “racially induced fear” of the native people. In the end it was the CCF's boundless self-righteousness, its paternalistic refusal to listen to the people or believe them capable of progress which contributed, as much as anything, to popular contempt for the CCF. The Liberals could win by doing nothing—by extolling the virtues of the past and by reaping the benefits of native resentment of the CCF's massive disruption of native life.

Norris was acutely aware of the shortcomings of the CCF administration in the north, yet he decided to withdraw from his organizing efforts among the Indian and Metis. Until conditions promised the possibility of a genuine, voluntary resistance movement, Norris saw little choice. The only other political force in the north was the reactionary alliance of private business, the Catholic Church and the Liberal Party. In the north one either came to terms with the CCF or withdrew from politics altogether. It was not in Norris' character to



withdraw.

Norris continued to push for radical reform and recognition of native rights within the Department of Mineral Resources and the CCF. He became a thorn in the side of party leaders, cabinet ministers and every senior government bureaucrat with any responsibility for northern policies. He used his position to get as many native people hired as possible—pressing mining and exploration companies to hire Indian and Metis employees. In the Department of Mineral Resources he initiated and developed a prospectors' assistance plan and a prospectors' school to train native people for work suited to their traditional skills. The program was one of the Department of Mineral Resources' showpieces and was gradually copied by the federal and other provincial governments. But most of Norris' agitation for change, such as his promotion of a public mining development corporation, fell on deaf ears. He was nearly fired on several occasions because of his public criticism of CCF policies.

He was a hard man to fire. Recognized as one of the most diligent and responsible workers in the department, Norris constantly worked beyond what was required. He also held a high profile in the CCF. Tommy Douglas recalled many occasions when Norris was in Regina and would phone him or show up on his doorstep urging the implementation of some program or demanding, unsuccessfully, the dismissal of some civil servant who was deliberately sabotaging the government's programs.<sup>9</sup> In Prince Albert Norris was seen as the political conscience of the party, never letting its members forget the original principles of the CCF and constantly, some would say incessantly, hammering away at the party's complacent and prejudiced attitude toward native people.

Norris seldom strayed from the CCF. A significant exception was in the 1953 federal election. John Diefenbaker, the so-called "red tory," had returned from Regina to run in Prince Albert—a CCF stronghold. He ran his campaign like an independent, establishing "Diefenbaker Clubs" throughout the area. None of his ads in the Prince Albert *Herald* even mentioned the Progressive Conservative Party.<sup>10</sup> A vote for "Dief" was a vote for the man. The people of Prince Albert, including many members of the CCF, jumped on the Diefenbaker bandwagon. A member of the local CCF executive pledged CCF support to Diefenbaker and the executive split on the issue. A majority supported Diefenbaker, and the party put up only a token candidate to run against him. Norris and many of the left-wing CCF'ers quietly supported and worked for the communist Labor Progressive Party (LPP)\* candidate,

\*The Communist Party of Canada, banned under the Defence of Canada Regulations in 1940, re-established itself as the Labor Progressive Party in 1943, when political conditions were more favorable. It kept this label until 1959 when it reverted to its old name.



Phyllis Clarke.<sup>11</sup>

Norris was a fellow traveller of the LLP during the early and mid-fifties, attending party get-togethers and discussion groups. He was generally welcome at such gatherings, which were often prompted by visits of Party officials from Toronto. His criticism of the Party's inaction on the native question and his failure to pay the proper respect to the Party hierarchy, however, did not always endear him to everyone.<sup>12</sup>

In 1957 Norris joined the Labor Progressive Party.<sup>13</sup> Why he chose to do so then—when many were leaving over the Soviet invasion of Hungary—is not clear. He had accused the LPP of opportunism and lack of action on the native question,<sup>14</sup> much the same criticism he levelled at the CCF. And he remained an active supporter of the CCF. It is likely that he was attracted to the LPP both by its Marxism and its theoretical understanding of colonialism in Canada, and attracted to the CCF, despite its social democracy, because it alone had the power to make real changes.

Norris did not abandon his political education work among the Metis and Indians during the fifties. Although he lived in Prince Albert during the winter, he spent much time in the north during the rest of the year. As well as pressuring mining companies and the government to hire native people and encourage native people to take up careers in the mining exploration industry, Norris never lost an opportunity to encourage native collective action and he continued to seek out and encourage potential leaders.

