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:

- General problems of implementing programs in the north.
- Growth of the bureaucracy within the CCF.
- Education in the north; what went wrong.
- Development of a fish marketing service.
- Reorganization of fur marketing in the north.
- Establishment of government stores.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

In this tape, Quandt talks about the original excitement and progress in the north under the first minister of DNR, Joe Phelps; the gradual entrenchment of conservative, professional bureaucrats from 1949 onwards - the disappearance of democratic, people-oriented policies. He describes the failure
of the education initiative - its disruptive effects. He explains the government’s initiative in the marketing of fish, fur - the reaction of private enterprise and of native people to the programs; the establishment of the government trading posts to complement the marketing services.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am talking to Allan Quandt of La Ronge. Allan, you came into northern Saskatchewan or Prince Albert in the beginning in the mid-forties. Could you tell me when exactly you came in, what brought you to Saskatchewan and what your first position was with the CCF government?

Allan: Well, I came to Prince Albert in the fall of 1946. And at that particular time, I had been in contact with the minister of Natural Resources, Joe Phelps, and he felt that he required as many young people coming into the department to work on northern Saskatchewan to give to this area some of the changes that the CCF actually were committed to in their political program. And I worked, first of all, in doing a survey into the potential of farming in the Cumberland House area. That was the first job that I did. I went down there and stayed down there for quite a considerable period of time and then, after this report was made, subsequently worked into the administrative setup which was just coming into being.

There were very few representatives prior to that in the whole northern area which is certainly more than half of the province. And they felt that they had to get field personnel into these areas to implement some of the programs that they had committed themselves to.

Murray: So they were looking for progressive people basically to implement progressive programs? Was that part of their search?

Allan: I think that was part of the philosophy, that they wanted to get people who were committed to the area, to the proposition that the people in northern Saskatchewan, who were mainly of Indian ancestry, had been in an exploited position and that they were addressing themselves to some of these problems and they were determined that they were going to change these. This came about in several different ways. The thing of resource development came into being. Some of the basic resources like fish and fur and timber policies were greatly changed. Sometimes in looking back on these programs, I feel that we made mistakes in that they were superimposed without the necessary awareness on the part of the people just what we were attempting to do. But basically the programs were correct.

Murray: From other people I've talked to, including Gus MacDonald and Phelps, it seems that the government did make attempts to do that, to go out and explain programs to people. Could you describe those efforts and why they didn't turn out
to be sufficient?

Allan: Well, I think that probably the main fault is that programs can't be explained in isolation from politics. You have to explain problems as they relate to you personally and in political terms. And this, of course, is to me the failure of this type of thing. Now, probably if the CCF had been strong enough to send people out on the political basis to explain these things, then probably we could've gained the confidence of people. But people have to understand the process of exploitation before they can rise to correcting that particular problem. This is one of the things. You just can't simply go out and explain a program and say, "This is being done on your behalf," when you have been tied to a colonizing process for several hundreds of years. And they identified closely with the Hudson's Bay Company who had provided them certain things. They would come and get services from them and in a way it was almost a sort of a serf-slave relationship. The identification of people to this was very strong because this is where they got all of their trade goods and in lean years, they were carried by the company. And then, of course, the free traders and all of the agitation that these people could raise in opposition to the program was tremendous.

Murray: They would play on this confusion?

Allan: That's right.

Murray: Phelps seemed to me, from other people I've talked to as well, was probably the most, well it's hard to say, progressive minister, in a sense. That he seemed to really identify with the problems of native people. Did he recognize the problem you've just pointed out? That you have to politicize people? Did he see that and not do something about it? What was his position on that situation?

Allan: I can't ever recall discussing this at length or indepth with Mr. Phelps because he was a terribly busy man and he was a doer. And he did get from the people that moved into the civil service at that time, a lot of dedication. Even people that would oppose Joe Phelps would see the dynamic personality that he was and was prepared to give a lot of hard labor in making programs work. This was at the civil service level. But I don't think that probably Joe saw these things that clearly at that particular time. I don't think that any of us really saw this at that particular time. I think it's only in retrospect that you are able to view these things properly and see where the mistakes were made.

