

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

New Directions

FOCUSING ON THE ISSUE

In 1970, the Canadian government proposed sweeping changes to its Aboriginal policy. The proposal marked the beginning of a fundamental change in relations between Aboriginal peoples and the federal government. In what ways did this relationship change?

No to the White Paper

A dramatic change took place in relations between the federal government and Aboriginal peoples in 1970. In 1969, the government had presented a **White Paper** on Aboriginal policy. The paper was based on the philosophy that Aboriginal peoples should be like all other Canadians, having complete equality and no special privileges—in other words, Aboriginal peoples should be **assimilated** into the mainstream of Canadian society.

To achieve this, the government proposed to abolish the Department of Indian Affairs, eliminate the **reserve** system, turn over responsibility for Aboriginal peoples to the provincial governments, and terminate Indian status. Yet these major changes in policy were announced after minimal consultation with the Aboriginal peoples themselves.

Aboriginal communities responded to the White Paper with one voice. The government's inten-

tions appalled Aboriginal peoples and they began making their views known. They did not want to be assimilated and they did not want to lose their special status. They felt betrayed by the government and believed it was trying to shirk its special responsibility to Aboriginal peoples as compensation for the lands that had been taken from them. They were particularly upset that their point of view had not even been considered by the government. They demanded that the

government listen to what they had to say.

In the face of vehement opposition, the government withdrew the White Paper and agreed to begin negotiations with Aboriginal peoples. The uproar surrounding the White Paper sparked a new determination on the part of Aboriginal peoples to organize and fight for their rights. Aboriginal organizations quickly became a political force to be reckoned with, growing in number and strength.



As a result of opposition to the White Paper, governments began direct negotiations with Aboriginal peoples.