

*Government Orders*

To understand why in 1995 we are still talking about negotiating treaties we need to look to our history. Unlike most other provinces where treaties were signed to clarify jurisdiction over land and resources and forge new relationships between First Nations and the newcomers to this great land few were ever concluded in British Columbia. As a result some 124 years after becoming a province, the key question of unextinguished aboriginal rights remains unresolved and the majority of the province remains subject to outstanding aboriginal land claims.

Few treaties were signed because of the position historically taken by the Government of British Columbia. From the late 1800s the position was that aboriginal rights had been extinguished prior to B.C.'s entry into Confederation in 1871 or, if these rights did exist, they were the exclusive responsibility of the federal government.

• (1710)

In 1990 under the leadership of Premier Vander Zalm, a Socred, B.C. reversed its longstanding position and the way was opened to resolving these issues.

I think it only fair to point out that one of the key players in convincing the provincial government to reverse its historic opposition to negotiating treaties was the then B.C. minister of native affairs, Mr. Jack Weisgerber. I know that many of my Reform Party friends would recognize Mr. Weisgerber's name. One of the early and enthusiastic architects of this process, Mr. Weisgerber now leads the provincial Reform Party in British Columbia.

Following on the heels of the B.C. government's decision, the Government of Canada and the B.C. government acted quickly to advance the process. Later the same year the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the hon. Tom Siddon, along with Mr. Weisgerber and Bill Wilson, chairman of the First Nations Congress, agreed to establish a task force to make recommendations on the mandate and process for treaty negotiations.

By June 1991 the B.C. claims task force had released its report. One of its key recommendations was the creation of an arm's length B.C. treaty commission.

In the 10 months that followed, representatives of Canada, B.C. and the First Nations summit negotiated the B.C. treaty commission agreement which was the blueprint for the commission. On September 21, 1992, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Indian Affairs Minister Tom Siddon, both Conservatives, B.C. Premier Mike Harcourt and native affairs minister Andrew Petter, both New Democrats, joined with the First Nations summit leadership in signing the B.C. treaty commission agreement. We had all the parties on board.

In the three years since, the commission has made great progress. If there was ever any doubt that the commission was necessary, one need only look at the response it has had for the aboriginal population of British Columbia.

To date, 49 first nation groups representing 79 per cent of B.C.'s aboriginal peoples have submitted a statement of intent to negotiate. One of the terms of the agreement creating the treaty commission was a commitment to establish it in the legislation. In May 1993 both the aboriginal summit and the province fulfilled their part of that commitment.

Now the time has come for the federal government to honour its part of the bargain. These then are the events which have led us to this legislation and to this debate. I welcome all members to this great partnership.

Across the years and across party lines people have joined hands in a common cause. It is their vision and determination that we celebrate and formalize today. Their cause was simple: the desire to bring justice to aboriginal people and certainty to their province.

The costs of that uncertainty has been high. In a Price Waterhouse study prepared in 1990 it was estimated that \$1 billion in investment had not occurred because of unresolved land claims. Three hundred badly needed jobs had not been created and \$125 million in capital investments had not been made. Yesterday we had the mining industry in town and they were talking to me about the same problem.

Since the time of that study the price has continued to be paid year in and year out. That has been the price of denying the problem or pretending it would go away. That is the price of the status quo for the people of British Columbia. It is a price we can no longer afford. With the passage of this legislation we will be on the way to no longer having to pay.

If the price has been high for the general population of B.C., for aboriginal people it has been far higher. For aboriginal people it has meant great hardships and shattering poverty. It has meant the denial of historic rights and future hopes. It has meant generations of dreams deferred and promises unkept. It has meant a quality of life few of us can imagine and none of us should tolerate.

Conditions are appalling. Almost a third of aboriginal homes on reserves lack running water. Diseases such as hepatitis and tuberculosis virtually eradicated in the non-native population persist in aboriginal communities. Death from fires are three and a half times the non-aboriginal level because of unsafe housing and lack of proper sanitation.

• (1715)

Aboriginal people are more than three times as likely to die a violent death and about twice as likely to die before age 65. The