Murray: What was the atmosphere like working for DNR in that time, in those first couple of years when Joe was minister? Was it a pretty exciting period politically? Did people feel pretty positive about what was going to happen?

Allan: A tremendously exciting period of time because people felt that something was happening now. Where you would've had,
let's say, a vote in many instances, a protest on a political basis had brought the CCF to power, particularly in the north. Northern people recognized that some of the old representatives here were, you know, were just pulling off the old boondoggle thing. They were there for their own benefit and so on and they were prepared to toss them out. We had a fellow by the name of Les Lee that became the member in this particular constituency. On the west side, Marcene Marion was returned as a Liberal. But in that instance of Marcene Marion, I think people recognized what he was as a politician but there were the powers that existed there that were extremely strong. Like the support of the church was there and it wielded a tremendous...

Murray: That was a powerful force, eh?

Allan: A powerful force.

Murray: You mentioned in the conversation we had before that Phelps had got a dirty deal at some point during his political career. Was that the election of 1948 that he lost and could you elaborate a bit on that?

Allan: Well, I think that because of the stands that he made in implementing programs where we really challenged the normal authority of some of the middle class institutions and private capital, I think because of this probably, in his own constituency of Saltcoats, he was defeated. And I feel that he was treated very shabbily after that by the CCF hierarchy. I feel that here was a man who had given a lot of time of himself and certainly that's vindicated today because Joe Phelps still today is giving a great deal of his time in progressive causes. Now, particularly with the senior citizens, and he has always called for challenges to the status quo. And many people look upon this as, well, moving too quickly. This is the neat pat way of saying... "They want to move too quickly and we have to stay in power. If we don't stay in power we can't do anything." But finally you've compromised yourself to the point that now, staying in power, you just become another political party.

Murray: So he was looked upon with some suspicion by other cabinet ministers as well as the party?

Allan: Oh, I think at that time, we were beginning to sort out the people who were really committed to a form of socialistic development. You know, even along the lines of so-called 'social democracy.' And I think that the people who were the moderates and the people who were on the right of the party could exercise these pressures and as I say, the party hierarchy, people were beginning to scramble for their own little particular niches in the power structure.

Murray: When did that start happening? It was really an exciting period but obviously things started to get less positive. What period was that would you say?
Allan: Well, I can't recall exactly, as far as dates and time are concerned, but I know that we came up to La Ronge in 1949 and I resigned my position from the government because it was very obvious in the civil service at that time, once we changed our minister. When Joe was defeated and then J.H. Brockelbank took over, it became quite obvious that certain forces within the civil service structure who sort of stressed the apolitical line and doing a good administrative job...

Murray: A mutual administrative civil service.

Allan: Right. And you know, becoming acceptable to people. And were always quick to point out some of the faults that existed and rather than turn around and grapple with these on the basis of again taking them back to people and informing people, they were quick to change the policy to satisfy the forces that were existing, entrepreneurial forces.

And there were things, the changing of the compulsory marketing of spring fur was one, because of the loud voices that were crying about the poor trapper and how he had to wait for his money and all of that. This is the argument that was being used but basically it was the argument from the free trader and it was the argument of the company, the Hudson's Bay Company, that wanted to get back this lucrative force again in their hands. Now, in some instances again, being fair, we realize that if people extend credit, they have to secure this and this is part of the securing of credit. When you give a man some credit, then he brings the fur back to you. Now, this was gone and it was a disruptive influence in the pattern of the fur trade. It was a disruptive thing when this was changed and you had the fur marketing service which brought about a better price structure and returned more to them. Then on the other hand, we also did at that time, bring into effect quicker field payment. There were field accounts set up. People could get an advance up to a fair proportion of the value of the fur right in the fields through the department of Natural Resources...

Murray: Before it was even marketed?

Allan: That's right. And then second payments were forthcoming and this is the way that you turn around and react to a situation like this. Get something in its stead. But again, because of the people vying within the department and pointing out all the problems that exist - because when you solve one problem, another problem comes to confront you. And you don't back off of that, you try to solve that problem and you keep going. This is really what the whole process is about. If you are going to change man's lot, you have to look for problems and be prepared to solve them and go on because other problems come up.

