Allan Quandt has lived in northern Saskatchewan for over 30 years. He was an active member of the CCF and ran as a candidate in the 1960 provincial election. He was a friend of Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady: their relationships with the CCF party.

Allan: He tried to convince people that this is the path they should take in their own best interests. This would be trappers and fishermen and northern laborers and anyone that was sort of being victimized by the system in the north. He would point this out to them and then he always, well I shouldn’t say always, but he did go down on a couple of occasions as a delegate from this constituency to the annual conventions.

Murray: Would those have been the earlier elections do you
think, or can you recall when that...?

Allan: I can't remember. The last time Jim went along as a delegate, I can remember when the convention was held. It was a convention that was held in Saskatoon and I can well remember, you know, when he was outlining... It was one of the elections we were defeated on and I would imagine that probably it was the time when Ripley probably was elected. Because Jim, in one of the panel discussions, did an analysis of some of the things that caused our defeat, when we should've won because we had the sitting member. And I remember that Tommy Douglas challenged Jim on some of this and Jim just got up and was able to, in his quiet way, just back Tommy Douglas right completely into a corner. And did it so nicely and he had facts at his command. He had the most retentive mind of any individual that I've ever met and he could just quote these facts. He made one little slip in this and, just shows you what a clever politician Tommy Douglas was, and that little slip, Tommy Douglas just took over like that. Jim said, "You know, we lost hundreds of votes over..." because of the reasons he outlined. And Tommy just jumped in like that and just sort of sneeringly said, "Hundreds of votes." And he quoted the amount of vote that we had in this constituency and it was just a few hundred votes, you see, in total. And used this as a basis for his argument. And that shows a very clever politician, but to me, it, you know...

Murray: It was cheap.

Allan: It was cheap.

Murray: I remember seeing a letter written by Jim in 1953 which, to the person he was writing to, he said that he was completely fed up with the CCF and had let his membership lapse. But he still saw the CCF as the much better of what was available.

Allan: Yes, that's right. Yeah. I think that he was like many of us, you know, that looked upon ourselves as socialists and we expected better performance from our leadership. I think we recognize that there was a hierarchy that held sway in this party and that were always looking to be acceptable and were wooing people at the ballot box. "If we can be in power, then we can do certain things." And then when they got in power, they became more and more entrenched, you know, and the people that seemed to rise in the civil service were people that saw that the bureaucracy became more and more an important part of government.

Murray: Did he take part in CCF activities after 1952-53, as far as you can recall? As far as going to conventions or working on elections?

Allan: Jim would always, if he was there, he would always do what he could. As far as taking part in elections after that
now, I can't remember. The last time that we went to Saskatoon, I can't tell you what year that was. That could've been a little later on in the fifties but I would doubt it very much. Probably that was about the last that he would've taken part. Because I remember we went to a gathering where there were several people in Saskatoon, I'm trying to think of the name of the place.

Murray: Naylor's.

Allan: It was Naylor's, right. Because George Taylor was there and - what was the Attorney-General's name at that time? Came from Saskatoon. He was the one that pressed the charges on the Columbia metals thing against Morris Shumiatcher, had sort of a vendetta on with Morris Shumiatcher.

Murray: Oh, yeah, I know who you mean. I can't think of his name either.

Allan: But at any rate, these are the type of people that were there and I know that we had some discussions about the north at that time. There were several people there from the university and I know that when Jim began to do some of his analyzing of the situation that existed, as it related to native people and the colonizing process and all, I know that there were a lot of people who were really impressed because he could hold his own as far as an intellectual level with...

Murray: Any of the academics.

Allan: Any of the academics.

Murray: What about Malcolm as far as his involvement? Of course, he didn't live in La Ronge but what was his involvement in the CCF as far as you were aware?

Allan: Well, I think that Malcolm again always was...

Murray: The same sort of attitude.

Allan: Yeah, very active in the party and always did what he could, and helped to organize. And of course, he was always trying to organizing among the native people to get their own organizations going and I know wherever they got to the point of talking about using political power, he always put forward that the only solution, as far as people of Indian ancestry, the only solution was in having socialism supplant capitalism as a political and economic order.