The CCF—the party and government—provided the context for Norris' political and personal life in the fifties. Defiantly proud of his Indian ancestry, Norris nonetheless craved recognition from the white society which had slighted him as an adolescent. His daughter Betty,<sup>15</sup> described him as a man out of balance—very much a product of the colonialism he fought so hard against. He needed people who appreciated him and his cause. Many interpreted Norris' ferocious preoccupation with native issues as a sign of inferiority feelings; Norris would have responded that he was simply using every opportunity to educate "palefaces." Most would have agreed with the assessment of Charles Brant, an academic friend of Norris, "Malcolm... was a man of quick wit and sharp tongue, who never suffered fools gladly. I can vividly remember his speaking out bluntly—but with a marvelous sense of humor—to individuals and groups, white, native and mixed."<sup>16</sup> A close friend, Ed Shearer, recalled, "You couldn't maintain a friendship with Malcolm if you couldn't take criticism."<sup>17</sup> He often took Norris to task for his fierce approach. Norris was held in high regard by most and with genuine affection by many CCF'ers in Prince Albert who did in fact sympathize with his causes. His message, however, was often lost



on people put off by his uncompromising stance and manner. Norris' wife, Mary, suffered, too, from Malcolm's crusade. She was the one he went to for comfort when he knew he had pushed too hard, too fast. She was one of the few people who saw him when the agonies of his own temperament drove him to despair. She was the one who bound up the wounds of his public battles.

Mary sympathized with his views, but there were times when she resented his obsession with politics and native issues. More than anything else she wanted a stable environment in which to raise her children. She knew the children suffered because of his public statements, and she could not prevent it. Mary was a strong, intelligent woman. Malcolm may have appreciated her extraordinary qualities, but his expectations of her were quite conventional. She was to bring up the children and manage the household. She was given strict, monthly, household allowances and lectures on frugality. In many respects the Norris family was typical of Prince Albert working-class families, living in a relatively comfortable home and aspiring to a middle-class life style. Norris tried to give his family respectability so they could feel secure in a town where racial tension was just beneath the surface.

While the children were small, Malcolm was an affectionate, attentive, climb-up-on-my-knee kind of father. When the children reached the "age of reason," things changed. He expected immediate and unquestioning obedience. He was not without humor, but he left no doubt that he was the teacher and they were the pupils. His child rearing philosophy was summed up in the maxim that it was "the lumps in the porridge that led to character, not spoon-fed pabulum." He expected his children to have self-respect and to act responsibly.

Norris sent his children into the world armed with lessons in politics and what it meant to live in a racist world. He could not arm them with native pride, for they were brought up as white children, but they were very aware of his battles on behalf of native people. The world, Norris taught, was cruel and unforgiving, and would show no mercy to those who were unprepared. In these lessons Norris was not concerned with nuance; preoccupied with the lesson to be taught, he kept the lesson simple and seldom bothered to adjust to the particular needs of his pupils. For some of his children, the teachings were a source of inspiration and resolve; for the others, they were a source of pain and confusion, and were even destructive of whatever confidence they might have had. Norris was a hard taskmaster. Driven by his own insecurities, he struggled to protect his children and at the same time push them to achieve goals that would stand as their own protection. Unknown to the children, their father was also grooming them as exemplary Metis representatives. They would show a racist, white world that there are native people who are not only as good as any whites but



better.

Prince Albert was a town with strict and often brutal class and racial divisions. Yet with their father's help the Norris children managed in this environment with comparatively few difficulties. They were bright, outgoing, good at school and popular with their school-mates. Racial slurs were infrequent, if painful, and the children had been provided with the appropriate "arrows" for their "bows."

The family's social life centred on CCF picnics and socials. Despite Norris' efforts to separate family and politics and Mary's resentment of his political commitments, both needed the social contact and support these functions provided. Even the children were prominent at the CCF functions, with two of the Norris daughters often singing at the get-togethers.

In order to provide the family with respectability, he even attended the United Church, telling its progressive minister that it was just for show and that his real beliefs, his true spiritual satisfaction, were found in Indian religion, communing with nature. But Norris was becoming integrated into white society and his returns to the native world were becoming infrequent and brief.

