



# FRONTIER CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Profile Series

*Profile of:*

## JEAN ALLARD

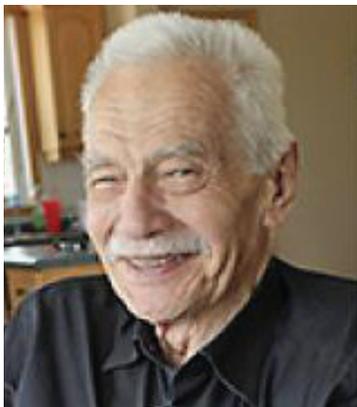
" he had big thoughts and an incurable optimism "

"The Jean Allard I knew was a big man, a strong man, forceful, utterly determined. He had an adequate sense of his worth, but that was based more upon his ideas than on hubris. He had seen enough of the world's troubles to have the essential humility of one who never forgot his origins and helping those who had not come as far as he had. He had that ability to move equally among the upper classes of power and ideas as well as the lesser among us who were his greater concern. When I knew him he had big thoughts and an incurable optimism that they would one day work out. And he made progress. Both by deed and example he has left us a better world."

Gordon Gibson

Canada and Manitoba have lost one of its most prominent Metis voices recently, as well as an important advocate for individual Indigenous empowerment.

Jean Rene Allard died at the age of 90. Born in 1930, Allard was a Metis activist and a one-time Manitoba politician. The son of Alfred Allard and Donald Champagne, Allard was educated at the Collège de Saint-Boniface and at the University of Manitoba. Allard boasted of sharing some direct descent with Metis leader Louis Riel.



Allard worked as a lawyer, served as leader of the Union Nationale Metisse, and served as a member of the Louis Riel Society and the St. Boniface Historical Society. Throughout his life, Allard promoted Metis people in Manitoba and Canadian politics, and he advanced the cause of increasing visibility of Metis history and rights.

He first came to major public attention when he joined a citizen's group in pushing for the inclusion of a statue of Louis Riel on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislature. Allard famously advocated that the monument be placed alongside a statue of Queen Victoria; he insisted that Riel was always loyal to the Queen, despite his insurrectionist past. A stylized monument was eventually erected on the site. Allard was also made famous over the same statue when he chained himself to it to protest plans to remove it from the Manitoba Legislature in 1994.



Allard had a short political career. At first, he ran as a Liberal for election to the Manitoba Legislature in the 1966 election and finished second behind Progressive Conservative incumbent Joseph Jeannotte in the northern Manitoba riding of Rupertsland.

He would come to prominence representing the vast northern Manitoba riding of Rupertsland in the government of NDP premier Ed Schreyer after being elected to the Manitoba Legislature in 1969. Many observers described his commitment to the NDP as tenuous and superficial, as he opposed socialism and was a strong social conservative. He later explained that he was more attracted to the NDP due to the populism of Ed Schreyer. In 1972, he left the NDP caucus and sat as an independent, complaining of radicalism within the party. Allard ran for the federal Liberal Party in the 1974 federal election in a northern Manitoba riding, but lost.

Although this ended his career in elected politics, this did not end his career in the battle of ideas nor his tireless advocacy for Indigenous empowerment.

It was Allard's observations about Indigenous communities and governance that got him much attention, as well as controversy. Although a Metis person, he had close personal contact with the Indian Affairs bureaucracy and the workings of the First Nation band council system. Allard was critical of the "Indian Industry" of bureaucrats and consultants, which he saw as profiting from Indigenous oversight and poverty.

"A man of great personal presence and dignity--as is obvious should you have the chance to meet him--he has been able to command the respect and confidence of his peers. A man with no personal entanglements in the Indian system, he is able to see it for what it is," wrote public policy expert Gordon Gibson, in the foreword to Allard's book on the Big Bear proposal. Even many years after their collaboration, Gibson still had fond words for his old friend "The Jean Allard I knew was a big man, a strong man, forceful, utterly determined. He had an adequate sense of his worth, but that was based more upon his ideas than on hubris. He had seen enough of the world's troubles to have the essential humility of one who never forgot his origins and helping those who had not come as far as he had. He had that ability to move equally among the upper classes of power and ideas as well as the lesser among us who were his greater concern. When I knew him he had big thoughts and an incurable optimism that they would one day work out. And he made progress. Both by deed and example he has left us a better world."