Murray: Was that Phelps' sort of approach to things do you think?
Allan: I think that Joe was prepared to grapple with these and probably, if he would've been returned as a minister, I think that in some instances we would've been able to have gone on because there were many things that, as they arose, you always had his ear and he was prepared to make changes. And changes that he would have to go back to cabinet and justify.

Murray: He was prepared to listen to people in the north?

Allan: That's right. He was prepared to listen and he made numerous field trips also.

Murray: This change in the bureaucracy, did that more or less coincide with Brockelbank coming in? Was it a distinctively different attitude on his part or could you tell?

Allan: Well, I think that it's something that happens to all political parties. You know, you can get any political party coming into power and the old cliche of 'a new broom sweeps clean,' for there is haste to grab this broom and just take wide swaths with it and you're bound to hit part of the target. But then gradually, the entrenchment takes place and then you're right back in.

Murray: The broom gets worn out.

Allan: Yeah.

Murray: So it was a sort of natural historical process almost?

Allan: Yeah. I think it happened in a lot of other departments, you know. It wasn't just this department it happened, but certainly from where I was, from my position, I could see the forces that wanted to withdraw and just become a civil service structure that administered services.

Murray: Stayed away from political kinds of questions.

Allan: They would stay away from that and they would stay away from challenging the position of the entrepreneurial strength in the north.

Murray: Right. Would you say that by 1950 this was the trend? To reacting quickly to those kinds of pressures? Was it that quickly or was it later than 1950? I'm just trying to get an impression of the year.

Allan: Well, I don't know. There were still some changes made under Brockelbank. There were certain changes in mineral legislation but I think at that time, I can't remember just when, the Department was split because the mineral development or the administration of minerals and mining in the north also came under the department of Natural Resources and then there was a split made where the minister remained in charge of the two departments and there was a separate deputy minister. Because, if I remember correctly, at that particular time,
Churchman became the Minister of Natural Resources and I think Vern Hogg became the Minister of Mineral Resources of...

Murray: The deputies, yeah.

Allan: Yeah, the deputy rather. And before that, Vern Hogg was the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources as a whole.

Murray: Right. Could you describe a bit of the history of the development of the bureaucracy in DNR? In the beginning in the north, it was a very small number of people, is that accurate?

Allan: Oh, there were very few people in the structure prior to the change in 1944. I don't know exactly what the structure was at that time. See, I come back after the war and came into it in 1946 and at that time they had already set up a structure of what they called northern district. We have, or we had within the department of Natural Resources, I think five natural resources administrative districts. There was northern district; Floyd Glass was the superintendent of that district. And then there was the Meadow Lake district and the Prince Albert district and the Hudson Bay Junction district at that time as they called it. (I think they dropped the Junction off since.) And then there was the southern district which fell to a line south of these areas. And in the northern district, recognizing the potential there was and need for change and need for justice, certain things happened. There was a fresh water fisheries commission which took place to investigate the fresh water fishing in the north and what could be done to make this a viable industry. And subsequently there was a forming of the Saskatchewan Fish Board as a marketing agency and...

Murray: These were all part of DNR were they? I mean, responsibility...

Allan: Right. And then there was the Timber Board, the Saskatchewan Timber Board was formed. Mining stayed on the basis of the entrepreneurial approach where these people came in with Riskette who did the investigating through prospecting and then some had company prospectors. There was a development at that time which Malcolm Norris was instrumental in, the development of a scheme called the Prospectors' Assistance Plan. We got people out on their own and they paid for aircraft travel and certain other expenses, put people out in their field. Then they could make whatever deal, if they came up with any prospect, if they went out and found anything, they could make whatever deal they wanted to with any company.

And then there was a division also in the northern district at that time, they started an aircraft branch of the northern district. And a lot of the fellows that had flown in the war had come back and they were field officers in their own right and they flew. There were forestry patrols and there was the picking up of fur and finally we worked to establish post
offices in the north. Contacted the federal government, this was brought into being. And then it was deemed that probably this should be made into a crown company and then Floyd Glass became the manager of this crown company and became Saskatchewan Government Airways. And northern district went on as a resource district.

They also implemented at that time, Joe Phelps also had visualized local government and they brought in an administrator by the name of Joe Wheaton and Bill Bague was secretary to him. And they, in essence, were looking at the same thing that we have got now through DNS which is the Northern Municipal Council. He felt that this would function as a sort of a large municipality where people eventually would be working on the local basis.

