

Who are you, and how, how did you come to find yourself running in this election?

I'm a professor in the history department at St FX. And I've been here since 2004.

The first thing that brought me into political activity at Antigonish was the brutal reality of homophobia here. It was quite bad when I got here. In fact, I was told by friends who knew Antigonish much better than I did that I would probably be crazy to accept the job, because the perception was that the nature of racism and homophobia, particularly at St FX was pretty bad. They were doubtful about my ability to survive it.

My intention was to really just kind of keep quiet for five years, get my tenure, and then see what I could do politically.

But this first year I was here there were two very serious homophobic incidents. One was where a Black international student from the Caribbean was assaulted in a serious attack that was both racist and homophobic, and hospitalized as a result. That was in the fall of 2004.

And then not long after that another guy that I knew, Andrew Murray, was also attacked. He had been jumped by a couple of people on his way home from the pub here. This was by two members of the football team of StFX that had beaten Andrew. So it was also a St FX problem. Andrew was also hospitalized.

In the first instance, there was a rally organised by Dr. Agnes Callyste, she was she was a sociology professor and the faculty advisors for an organization that was known on campus as the Brothers and Sisters of the African Diaspora.

The second incident was also clearly homophobic. So I took it upon myself to organize a protest, and we marched from campus with about

300 or 400 people, to the Town Hall, to express our opposition to this sort of thing.

It had to be public. Andrew himself told me later that it had been his intention just to be quiet about it, and hope that it would pass. Which is pretty typical in how those kinds of incidents here were handled in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

All this made me realize that just being quiet and in the closet was not going to be a possibility at all. So that sort of outed me right in that moment.

The university administration decided that there needed to be some kind of support for LGBTQ students on campus. And that perhaps one of the things they should do would be to appoint a faculty advisor for those students. They created a mandate for me which was really a license to organize.

So I took that opportunity and ran with it. And it turned into quite a run. We renewed the student society on campus, made it very public and then started organizing very public pride weeks at StFX, and pride marches in town on a regular basis.

I also began organizing a drag show, as an opportunity to provide a space because there was none here, there still are none. There's nowhere you can go and feel safe if you have a relationship with somebody, or you want to go on a date. So this would be our night. And we called it Priscilla, Queen of the Highlands. It's taken off to become probably the biggest and one of the best drag shows east of Montreal.

That's one piece of what I do here. The other piece is my work with the union on campus. I've always been a union person, and I had the opportunity to participate in two card drives for unions, one here at St FX, and the other one at my grad school at Brown University. I had also worked for the United Auto Workers for two years as an organizer.

I was on the first union executive at StFX. And I have been ever since except for break for years when I just needed to unplug from it.

I served as a grievance officer for many of those years, and that put me into contact with most of the most of our members at StFX, because I ended up advocating for them at one point or another. That led to my appointment as the strike coordinator in 2012-2013 when we walked out.

I am also a drag performer. And I have served as the Empress of Halifax in 2010, I spent a year raising money for LGBTQ charities.

I perform regularly here, so I have that as a side career. I was married until just a few years ago. Also, I'm kind of embedded in the hockey community here in Antigonish as well. I probably play three or four games a week, which I'm actually probably overly proud of. But I mean, I'm 60...

So that's who I am in a nutshell.

Let's talk about communism and how it informs what you are doing. And, related to that, are you in this campaign to win? Or for another reason?

I have never campaigned on anything not to win. And maybe it's a sleight of hand, but winning could mean getting elected, or pushing a political agenda further. Mostly I'm trying to add some depth to political conversations that are happening in this constituency. I just find that it's very narrowly conceived, and most of the candidates are, are following a strategy that I see as being unconscionably safe. Especially in a time like the one we're living, where really if we don't do something bold and meaningful, it may end up being too late for us. We have a climate crisis above all else, which really has to be addressed. It is now no longer a matter of trying to save the polar bears, this is about attempting to save humanity, period. The question also is, what kind of a future do we want? Are we ready to just settle for anything, just for being saved? Or

do we want to take this opportunity to make the world into a better place. That's my message.

We can do something to slow down, and at least stabilize the climate situation. We need to do so in a way that's not only going to be effective, but that will also set the stage for a world where life is equitable, and where people don't experience oppression and exploitation.

What has brought us to this point is the capacity of capitalism to generate profit from the misery of others. It is as if the ruling class has learned to turn off their empathy for the suffering of others, extract resources, as much as they can and sell them for as much as they can and exploit the labor of others as much as they can. And all of it is a wasteful process. It's almost as if it's ingrained in the system.