In 1956 Norris suffered a massive heart attack. He was taken to hospital in a coma and was in hospital for three months. When he was recuperating, he told his daughter, Betty, about a dream he had when he was near death.

I dreamed I was entering a pass in the mountains. An Indian chief with his warriors in full regalia sat mounted on their ponies waiting for me. When I approached and raised my hand in greeting, the chief looked at me, and with great sadness said: "You must go back. You have dwelt too long in the land of the white man. You are no longer eligible for the happy hunting ground."

Norris insisted that this was why he did not die. But for the time being at least, he had to return to the "land of the white man."

Politically, the land of the white man was the land of the CCF. Norris still hoped that the government would institute a social development program for northern Metis. In 1956 Norris wrote to Brady that such a program had the backing of T.C. Douglas and the cabinet, and that it was about to be launched. No such program materialized, and the fate of the Metis languished in the DNR, which, in the words of its planning officer, rejected "preferred and special treatment" of the Metis because such a program allotted "public resources to a limited number of people with no compensation to the rest of the public."<sup>18</sup> Ironically, the planning officer had come to his conclusions partly on the basis of correspondence with the director of the Metis colonies in Alberta,



Mr. McCully, whom Brady and Norris blamed for the rapid deterioration of the colonies after the war.

Despite the continued rebuffs and disappointments handed out by the CCF, Norris continued his efforts inside the party. He and his Prince Albert colleagues promoted resolutions at annual conventions supporting native rights and pressing for programs for the Metis. In the early to mid-fifties Norris was active in a left caucus which met a couple of times a year at Fort Qu'Appelle. The group considered establishing a formal left caucus in the party but, according to Bill Harding, one of its members, eventually rejected the idea as frivolous. The group faded after 1954, and its members, including Norris, returned to pressing their particular concerns individually within the party.<sup>19</sup>

When Jim Brady arrived in LaRonge in November 1951, he expected to sign on with a mining exploration team. The day after his arrival, however, the project was cancelled and, with it, Brady's job. Brady had little choice but to spend the winter in LaRonge. Through the winter months he relied on the generosity of Allan Quandt and his wife, Roberta. The local Metis people were generous as well and apparently accepted Brady as one of them.

LaRonge contrasted sharply with Cumberland House. Here there were no "progressive" Metis to give the settlement coherence and its people leadership. LaRonge was not so much a Metis community as a gathering place, adjacent to an Indian reserve, on the shores of Lac LaRonge. It was becoming the focal point for the mining industry and the new tourist industry, and was already experiencing the social effects of its road connection to the south. LaRonge was the first settlement to experience the full force of the new economic and political order in the north and was a harbinger of the future. Its stark contrast with Cumberland House seemed to herald decisive changes in Brady's life. He described those changes:

... I lost contact with all the previous things I used to do, such as Indian and Metis organizations and co-ops and adult education work... this prospecting was a new life, new interests, new people and an entirely different milieu to what I had been accustomed in the past.<sup>20</sup>

It was almost certainly at the urging of Malcolm Norris that Brady now took up his mineral prospecting. Norris knew the industry well and had the contacts which would allow Brady easy entry. Brady did little actual prospecting. In his usual pattern Brady was a wage laborer, hiring on as a geological surveyor for the uranium exploration companies.

The year 1952 began Brady's period of prolonged political inactivity.



Brady recognized that conditions in LaRonge and the north in general prevented any immediate hope of organized native resistance. He faced the same decision Norris faced in 1949—either come to terms with the CCF or withdraw from politics altogether. Norris had chosen the first route; Brady chose the latter.