Murray: But that didn't get established at that time?

Allan: You can go back and see when it was formed and brought into being. And they were trying to bring this about and promote this approach. And, as I say, Joe Phelps was defeated and the minister, J.H. Brockelbank, that took over after that, there was a gradual sort of, the structure, the bureaucratic structure began to, you know, become....

Murray: Heavy.

Allan: Yeah, more visible, a higher profile. And you're into the thing of...

Murray: Red tape and....

Allan: All. Where gradually the programs that were designed for people and people participation - and I admit, were superimposed in most instances - but rather than correct that, then we went the other way where you turned around and you backed off and you went back into where the center of power was in the bureaucratic structure. The flow charts were pinned up on the wall and all the lines of communication had to go through the proper channels and when you give up the idea that people should participate in something, well then you are into a real bureaucracy.

Murray: So the people-oriented atmosphere of the department gradually just disappeared into the early fifties.

Allan: Just disappeared.

Murray: I remember there was a report done by the Centre for Community Studies that characterized the north. This was done, I think, about the mid-fifties, maybe mid- to late fifties, characterizing the north as being very similar to India under British colonialism. That a lot of the field officers had the same kind of power as a colonial officer. Could you describe the kinds of power they would have over native people in the north and how that developed?
Allan: Well sure, I think that they had that kind of power and that gradually that power was strengthened and, knowing a lot of these fellows, and a lot of these fellows are friends of mine and many that have retired, I don't think that they ever assumed this kind of power. They identified with people and tried to help and we really had a good spirit that existed among a lot of the field officers in that they definitely were going along once they were sold on a program and an idea. There was resistance to it but once they could see this, and I don't think that that existed with a lot of the fellows. Well, when you begin to take fellows who actually were in the department, who had come from backgrounds of trapping and sort of a rugged frontier life, they identified with the country and they identified with the people. Well when you look at some of the guys that would take dog teams and go out and hit these fish camps and would travel up a lake. I know Frank Clinton, who was just dumped in as the winter freeze-up was taking place. As a matter of fact, the aircraft had to break its way through the first ice that was forming on the bay. And he was just dumped off there with some supplies and dogs and he had to build his cabin, prepare for the winter, and then go up the lake on the first ice. And he just took a map, all he had was a map. And hit all the fish camps, you know, to say that he was there to look after their needs. Sure, collecting licenses and so on, and enforce the regulations but mainly by way of assisting, you know. That, and you know, radio communication and...

Murray: So the people in the field were pretty good people as far as you were....?

Allan: I feel that there existed a nucleus for bringing programs about that could've been people-oriented programs, you know, and that there wasn't the matter of a heavy hand. But gradually this too changed and from the way I view it, you know, in the years that I've now lived in the north, which has been thirty years, I view these things always moving more and more into a bureaucratic external force, superimposed....

Murray: Technocratic sort of goals.

Allan: Right. I suppose the saddest one of all is education, you know. I just feel there has been a failure from the time that the Piercy Report was brought down and it was decided that public education should be brought to the north. I can see no good coming out. Nothing but things that have acted to the detriment of people. I'm speaking now of native people. I don't say that it hasn't assisted people who live in the white culture, but certainly it has had a very devastating effect on people of Indian ancestry.

Murray: Could you elaborate on that, the whole education aspect and what the Piercy Report had suggested and where education went wrong?
Allan: ...pursued and will have to be pursued in the future. You know, when you look at the Department of Natural Resources now and the types of programs that they are implementing, they aren't taking these things into consideration. And the thing is that, therefore, they are going to be faced more and more with the problems of people gathering in urban areas and becoming a problem because there is no economic base. You have situations that exist in northern settlements where there are several hundred young people now under the age of 20 who probably have a grade four or five, six education. No skills.

Murray: They don't go in the bush, they don't...?

Allan: No, they don't. Where do they go?

Murray: Right. Getting back to the earlier years, was that problem of education, the disruption it caused, I mean it must've been seen by people, what was the response by people like yourself and people in the department to that? Did they try and solve that? What did you see at the time as a possible solution to it?