Murray: How did he put that argument to native people? He wouldn't put it just as you have?

Allan: No. Malcolm worked in so many varied areas in government. He did some economic surveys, took the prices that trappers got for their fur at a free trader or what the Bay was paying and then he would do an analysis of this price against
what you would get from the Saskatchewan Fur Marketing Service. He would get fish prices and so on, and he would relate to people how, if they would use these things, it would help them. And if this idea would carry further, the idea of people having control over some of their own resources and so on. But he would try to, by example, show them how they could gain and have a better life and try to do it by grass roots reasoning.

Murray: What was Jim's approach to talking to native people? Would he use the same kind of approach?

Allan: I think that Jim did basically the same thing. Jim believed again by actual doing. He was a believer in cooperatives, in that if people became involved in this to help themselves...

Murray: Then they would see.

Allan: They would see. He didn't believe that, you know, as many people today that support cooperatives believe, that you can have a flourishing cooperative in a middle class capitalism. Jim always maintained that a cooperative could not flourish in its broadest sense only under a socialist state. That he fully believed. He didn't push that idea. He just felt, get people involved in cooperatives and get them involved in their taking part in it so they can see what they are up against. The economics of the thing where they may produce a certain article, that is where they end. They produce it but once they get it out into that market, they are subject to all the other market forces. And it was a learning process there as far as people were concerned. That's the approach he would take. He was limited in being able to identify with northern people, he was limited when you compared him to Malcolm because Malcolm could speak Cree fluently and Jim didn't have an Indian language at his command. He could speak French fluently but he couldn't speak a native language. And this wasn't a deterrent though, as far as establishing contact and being close friends with native people because I think in many ways, he had a closer relationship with people in their lifestyle.

Murray: Felt more akin to the northern way of life than Malcolm.

Allan: Right, than Malcolm did. Malcolm had sort of moved out of this thing. And had gone through, in his younger years, had trapped and prospected and everything and now he lived really a petty middle class life as a civil servant. And that didn't mean that he couldn't go out in the bush and still do his thing. As a matter of fact, it was really sad the last few years Malcolm went out and was looking after the Prospectors' Assistance Plan because he still felt he could go out and he was just as young as he ever was. And it was taking its toll, he couldn't do it. I said, "Malcolm, you can't do those things any more, you know. After all, you're getting up in years." But he tried that hard, he just wasn't going to give in.
Murray: Right, a doer.

Allan: And you will recall then he did suffer more than one heart attack, you know, and left him finally paralyzed, which was a sad thing. But Malcolm could've gone out and survived anywhere in the north. He had that ability.

Murray: Malcolm's lifestyle, you say, was sort of petty middle class, as I've heard it described 'halfway up the hill' in Prince Albert, sort of. Was this just his choice, this is the way he wanted to live or do you think it was in any way a reaction to native lifestyle or was it simply his choice of living?

Allan: I don't know. I never really discussed these things with him. He was a friend and these things...

Murray: Didn't come up.

Allan: No, they didn't come up. I think that, you know, he felt that he wanted this for his family and...

Murray: And of course, Jim didn't have a family in the same...

Allan: No, Jim didn't have a family and again, I suppose, these things meant a little bit more to Jim. Jim, regardless of what position he held in the structure when he was a civil servant, and he was a field officer (now you call them conservation officers), he always identified himself, if he had to be identified, as a laborer. Just because he wasn't going to move out of the working class.

Murray: That's what he wanted to be and that's what he was.

Allan: That's what he wanted to be. He wanted to be known as that. He didn't want to be known as something else. He took those other things, I think, because he felt that it was a way that he would be able to further the end of getting people to understand and to help people in a given area to understand and to give them a little bit more power and the understanding of power and the understanding of responsibility and so on. Because at that time down at Cumberland House, there were a lot of projects going. There was a farm being developed and there was a sawmill being developed and all these things. You get into, you know, some of the Indian cultures where one will not want to give orders to another at all. Jim, in that situation, had to give orders but he minimized them because he'd try to get people involved and would just discuss things that had to be done and there should be a consensus. But if he had to do it in the crunch....

Murray: He would do it.