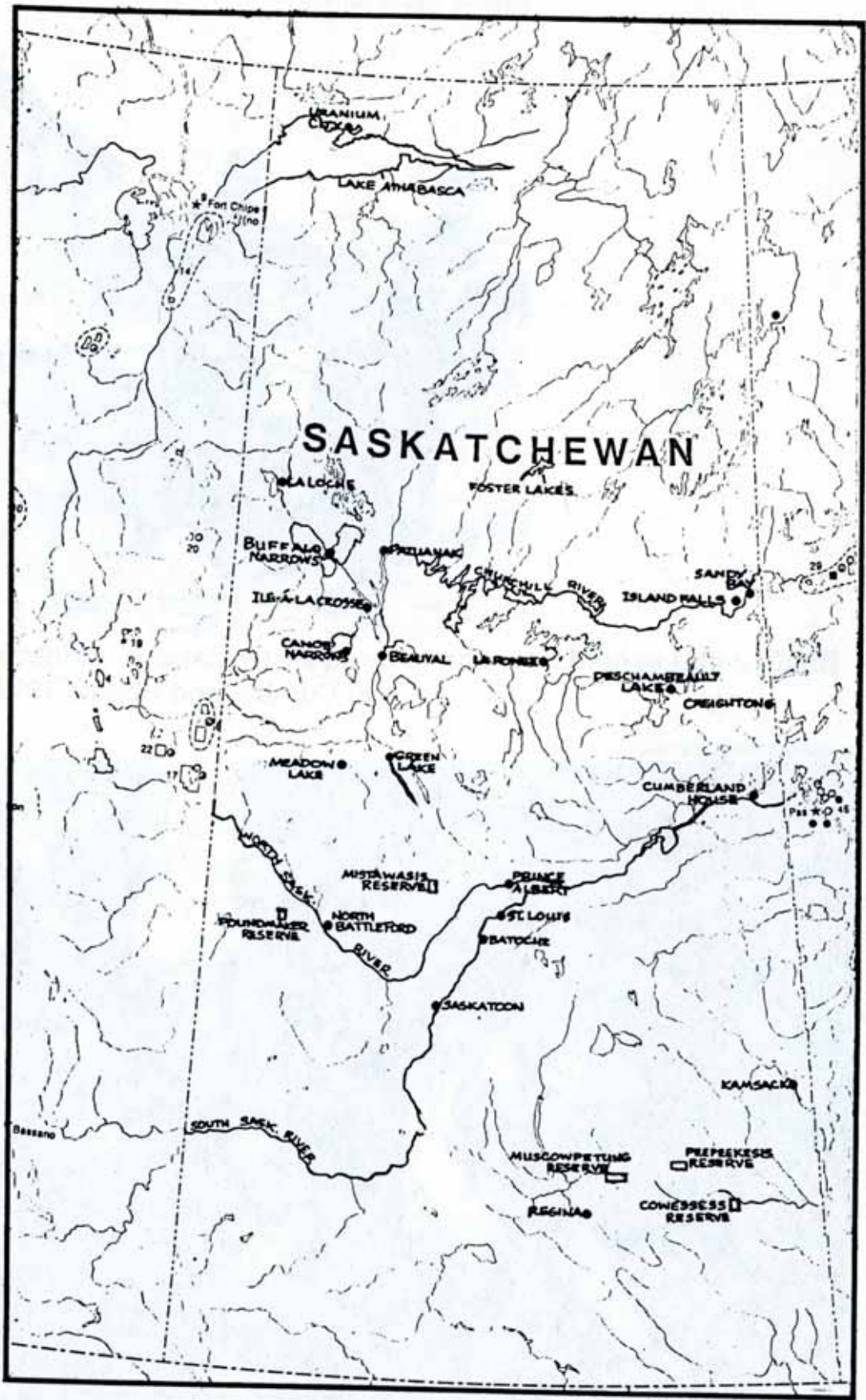
Brady's former boss, Cham McLean, was still trying to win the CCF nomination for the forthcoming provincial election. The LaRonge CCF club had nominated Allan Quandt for the Cumberland constituency. In a move which infuriated Brady, the provincial executive decided to override the LaRonge CCF'ers and give the nomination to McLean. Brady later explained: "McLean was selected on the basis of a petition bearing thirty-six signatures . . . gathered in the [LaRonge] barroom . . . eighteen of those signatures actively supported Ripley, the Liberal candidate in the election."<sup>21</sup>

It must have been with mixed feelings that Brady walked through fifteen miles of bush to vote for McLean in the June 1952 election; perhaps he felt some satisfaction when McLean was beaten. Brady never failed to vote. He identified the Liberals as the explicit enemy of the people, which left him no choice but McLean. Yet neither could he continue to be a part of CCF politics, and after the 1952 election Brady let his CCF membership lapse. In 1954 he wrote to Bob Deverell, a close socialist colleague and editor of the *Commonwealth*, the provincial CCF newspaper: "The CCF has ceased to be the grass roots movement which brought it to power and is now filled with careerists, opportunists and petty racketeers and other finaglers on a larger scale."<sup>22</sup>

