

EDITORIAL

AS THE FINAL STAGES of the Nisga'a treaty are debated in Ottawa and British Columbia, it is particularly appropriate to reflect on the last major treaty in the province, signed 100 years ago. Treaty 8, like its current equivalent, was caught in a complex inheritance of legal, constitutional, and cultural positions. In the particular circumstances that Professor Ray describes in the article that follows, Treaty 8 managed to become law. But the treaty-making process is still with us, and so too are the positions that make comprehensive treaties with Native peoples so difficult to achieve.

The most basic of these – the long provincial refusal to admit the possibility of Native title – has been overturned by recent decisions from the Supreme Court of Canada. The constitutional predicament remains: a federal responsibility for Native people, a provincial responsibility for land. Early in Confederation the province found that, given its control of land, it was often safest to say and do nothing. Ottawa could fume, but its Native policies were effectively stymied. As Professor Ray shows, the province used a variant of this tactic to allow Treaty 8 to pass while denying any responsibility for it. Provincial control over land still gives the province a trump card in dealing with Ottawa.

Cultural values change but not very quickly. In the nineteenth century, most immigrant British Columbians thought that Native peoples did not use land properly and that it should belong to those who did. Civilization should replace savagery, just as progressive land uses should replace waste. Native people would either die out or be assimilated. Indian land policy was a means to the latter end. By granting reserves that were too small to support those living on them, the government forced individual Natives to take up wage-labour, there to learn habits of regularity, economy, and thrift, and to acquire materialistic ambitions and the profit-motive. Thus they would become civilized and assimilated at the same time, to the benefit both of themselves and of a fledgling industrial economy needing their labour.

Yet, for all the cultural changes that this and other projects of assimilation have brought about, most Native people have not been assimilated. Their own voices are now louder than ever. They and the province are left with the spaces (i.e., reserves) associated with a failed politics of assimilation.

So what do we do? We can continue the politics of assimilation, but after 150 years of failure, there is little precedent for its success. The more likely consequences are intensified civil strife, fuller jails, and increasingly critical world opinion. The alternative, a politics of difference, requires some opportunity for Native peoples to earn moderate livings *in situ* (as per the recent Marshall decision), some provision for Native self-government, and some explanation as to why Native peoples are entitled to such rights while other groups (immigrant Greek communities, for example) are not. The answer to this, some would argue, lies in different histories: on the one hand, that of a state (Canada) superimposed on functioning, self-governing societies; on the other hand, that of immigrants choosing a state (Canada) and, in so doing, accepting that their own ways would alter greatly.

This province is in the thick of these matters. Professor Ray tells a basic part of a story that won't go away. In this deeply colonized place, British Columbians have reached the present by vastly different routes. A politics of equality that ignores these differences essentially denies both the colonial encounter that underlies what we are and a search for a measure of belated justice. It also denies what is the most primal of Canadian voices – the one that, however altered, was here when Cartier or Champlain, or for that matter Cook or Mackenzie, arrived on the scene.

Cole Harris

WE NOTE WITH SADNESS the death, at the end of August last, of W.K. Lamb, Dominion archivist for many years; founder of the National Library; author or editor of many books; and, somewhat indirectly, the founder of this journal. In 1937, Lamb was founding editor of the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, and it was the demise of this journal in 1958 that, a decade later, led Margaret Prang, historian, and Walter Young, political scientist, to found the more interdisciplinary journal known from its inception as *BC Studies*. Lamb was born in New Westminster in 1904. His long and distinguished scholarly and public life left many legacies and had many fortunate ramifications – this journal not least among them.

J.B. & C.H.