Now, I mentioned this, because I keep hearing from the liberals and the conservatives that really nothing has to change. Our Prime Minister actually just proposed that you can buy a pipeline and take oil out of the ground, and then use the proceeds to plant 2 billion trees and save the earth. It's lunacy. It tells me they do not have a firm grasp on the reality of the science confronting us.

I'm personally quite frightened by that, if they really believe that, then we're in a much worse place than I ever would have thought.

My ideas are informed by communism, which means that we have resources that absolutely need to be shared equitably, and not to be plundered, not to be exploited, but used to sustain people as they grow. And as communities develop and grow, they just needs to be sustainable.

From each **according** to his ability, to each **according** to his **needs**", that's a fundamental premise in my approach in a nutshell. That is what distinguishes me from other candidates. And perhaps it's just that I somehow see fairly clearly that we live in a class based society where a

very small handful profit from our resources and the rest of us are left to scramble as best we can.

And We don't have to do it that way, you know, a better world is possible.

The problem I see is that we just have very little time left. I was doing the calculations recently. We have approximately seven election cycles left before it's too late. In my life, I've already lived through 10 election cycles.

We've tinkered with the system as it is, I think, as much as we can. We have exhausted possibilities under capitalism, and this is why we're plunging into crisis.

If I have any advantage it is that I'm a historian. I'm always looking at these things as a historian,

It astounds me that in 150 years, such a short period of time, we've moved from the beginning of industrial production based on mass extraction and mass production, and how quickly that has run its course.

And if you were to chart the correlation between the increase of production and increasing profits, and the damage that is being done to the climate, it tracks almost completely. There is no question that this is a function of industrial production, but more specifically, of capitalism

We have at least one example of a of a socialist state that actually has confronted this kind of a crisis and survived it. And this was Cuba. in the 1990s. So there is a possibility for creative and successful human response. But I don't believe that we can manage it any longer within the confines of a system that is committed to profit first and foremost, profit above the interests of people, profit above nature.

What is going on in rural Nova Scotia in terms of outmigration, an aging population, and similar well-publicized issues? What needs to be done to turn that around?

We're just another resource, and that resource is labour power. People are being pulled out of their communities to somewhere else, whether that's to Halifax, or whether it's further away. People become desperate enough when conditions continue to deteriorate. That's what we're witnessing here.

And then again, (in Antigonish) we're relatively lucky, we benefit from the presence of a university as well as hospital. This really does drive employment in Antigonish, but this too has some very negative features that come along with it. We live in or in a rental market which has been completely captured by absentee landlords. The price of real estate here is distorted beyond belief, because most of the housing stock is in the hands of absentee landlords. And they will charge \$400 to \$600 for a room. They subdivide houses to get more rooms out of it. And that in turn artificially inflates the price of all the real estate around it.

Now low income people, working class people, are not living in town any longer, We're surrounded by communities of trailer parks, right outside of the town limits, because property taxes are cheaper in the county, and land is cheaper in the county. They're literally being pushed out of town by the cost of real estate.

The cutbacks to the hospital will also become a problem, We have a health care system which is under attack. I am quite certain that the intention is to deliberately cause a crisis in the healthcare system so that it can be privatized, broken up and sold off. There's a P3 that's going up in Sydney. That's the beginning of it. That's going to be another blow to the economy here.

And the same thing with the university. It boggles my mind that students are paying are paying \$8,000 or \$9,000 a year for an education at StFX.

Meanwhile, the support workforce at StFX was much larger when I arrived. Now many of the positions are part time or casual. So they get away with paying them less, and offering fewer benefits.

This pushes the standard of living down even further in Antigonish. But we're fortunate. We have these problems here in Antigonish, but we're still better off than say New Glasgow, Pictou, or Stellarton.

It's no wonder that the union for Northern pulp, for example, is fighting as hard as they can, I think wrongly, to keep the mill open. Because closing it down is going to lead to job losses and poverty for a lot of people. And it is a horrible choice to have to make. What they do want is jobs with good wages and benefits. What I don't understand is why a solution can't be reached where you transition those workers out of that workplace, without any loss of pay or benefits.

First of all, compensate the residents of Pictou Landing, They have borne the worst of it. That mill has destroyed human bodies, it has destroyed the environment in the community and beyond, into Pictou County itself.

There's no question that the mill needs to be closed. Unless there are plans for the transition, then we're not really taking climate change seriously. Northern Pulp is a flashpoint for the whole thing. If the McNeil government had the slightest sense of decency they would be looking for a way to protect the citizens of that area rather than the interests of the owners of Northern Pulp, which is pretty much all they're doing.