Brady had always divided his socialist loyalties between the CCF and the Communist Party/Labor Progressive Party (LPP). Brady had joined the LPP in 1947 when he first came to Saskatchewan. In the early fifties, perhaps because of his frustration with the CCF, his communication with the LPP increased. The party encouraged him to write a history of the Metis and invited him to speak on Riel at a meeting honoring Riel and Norman Bethune, which party leader Tim Buck was to attend. In 1952 the LPP paper, the *Tribune*, printed a long piece by Brady on the 1885 rebellion.<sup>23</sup> But after 1953 Brady's contact with the LPP came almost to an end. According to Nelson Clarke, a party colleague, "For a good part of the rest of his life he was out of touch with any party collective . . . [He contributed financially to the party] although because of the remoteness of his connections he did not carry a membership card."<sup>24</sup>

The LPP considered Brady a member and Brady probably did likewise. He held firmly to the conviction that socialism had to be fought for on the basis of a Marxist, scientific analysis of the social forces in that struggle. Yet his lack of formal connections with the LPP was due to more than his remoteness. The LPP, while it talked of the







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Brady with Leonard Johnson (subsequently General Johnson)  
at Cumberland House, 1952.

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Brady with daughter Emma Jean Bird, Cumberland House,  
1961.





Brady and co-worker geiger-probing  
diamond drill holes, Nistowiak, 1952

Brady and Norris, 1961



Berry and Verna Richards

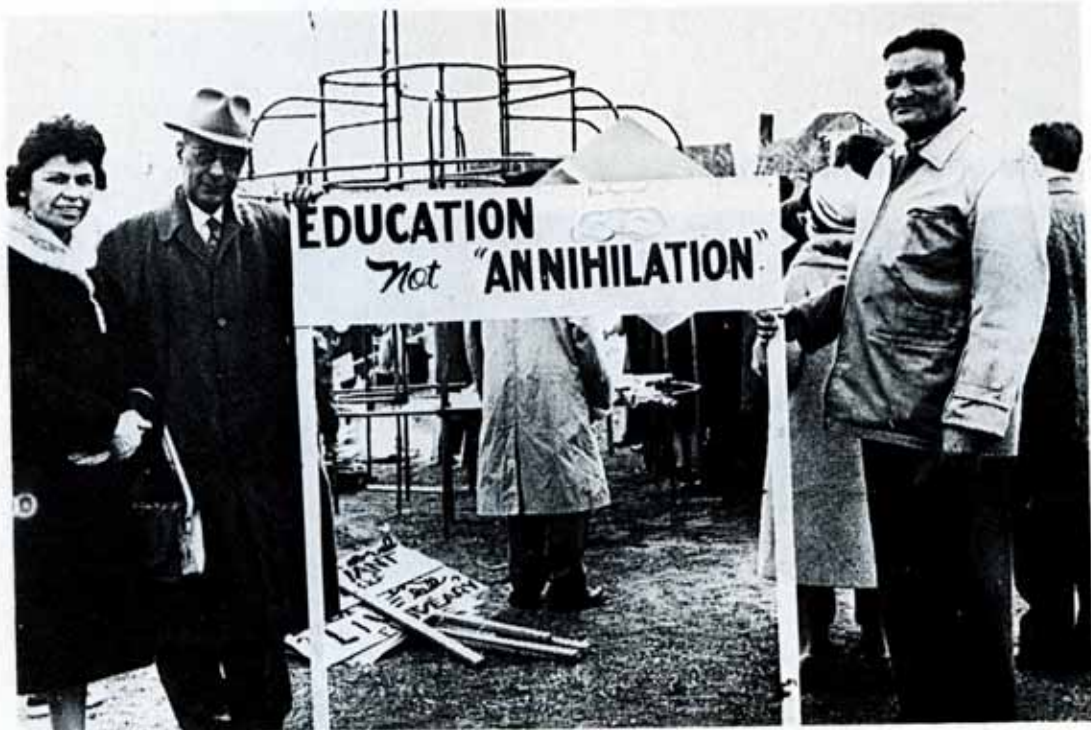


Peter Worsley



The first, informal, commemorative gathering at Batoche, summer 1961. Norris is with back to camera, centre.