Allan: Well, I have to admit at that particular time that I felt the whole education process, and this is a cliche again, they say that education is the key to our changing the world. And it depends upon what kind of education, you know. If you were going to go blithely along and teach so many engineers, you're going to graduate 400 engineers, and you only have room for 200 to be employed, what do you do with the other 200 and so on? Unless you address yourself to the problems as they exist in total - and mainly, again, this becomes a political problem. And I think that we, in middle class capitalism, we realize that the exploitive process, and the process in the north particularly, is one of colonization. And the education has never taken on the aspect of where you want to identify through the educational process to these people what has happened to them, what is happening to them now, so they can respond to this. That isn't told for very obvious reasons. Because then, sometime in the near future, all hell would break loose, because they would demand that things change.

So at the particular time, you say, what did I think about it? Well, I had long talks with Chet Piercy and I was sold on the idea. I could see it. Obviously, you know, when you have youngsters that can stay at home, nobody likes to be separated from their family and so on and I thought that it seemed like a good idea. But after it once was implemented, it was only a matter of two, three years, you could see that there was huge gaps in this thing that had to be filled in and it just wasn't going to work.
Murray: It just hadn't been seen ahead of time.

Allan: Right, right, it wasn't thought out. To give you an idea, I went recently here to a community over on the east side of the province, Sturgeon Landing. I don't know what order it is that had a Catholic school there but they had upwards of 200 youngsters staying and they came from a number of different spots in northern Saskatchewan. This whole school complex was almost self-supporting from the production angle, from the agricultural production in that area. There are fields there now that have grown up with grass, I don't know how many acres that they had tilled at that time. But they had cattle, they had chickens,...

Murray: This was in the forties, was it?

Allan: Yes, this school burned down. Ah, it seems to me it was 1952, if I'm not mistaken, when the school burned down. But they had it well-organized. The youngsters went there and the whole community would, you know... For instance, the boilers were wood burning boilers that they heated. There was central heating. And they had their own power, their own electrical power. But the thing was that the community were, there was an agricultural pursuit. People had vegetables, people had produce and so on. Now you would think that somewhere that this process could be carried on on a community basis and every community in northern Saskatchewan could do this, in addition to taking the natural resource development in the area, basic natural resource development. We don't have to go to the sophisticated things like mining resources, large scale wood resource development, or water power development, but just getting down to the fish and the fur and the tourism in the area and doing things for themselves on a community basis instead of the entrepreneurial basis. Well, in a way here, the church was the nucleus in this particular instance. The church was the nucleus and one can say, "Okay, they comprised the force." As long as the people identified with it, fine. You know, I think that these are decisions that people have to make when it comes to what they want to do for themselves, and if they identify this closely with the church and there isn't a blatant disregard for human rights in here, fine.

Murray: It's a pretty positive operation.

Allan: It's a positive operation in that it was achieving certain good things, certain good goals. Now, we don't see any of this go on. Well, even here in La Ronge, the Anglican church had a school here and you can still see the influence of the people that went through that school. I've talked to a lot of them. Sure, a lot of them spoke about some of the things that they didn't like. They felt confined, and a lot of them tried to get away and did take off to go home. You address yourself then to how to make an organization like this a concerned organization where you don't use the repressive measures in trying to keep young people in the system.
Murray: You maintain the positive parts but try and get rid of the negative.

Allan: Right. And when you get back to education here, you know, we are building many marvelous schools but basically, I have to say that the people that benefit out of the schools are the people who become the teachers in there, that go into northern settlements, who have now very nice housing and very, very well looked after, live in a sort of a little ghetto of their own creation.

Murray: Isolated from the realities.

Allan: Isolated from the realities of the situation of the youngsters that they are teaching.

Murray: What about curriculum? That must've been a problem as well and probably still is.

Allan: Well, I think that they took curriculums that were pretty basic to a southern school, you know, at the same grade levels.

Murray: Right. Woodrow Lloyd was Minister of Education; he must've been involved in a lot of this. What seemed to be his response to the education problem?