His proposal – called the "Big Bear solution," harkened back to a 19th-century treaty signed by Cree Chief Big Bear. A key provision of the treaty was to pay each Indian \$5 per year. The payments were a part of the compensation paid to Indigenous communities for their loss of land and economic livelihood. Although five dollars in the 19th century amounted to much, in today's dollars it is pittance. Allard's idea was to modernize the treaty land annuities and pay them out to families. The key difference would be the money would bypass the Indigenous Affairs bureaucracy and band councils. In fact, Allard's idea was to reduce the transfers sent to the bureaucracy and

band councils and send it instead to individuals and families. His idea was to significantly tilt economic and political power away from unaccountable bureaucrats and politicians and advance Indigenous individual rights.

In 2002, Allard had a commentary published in *Inroads*, a journal of Queen's University, on his Big Bear proposal. In it, Allard showed his great depth of knowledge of Indigenous history and affairs. He situated himself within the great tradition of Canadian Indigenous rights advocates. However, Allard pulled no punches in criticizing the dysfunctional state of Indigenous life – especially in the area of Indigenous governance. Allard saw the lack of checks and balances inherent within many Indian Act bands. He cited contemporary examples of corrupt and unaccountable Indigenous governance as evidence for his points. He also outlined how the problems originated in an over-emphasis on the collective and a de-emphasis on individuals and families. He then looked at how treaty interpretation down through the century has been the problem, citing the example of individual treaty annuities. Allard mentioned how all other treaty provisions – such as clauses related to a medicine chest or clauses mentioning pestilence and families – have all been modernized and expanded to all Status Indians. He wrote that the problem was that the annuities were not modernized or updated, or as he put it in his journal article: "It was five dollars in 1871. It remains five dollars at the time of writing this book."

Allard wrote eloquently in his book about how the problem was rooted in historical interpretation:

"What was intended by leaders like Big Bear as a means for individual empowerment within the band collective has been trivialized so that today it serves only a minor ceremonial role. Treaty money is still five dollars because grassroots Indians have never been involved in making any of the decisions, and the leaders have never advocated for the rights of the individual. Individual rights provide no benefits to the system and would only serve to undermine its control."

Finally, he traced many of the problems plaguing Indigenous communities with the breakdown of the family unit on the reserve that he argued was part of the disempowerment of individuals and the growth of the welfare state, dependency, and loss of control and agency.

After his departure from partisan politics, Allard never let his passion and advocacy for empowering Indigenous communities to die. He continued to advance his cause of modernized annuities, up until very recently, through non-political vehicles. Allard was a founding co-chair of the Treaty Annuity Working Group (a special committee of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2002-2005) and he worked across partisan divides to advance this cause.

Most recently, Allard collaborated with the working group and its members Gregory Mason, Sheilla Jones, Wayne Helgason, and Sheila North in publishing a significant article in the Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development. It will be a legacy to his life's work and advocacy.

Allard's life stands in the modern Indigenous world as a beacon of hope for positive and lasting change. In a policy world obsessed with divisive identity politics, Allard's ideas represent concrete changes that will advance Indigenous people in their everyday life and will advance true Indigenous economic reconciliation. Let us hope politicians do not squander his important legacy and re-look at his policy ideas with fresh eyes.



203-2727 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3J 0R2  
Tel: 204-957-1567  
Email: manitoba@fcpp.org

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Joseph Quesnel is a research fellow for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who mainly focuses on Aboriginal matters and property rights. Presently based in eastern Nova Scotia, he is from northeastern Ontario and has Métis ancestry from Quebec.

He graduated from McGill University in 2001, where he majored in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and U.S. politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. He also has a Master of Journalism degree from Carleton University, where he specialized in political reporting. His master's research project focused on reformist Indigenous thinkers in Canada.

He is currently studying theology at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax.

In the past while as a policy analyst, he was the lead researcher on the Frontier Centre's flagship Aboriginal Governance Index, which is measured perceptions of quality of governance and services on Prairie First Nations. For over two years, he covered House standing committees as well as Senate committees. Quesnel's career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including in Sudbury and Espanola. He also completed a radio broadcasting internship at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa, and the well-known Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

He is a past editor of C2C Journal, an online Canadian publication devoted to political commentary. He wrote a weekly column for the Winnipeg Sun and contributes to The Taxpayer, the flagship publication of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Quesnel's policy commentaries have appeared all over Canada, including the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Financial Post, the Vancouver Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, Winnipeg Free Press, among many other major papers. Over the years, he has been featured as a guest commentator on many radio and television news programs.