Jean Cuthand, Norris and Brady at an anti-nuclear arms demonstration in Regina, April 1, 1961



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colonial situation of the native people, was more interested in Brady the historian than Brady the activist. Brady's political inactivity was due in part to the lack of any encouragement from a political collective. The LPP had resources it could have used to encourage Brady's organizing work in the north, but it did not do so. So long as the party saw the native struggle as secondary, it would not play a major role in Brady's life.

With his political options at an end and his work in the exploration business seasonal, Brady could have returned to Alberta, as he often said he would. His political skills were certainly in demand there. In 1951 Brady, Norris and Pete Tomkins (who now worked for the Saskatchewan government) received word from Joe Dion that the Metis were trying to reorganize the old association. At that time Dion was simply seeking advice. By 1952 he was pleading with Brady to come back, even offering him a salary to take the secretary's job again and confessing to him that the Alberta Metis hadn't really appreciated him and Norris until they had left the province.<sup>25</sup>

Brady had no desire to return to a political battle he had lost and believed irreversible. In turning down the offer, Brady commented that "things have deteriorated badly on every [Metis] area without exception."

Brady's one, unflinching loyalty was to the Metis, and his true comrades were those who shared in their struggles. Brady's decision to remain in Saskatchewan was influenced by the presence there of Malcolm Norris and Pete Tomkins. His relationship with Norris in Saskatchewan was as turbulent as it had been in Alberta. Brady was critical of Norris' immersion in the CCF, especially since Norris agreed with much of his analysis. Yet it was more a matter of temperament than ideology, and Brady never doubted Norris' unique status as his principal comrade.

Brady, shy and reserved in his emotional expressions seldom revealed his feelings for Norris, and Norris seemed to feel obliged to cover up his obvious affection for his undemonstrative friend. Norris demonstrated his feelings in other ways—encouraging Brady to write and making sure Brady found job opportunities. Without the contact afforded by mutual involvement in political endeavors, their relationship had to survive mostly on memories and hopes.

At no time in their long association had Brady and Norris lived such dissimilar lives. Norris had moved into the white world—CCF picnics, Sunday church, school boards and a neat, orderly home. Brady was becoming more and more alienated from the white world, from urban environments and the increasingly consumer-oriented southern society. He retreated into the isolated, spartan world of the nomadic native people of LaRonge and the Churchill River basin.



While LaRonge was to be Brady's permanent home, he once told his sister Eleanor that it was with the people of Cumberland House that he felt a "strong feeling of kinship." Perhaps this was due to the cohesiveness and sense of community that characterized Cumberland House, features that were missing in LaRonge. Brady maintained his ties to Cumberland House throughout the fifties. That he did not return permanently was probably due to practical considerations of employment. He visited there almost every Christmas to spend time with the Dorion clan and he continued his relationship with Cecilia Dorion. They had a daughter, Ruth, in 1952 and a second daughter, Anne, in 1954. Brady supported the family until 1962 and also made financial contributions to his second family right through to the early sixties. But a letter from his daughter, Emma Jean, asking why she could not call him "dad"<sup>26</sup> in public suggests that Brady was not entirely comfortable with his second paternal role.

Brady's ties to Cumberland House gradually weakened. In 1956, as if formally recognizing his ties to LaRonge, Brady built a small, frame cabin on a rock outcropping a hundred yards from the main street of town—the first and only such home he ever built. Over the years, the plain, bare cabin became a celebrated centre in the native community. The cabin served the nomadic people of the area in many capacities. For the children, alienated by the standard "Dick and Jane" fare of elementary school, it was a free school where Brady would hold forth on Metis and Indian history or anything else which might strike his or their fancy. Brady's library put the local school's to shame and even Glen Lindgren, the principal, found it difficult to object when his young truants confessed to being at Jim Brady's.

Not only young people were drawn to Brady's shack. Scarcely a day went by that Brady did not have at least two or three visitors and often there were many more. Some came simply to visit and listen to Brady's stories from history. Others came to stay the night on his floor, and still others, having spent their last dollar, sought Brady out for what was usually a forgivable loan. It was not unusual to find Brady living in a tent while a Metis or Indian family, their home lost to fire, took temporary refuge in the Brady hostel.