Allan: I always found Woodrow Lloyd a tremendous person and I think a person that probably understood, you know, really better than any of the premiers that we've had within the CCF or the NDP, the problems that were present and tried to address himself to changing these. And I'm not just speaking of northern Saskatchewan, but to the province as a whole. And I must honestly say that I didn't come to any real discussion on this up here at that time - just didn't have the opportunity. I know that I have had several discussions with him on northern problems generally and I know that we touched on education and I know that he could see that many of these things were wrong. But you want to remember that when he took over, that so many things had happened, and the entrenchment, and the bureaucracy has a way of perpetuating itself and hanging on. Political leaders, you know, have to be very astute and have to be very convincing, have to be able to get people in key positions to be able to do things. Otherwise, you know, they'll kill you every time. The bureaucracy will kill politicians every time. I think this becomes more and more apparent. I think that there are so many things today that probably the people at the provincial level, and certainly at the federal level, would like to bring about but they're...

Murray: Stymied.

Allan: They are like the giant that's tied down by the threads of the Lilliputians, you know. They get to be helpless giants. Plus the fact that there are a lot of people calling the shots from the outside because middle class capitalism perpetuates
itself through this system.

Murray: Let's get back to some of the programs that were developed with regard to resources in the north. Could you give a bit of an idea of the fish marketing system and perhaps the kind of thing I was thinking of is the original intention and sort of the reaction of the fish companies, that kind of thing?

Allan: Oh, the Fish Board, the original Fish Board really drew a reaction from the industry because the fish industry was a very close-knit industry that was controlled in the large market areas in the United States because the flow of fish down into these areas got down to very few hands.

Murray: So you weren't dealing with just a couple of little companies?

Allan: No, you're not dealing with a couple. There were some giants and it's a real jungle, it's a real jungle. And particularly with the restrictions that the industry had in getting fish across the line. You were dealing with, at that time, A and B fish. Fish that had a tolerance in the whitefish of a certain parasite count and before you could get them in as A fish and then the rest would have to be filleted. And the thing is that if the right people were contacted at the right time, I repeat from people that were in the industry from a long time, if the payoffs were made in the right direction, certain people could get fish across and they found their way and other people would get their fish bumped at the line through inspection. So you had this whole thing to fight plus the fact that as you backed this up right to the lake, now the fish buyers had ties with these people and the fish buyers that used to go out, would have to, in many instances, would have to supply equipment, would have to extend money and so on. So it really had the fisherman in a position of not being able to do anything. They either market their fish through the individual that was backing them or they just wouldn't be able to survive. And then the other thing is that all the rest of this existed, of course. The price of the fish in the lake was almost incidental. All these other things had to be paid for and it was the fisherman that always suffered at the end and very often, if it was winter fishing and the year was bad, a lot of the fish wouldn't even be purchased at all.

Murray: What did the Fish Board attempt to do to confront that sort of problem?

Allan: Well, they started out by acting as an agency where they said in certain areas, certain designated areas... There were certain areas that were free here too, where fish buyers could go in and also there were certain areas that they deemed that inadvisable. It would have been a sort of a serious disruption of a normal flow. Well, say for instance if a certain company would have a filleting plant in an area and then all at once someone is allowed to disrupt this, you had to
have a flow of fish into that filleting plant. You couldn't very well turn around and let buyers come in and just sort of pick off a fish, because the person would have to have sort of an integrated operation to assure that this was going to work. And what you were doing really then is, in many instances, you were accused of allowing this person to operate because he now was sort of a friend of the government. This caused some disruptive thing. For instance, on the west side, you know, Len Waite operated there. He had a filleting plant at Buffalo Narrows and of course, everybody said, "You know, it seems funny, Len Waite can keep on operating and the government goes into these other areas." Len Waite had a filleting plant and well, I would say this, quite early on Len Waite was prepared to make the policy of the government. He was prepared to go along with it while others fought it bitterly. You know, did everything, through everything. Well probably that may have been clever politics on the part of Len Waite. They're still in existence over there today although his son is acting as an agent on behalf of the Fresh Water Fish Marketing Corporation which is now a federal agency. And that sort of was the beginning. And the whole idea of marketing fish through a central agency as we know it, within the type of economy we have, is quite sound. It's being used on agricultural products and that really was what the Fish Board was trying to do. Now, it gives you control over a certain volume of fish so you're able to go down to the Detroit buccaneers that operate in fish and have the final say and you can turn around and in many instances, if you have a good lake area and they want to get a certain amount of fish like trout or they want to get some nice A whitefish, you then turn around and you can say, "Well, look it, you take so many of our other fish too, otherwise you just don't have access to this." So it gives you a little...