The same thing with the federal government. I like John Fraser a lot as a person, but his government has been dancing around this issue without making any firm commitments other than just to study it. And the time for studying is over, the time for doing something is actually upon us. Somebody's got to show some leadership.

People ask, so what's the alternatives? I don't have all the answers, but I know where we can start. And one place is by investing money back into rural Nova Scotia. Lots of young people leave here, not because they want to, but because there are no opportunities for them.

So what can we do to create opportunities for them? How can we make it more attractive? One thing that we absolutely need is a stable and affordable power grid across this province. Our power lines fall down at even the hint of a storm now. Because Nova Scotia does not want to invest that kind of money into its infrastructure, they will run it to the ground first.

This begins with expropriating Nova Scotia Power and put it back into the public domain. Then all the work that needs to make the power lines more stable will generate jobs in rural areas.

Another thing, is mass transportation. We have everybody chained to their cars, because they can't rely on a bus service and there is no passenger rail. And some people do not have cars. Transit may or may not operate at a loss, but we have an obligation to provide that to people. It needs to run regularly, and it needs to run not just from Sydney to Halifax.

We have rails here, I hear the freight train coming through every night. There's not a lot of traffic on those rails anymore. We could run carbon neutral train passenger service on those tracks as well. So it's possible to provide affordable mass public transportation, but we don't have it. It's a crying need. It would create jobs, building the infrastructure, maintaining the infrastructure and operating it.

The school system is really challenged. The cutbacks that are made to do education are just truly outrageous. Squeezing more students into a classroom. We need more teachers, we have teachers who need jobs, why don't we employ them and employ them in rural Nova Scotia?

Then there is promotion of culture. One of the things that I really love, and it surprised me a lot when I first moved here, was this powerful do it yourself mentality in this community. I'm sure it exists elsewhere as well. If something is lacking, people find ways to make it happen.

How you would deal with the deep poverty that exists in rural Nova Scotia.

Most people in this riding live within a few dollars of financial disaster every month, and other people, often people on welfare, actually live in that state of financial disaster constantly. It breaks people mentally and physically. It's just so hard to bear, and children often bear the worst.

So what can we do? Well, we must guarantee food security. We need to start thinking about changing the way we produce food in order to make it easier, and more profitable to a degree, for small producers to survive here. That's the production side, then there's the distribution side.

In recent years, since I got here, it's Loblaws and Sobeys who run the show here. They get to decide what foods come in, and how much they're going to charge for it. It's also a major site of exploitation of labour for both young people and old people.

We need to take control over how food is produced, how it is distributed, and what it costs to consume. People need to have a guaranteed basic supply of healthy food. It has to be guaranteed, people have to eat.

The second thing to do is to build social housing throughout rural Nova Scotia that keeps rents low. And not just housing that's run by some government agency. It has to be run on a democratic basis, so that tenants themselves decide. In that sense we're talking about a collective ownership, that gives people some control and power over their lives. That's one of the things that's missing in a lot of what we do.

Across the country we're calling for a million units of social housing to be built. We are in a serious housing crisis. We must have an effective tenancy act, especially one that has an effective mechanism for filing complaints against landlords who are violating the law. I would also like to see rent control reintroduced.

It's also about the income you earn, which is not enough. We need a living wage, I'm pretty sure is around the \$20 an hour mark. We should be guaranteeing people a living wage and control their major expenses, which include transportation, housing, and food on your table, and your utilities. If that was a unified, integrated program for reform in this province, then we would strike a mortal blow against poverty here.

Okay, Chris, is there anything else? Anything I should have asked you about?

Well, the only other thing I would say is that one of the issues that I'm very concerned about are the circumstances for First Nations people and the tendency of governments, both provincial and federal to run roughshod over their rights. I am thinking of Alton Gas Pictou Landing as just two examples. I have come to the conclusion that we cannot solve the climate crisis without respecting the rights of Indigenous communities in Canada, the two go hand in hand.

The other issue is about racism, pure and simple. Sometimes it's like a polite racism here, but it's deep. There are lots of people of color in his community, but they're hidden away. This is a matter of racism, pure and simple.

The final is ensuring that the rights of LGBTQ people are protected and respected. Partly because this is personal, and partly because through my advocacy for LGBTQ people I have acquired a better understanding of how prejudice and discrimination affects other communities here as well.

We cannot meaningfully talk about creating a just society or a society where people get a fair shot when we're still being afflicted by that kind of hatred.