The increasingly hopeless environment of LaRonge brought out Brady's compassion. He saw alcohol abuse as symptomatic of the situation. Native drunkenness called up in Norris an anguished mix of indignation, pity, anger and despair and, almost without exception, some sort of lecture for the victim/offender. Brady, too, despaired over the devastating effects of alcohol which he witnessed daily in LaRonge, but he could not bring himself to rebuke the victims around him. Drunks had equal rights to Brady's hospitality. On one occasion he was thrown out of his own cabin by the man to whom he had lent it. In a



drunken rage the man accused Brady of being a "goddamned communist" and ordered him to leave. Brady retreated to Allan Quandts in a mood of utter despair. Some people attributed Brady's compassion to meekness and ascribed his reluctance to take the political initiative to that same trait.

In contrast to Malcom Norris, Brady was a reluctant leader, drafted to political duties he was, by circumstances, especially suited to serve. Brady's temperament suited him more for scholarly pursuits than for the rigors of political battle. His preference for solitude and his spartan material requirements placed minimal barriers between him and the native people of the area, and Brady identified increasingly with the native people and they with him. Brady also shared the Cree and Metis' understated sense of humor which put a premium on mocking "big shots." One time in the bar Brady and a group of native workers were quietly suffering the pompous pontificating of a British mining engineer, until the topic turned to the Korean War. The man offered the opinion that the Chinese, who had just entered the conflict, could be driven back in short order by a division of British fighting men. With a straight face and to the delight of the native audience, Brady calmly suggested that all the Chinese would have to do is collectively urinate and they would drown the British division.

Assuming that a person records what he considers most significant, it is interesting to note that Brady's diaries made virtually no mention of political events or developments even when other evidence suggests that he was intensely involved. With rare exceptions, the entries record either the essential details of his workday or a list of the day's visitors, or both. There seemed to be no trace of self-importance in Brady, rather, as Bill Tuomi observed, a strong sense of the insignificance of one man's life.

Brady's reluctance to take on a leadership role at least partially accounts for his lack of political initiative in the LaRonge native community. His relationship with the people, however, was never completely apolitical. During his years in LaRonge Brady made a steady and determined contribution to that long process of decolonization by encouraging the native people to cast off their colonial, dependent mentality. Janet Feitz, an ex-treaty Indian who would herself become a local leader, summed up Brady's elementary political lessons: "Jim Brady was the first person to tell us we were human beings, too."<sup>27</sup>

Social conditions in LaRonge dictated that Brady could do little more than impress upon the native people their right to human dignity. There was little to be had in an environment of increasing dependence on government, family breakdown and the added burden of alcohol abuse. Even without these factors a social structure characterized by the



nomads' strong individualism seemed to deny any immediate hope of collective action or political unity.

Brady's political teaching was rudimentary, and with few exceptions he did not attempt to instill a socialist consciousness in the native people. Yet his stories, his library and his instructive responses to the "charge" of being a communist made Brady's political philosophy plain enough. The anti-communism of the period often led to suspicion of Brady, but more often Brady's personal integrity and the example he set served to undermine the propaganda.

LaRonge was a lonely and hostile environment for a socialist, yet Brady continued to get order and continuity from the study of politics and history. It was not unusual to find his light on all night as he poured over the latest addition to his library or the latest issue of any one of dozens of periodicals. Like other socialists in this period he was preoccupied with the cold war and the anti-colonial liberation struggles being waged in Africa and elsewhere.

In studying these anti-colonial movements both Brady and Norris identified the close parallels to the situation in northern Saskatchewan. In a letter to Bob Deverell, Brady remarked on the changes which had occurred in Cumberland House in the four years since he had left—changes which were "all for the worse."

I cannot understand the government policy, why they build up with one hand and destroy with the other. The situation has deteriorated badly. My experience has convinced me that there will never be any change unless... [we] ruthlessly uproot every last vestige of colonialism to which the native has been subjected. In Northern Saskatchewan we have a living example of what colonialism does to a people for essentially this is what the entire native question amounts to.<sup>28</sup>

The colonial character of the native question had its roots in the nineteenth century, and Brady drew on his understanding of the Metis' past struggles to build his vision of their future. He gave the following assessment of the situation facing Indians and Metis in Canada:

I have always felt that... the Metis rebellions were... actually an expression of a national liberation movement. Basically it didn't differ the least from the national movements against colonialism that we are familiar with in the last twenty or thirty years in Asia and Africa and the Arab world.