Allan: Yeah, never let it be said that he couldn't make a decision.
Murray: In this sort of filling in the blank 'laborer,' was this an attempt not to get away from the people?

Allan: Well, I think probably that was part of it, too. And probably it's one of those things where sometimes you kid yourself, you know, about a lot of things. Probably he was only kidding himself. But he probably honestly believed it and tried to live up to that. But I think it was a matter of identification. This is the way he identified. I know I've always said, personally, I said, "You know, I might occupy a petty middle class position in life, but I identify with the working class."

Murray: And that's what he was doing when he wrote that word. What would Malcolm have filled in the blank with?

Allan: I don't know. I think that this would've meant less to Malcolm. As a matter of fact, I think if Malcolm could've turned around and used something to impress any white man, he would've done it. Not that it's something that he himself would need but it was mainly just to let that guy understand that here was a redskin...

Murray: That was no dummy.

Allan: That was no dummy and he knew his way around. Because his command of the English language was fantastic and in debate he was absolutely devastating. And while he could be the kindest, most compassionate individual where he dealt with people that were just simple ordinary people...

Murray: Who had no power.

Allan: He could be devastating to people who pretended to be something they weren't, and particularly if they were in any way putting other people down. He would just cut them so down to size that it was almost a cruel put down. Because...

Murray: They were no match.

Allan: They just weren't any match at all.

Murray: Jim wasn't concerned so much with that sort of impressing people in the terms that Malcolm was with white people. Or was he?

Allan: No, I don't think so. I think Jim would sit back quietly and let everybody else do the talking and sit back and probably he would, after a long period of listening, would come up with some remark that would just, you know, almost bring the house down. I listened to him, you know, a few times. Especially when it was native people who have a marvelous sense of humor and he would make some remark...

Murray: Rich with irony.
Allan: And he would make some remark and it was just so simple and straightforward but it never left anything to the imagination. He had put this guy down so nicely and just sit back and the Indian people that were there, they would just laugh and hoot, you know.

Murray: One last question before we both fall asleep. Jim expressed his disgust and disillusionment with the party pretty early, you know, within five or six years of coming to Saskatchewan. Did Malcolm give up on the party as quickly as Jim or did he stick with it in terms of having hopes for it longer than Jim did?

Allan: I think that Malcolm understood this too because they were both very intelligent people. I think that Malcolm gave up equally as early. You know, they still supported it as the lesser of the evils that were being presented but to hope that any real gains were going to be made in this direction, I think they recognized this quite early. Because I know when I left Prince Albert and we moved, Roberta and I moved to La Ronge, that was a pretty big move for us and that was 1949. Already, you see, you could begin to see these power plays.

Murray: The trends.

Allan: Yeah, and the trends coming. And already we had said amongst ourselves... I said, "You know, I can just see down there where your hope, knowing the people that were trying to move up the ladder in the civil service structure and where some of the..." You see, the CCF had to do things and they could do bold things. Then they're in there and they turn around and they look to consolidate and then they go out and they are looking to try to stay in power. Then after they did a few of these things, you know, the hospitalization thing and there was numerous things that we can say, but look at the long period of time that went on and there wasn't really anything.

Murray: The first three years maybe.

Allan: Yeah, you could look at other provinces around you that, my God, you know, would have Social Credit, would have Liberal or Conservative parties, and they were getting some things done and, you know, there wasn't that zealous type of almost missionary spirit that you had that first while when they bang, bang, bang, they could pass laws, enact acts and they could get going.

And sure, like up here, the superimposition, we realize that this is a mistake. It wasn't a mistake in that the ideas were good because they are still going to have to go back to them. They are still going to have to come back to some of these things. They are plagued today with things. They are going to have to go back to some of the things that they did at that time. But the process of getting people to understand that these ideas are good, to accept them, and to just provide leadership and then have the people demand that these things
take place. This is really the whole, you know, the political skills that are necessary is that... It's like the Chinese do. Provide that wise leadership and show the way and then people, at last, are just demanding that you do those things.

Murray: That must've been one of the major goals of both men, was to convince people that that's what they needed was leadership.

Allan: Yeah, I think that they understood this process. I think this is really what they wanted in trying to organize people.

(End of Side A)
(End of Interview)