Murray: So it gives you power.

Allan: Yes, it does give you a certain amount of marketing power.

Murray: And that did result in better prices for the native people, did it?

Allan: I think that what it did in many instances, it brought a little bit more stability. I don't say that it brought back an alleviation of the fishing industry itself right at the ice level because the people at the ice level are going out under terrifically hard physical conditions. You are out there in below zero weather, chiselling basin holes and running jiggers under and setting this all in these sub-freezing temperatures. So this isn't easy. Now, a lot of people like it and I've done it and I can say that the experience was tremendous. At the time, it's damn hard work and it's suffering. I don't give a damn how you want to look at it. Now the thing is to return to this person something that is fair and equitable for what money he has invested and what effort. That has never been equitable. That whole industry has been riding on his back.
And you begin to look, and that's right, you got down to the primary producer today and this is still in existence. It's in existence in your agricultural economy unless you get that large that you are able to now have such quantities of money, equipment, and land at your disposal, but for the person that is down there on the family farm level and that, and the swings up and down, this exists and this is this much tougher.

Murray: How did the native person respond to the development of the fish marketing system? Was it a positive response?

Allan: I think that what they really did was they responded in many ways like they did to a lot of the other things. Well, look it, this is something that the white man's come along and he says it's going to happen and there wasn't any resistance. With some people there may have been some agitation, some people were more vocal, but a clear understanding of the situation I don't think was really ever there. And it gets back to, again, we can't look upon this today. All kinds of things have been done to try to make fresh water fishing a viable industry, and nobody seems to be able to do it. And I don't think we will be able to do it as long as we go on the basis of, it's got to be a dollars and cents thing. Miles of transportation from here to the huge fish markets which are basically across the line and the thing is that until fish is looked upon as a protein food that is required by some individual who is hungry to sustain him and that regardless of what the hell the cost is to get, the cost has got to be forgotten about.

Murray: Until the fish is three dollars a pound, the fishermen aren't going to make good on it.

Allan: Right. And you see, particularly in an inflated period of times. When you look now at what I used to buy webbing for, and by webbing I mean the net itself, and the nets were always hung down in Winnipeg. They'd bring in women to hang these nets. The nets used to be hung up here, people knew how to do this themselves. They could take this and tie them into the various mesh sizes. Well then finally from cotton, cotton of course would, if you didn't look after your nets real well, they didn't last too long because they would rot. You get fish slime, you'd have to wash them and you'd have to take real good care of them and dry them out. But when you look at your floats now, your floats and your leads and the net itself. And now it's nylon and the side line is nylon and you look at the tremendous cost, the expense that this is, you know.

Murray: And a minimal increase in price...

Allan: And the minimal increase in price.

Murray: The situation in fur was similar. What were the policies in the fur marketing thing? There was, I believe, an establishment of a block system. Could you describe that a bit and what the intention was there?
Allan: Well, the fur conservation blocks came into being. That was another innovation that was done under a joint agreement by the provincial and federal governments. But again, mind you, they had some fellows federally that were pretty well aware of the situation on their own, had some programs going where they challenged the authority of the way raw fur was handled generally in the north. And the conservation blocks were established and within this there was elected councillors. Then people would set fur quotas on spring fur because, see, there was a serious depletion of this kind of fur. Before, there was a very haphazard method and a great deal of bootlegging, particularly in beaver because, as beaver numbers declined and the fur became scarce, well of course, the value of it went up. And the only way they would respond to this was turn around and if there was a given area where there was beaver, they would probably open up a season, you see. And somebody would take this and then again it was depleted. But there were very few of these areas left because they closed the seasons for long periods of time and the value of the fur, of course, went up. Then they would be bootlegged out and would work through the channels. Well, I think again there was an inquiry. I can't quote you the inquiry but one of the foremost companies that operated, Sudacs(?) you know, just stated that they couldn't have stayed in business if they wouldn't have purchased this kind of fur in between seasons.

Murray: Was there an organized opposition to the fur marketing plan?