I still feel that as far as the North American Indian is concerned there will be no real advance until that liberation movement is carried to its completion.



[However]...it would be nonsensical for anyone to assume that he should be a separate nation...for they no longer possess an autonomous territory with a culture which is strictly indigenous to that territory...Their future lies in the fact that they must...be freed from all of the pernicious influences...[and] disabilities which colonialism has imposed upon them. Consequently...the national liberation of the Indian people and the Metis people in Canada cannot be completed until Canada as a whole and the western world as a whole free themselves of that vicious system which has imposed these conditions on a conquered people.<sup>29</sup>

How would that vicious system be destroyed? Brady stated on numerous occasions his conviction that imperialism would be defeated not by revolutions initiated in the industrial countries but by anti-colonial struggles in the third world. He told his sister Eleanor that he "never had any doubts about the future...The white man has had his day and the world future belongs to the people with dark colored skins." Another time, he bitterly told Allan Quandt, "The world won't be free until the white man has had his face pushed into the dirt by a yellow heel."

Clearly the anti-colonial struggle in Canada was an extremely complex political question, one which had frustrated Brady for years. Yet Brady had no doubt that the struggle for socialism and the struggle for national liberation were ultimately inseparable. They were inseparable in the African and Asian countries where national liberation struggles turned to socialism to extend freedom and social justice to all the people. The Indian and Metis were allied with the colonized of Africa and Asia in a spirit of solidarity. But they were also allied with white workers in Canada struggling for socialism. The ultimate struggle for world freedom and social justice was a struggle for socialism, and the native people of Canada could best contribute to that struggle and to their own national liberation by building an alliance with the Canadian working class. As Brady had concluded in 1942: "We have no independent social base other than the working class."<sup>30</sup> Brady's comments about the "nonsensical" notion of a "separate nation" were aimed at those who believed the liberation struggle could be completed under a capitalist system.

However that struggle might work itself out in the future, LaRonge in the 1950s was politically bleak. All Brady could do was try on an ad hoc basis to reduce the suffering of individuals and spontaneously confront those responsible for the misery. Occasionally the situation in LaRonge did produce organized resistance. A group of young girls, twelve to sixteen, formed the "bubble-gum gang" to protect themselves



against rape by tourists and transient white workers. Brady, Quandt and others ended up in a brawl with a gang of outside workers over the issue of pregnant native girls and forced the RCMP to advise the men to leave town. Brady and others confronted a local doctor who had invited his friends to the hospital to watch a native woman give birth. And on the coldest winter nights a group of LaRonge men checked the bar at closing time to ensure that ejected drunks did not freeze to death before they reached home. In many of these instances the LaRonge socialists were joined by others, white and native, disturbed by the social disintegration and racism in the village.

But these were hardly political responses and barely addressed the symptoms let alone the causes. This is not to suggest that the northern socialists were satisfied with such action or that they failed to seek viable political answers. On many occasions in the mid-fifties Brady, Norris, Quandt and Berry Richards (who had moved to LaRonge) gathered around the wood stove in Richards' Pre Cam Explorations office to tackle the political dilemma. Yet all too often these discussions would end in a refrain all too familiar to Saskatchewan leftists, "The trouble with the CCF is..."<sup>31</sup> Many of the socialists who were drawn into the CCF kept their hopes for a socialist CCF alive by characterizing the government's failures as "mistakes" or "misunderstandings." Brady was less susceptible to this pitfall than his colleagues; he saw the CCF's failures as universal features of social democratic parties and governments—he expected them. Some saw his views as ultra-leftist, and in any case he was no less stymied than his colleagues. His analysis and subsequent rejection of the CCF rendered him, in the absence of native resistance, politically paralyzed.

Norris and Brady had fashioned for themselves political traps which reflected their temperaments and political inclinations. Yet the traps were created by the social forces the men were a part of, and those forces were starting to change. North and south would experience different changes and would, ironically, draw Jim Brady back into the CCF, and Malcolm Norris back into the native world.