Allan: Oh yes, there was. Again the free traders were very opposed to this.

Murray: What were their tactics, their strategy to oppose it?

Allan: Well basically, you know, with the company, the Hudson's Bay Company and the free traders, the method that was generally used is that when you would come up to get credit, they would just point out, well, how could they give you credit because the government was taking all the fur. And in most instances, these fellows were also knowledgeable in the language, would be able to converse in the native language. I know for years the Hudson's Bay Company had a policy where they gave a man only a certain length of time that he was in their employ and he had to learn the language of the area, at least the basic language.

Murray: So they were very smart as far as...?

Allan: So they would be able to turn around and use this type of tactic. And in many instances, these were used as collection points for spring fur. You know, again I have to say this in all fairness, the Hudson's Bay Company used to have their manager go around with the federal and the provincial representative. We had Bill Tunstead looked after that program on a provincial basis and Hugh Conn was a federal...
representative. The Hudson's Bay used to go around, Bill and the Hudson's Bay manager would go around, and I would say they were quite cooperative in this. Because already there were some decline in the fur industry as to the monies that were being made, as to the marketing of raw fur and a lot of it was made on the trade goods. But of course, you could make it two ways otherwise. But they were quite cooperative that way. I think a good deal of the opposition, of course, came from a lot of the free traders because they, you know,...

Murray: It was a political organizing sort of opposition. Just trying to get trappers to...

Allan: Well, I think that when you have a private entrepreneurial approach and people come into a country and the north is always, you know, the north, strong, true and free. You feel that you're free of almost any sort of...

Murray: Regulation.

Allan: Regulations. You turn around and you buy, you sell and you got a license to buy and sell. And it almost gives you carte blanche to operate the way you want to operate. And, as a bureaucracy moves in, there are more and more controls. There is always things that follow that you don't like and, you know, even when a person is dedicated to change, he unconsciously opposes change. He has to always bring himself around to thinking when he sees things happening around and he sees them as something bad, and you have to say, "Well, look. Let's just stop and..."

Murray: One of the other things the government did in this period, this is the last sort of area like this I want to get at, was the establishment of government stores. Could you describe that from the beginning and what inspired that?

Allan: Well, again, the idea of the government trading stores, Saskatchewan Government Trading as they were called, came about through this thing of establishing certain restrictions as far as the fishing was concerned, where there was compulsory areas, these compulsory areas that fish had to be marketed through the Saskatchewan Fish Board. Now you were into the thing of, who supplies these individuals? He didn't have any control over credit extension anymore. Free trader who used to turn around and do this, he'd have some because he usually was buying fish, he was buying fur and so on.

Murray: He could stop when he wanted to.

Allan: And now, it forced the government into this position of, "Well, how do we respond to this?" For a while, they did it through the Fish Board itself. They got into this, they were sort of backed into it. And as they got backed into it, it became obvious that it created more and more problems. Now, someone, let's say for instance you could take a fish buyer
like Len Waite. He supplied certain basics to his fishing industry up there that had to do with fishing and then probably he had private individuals that were private stores and traders and would work in with them. They would supply a certain part and he could probably guarantee back that they would get paid. But here, when the Fish Board got in, because of this opposition and everything, they were really out on a limb. So, gradually, they got into the establishment of Saskatchewan Government Trading and Saskatchewan Government Trading then formed these stores and they actually were separated. For a while, they worked very, very closely. I can't really tell you just exactly when the division was made at that time but that's eventually how they came into being and they existed until such time as they decided to establish these stores on a cooperative basis. And actually they aren't true cooperatives, they were sort of an ersatz crown company. Northern cooperative trading services were established and they...

Murray: It was a top-down co-op.

Allan: Right, a top-down co-op and it's been always under management and what you did is you had tokenism by way of local boards.

Murray: Right. There was opposition from the managers of the government stores when they decided to change them into co-ops, is that true?

Allan: Yeah, there was some. Again people, you know, worry about their positions and things and so on and I think that there is internal problems and so on.

Murray: They were generally successful though as far as...

Allan: Yeah, generally the cooperative trading services have helped, I think, the northern economy in that there is some local participation. Even if it's on the basis of where there isn't any real power, people did learn the process.

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