

greatly improved access to higher education. By the end of the decade, Indians had obtained full political and legal rights. Progress has also been made to ensure people on reserves have adequate shelter.

Although Indians are now represented in most professions, in the arts and at every level of Canadian government, serious economic and social problems remain. Unemployment rates are high compared to non-natives and housing is still inadequate on many reserves. The Government of Canada is working with Indian community leaders to address these and other issues.

A New Relationship

During the 1970s, Indians acquired more control over their community life and affairs. Through this process of devolution, Indian communities are assuming responsibility for the administration of federally funded programs and services. At the end of the 1980s, Indian communities directly administered about 70 per cent of Indian program expenditures of the federal department, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Canada's Constitution Act, 1982, affirmed existing aboriginal and treaty rights. It established a process for further discussions on self-government and other aboriginal issues through the First Ministers' conferences. In addition, it was committed to including aboriginal leaders in the discussions.

Since 1984, the federal government has followed three main policies in regard to Indian peoples:

- to support Indians in their efforts to become more self-reliant and to take charge of their own communities;
- to maintain and improve the community services available to Indians living on reserves; and
- to settle native land claims.

Land Claims

There has been a significant increase in native land claim activities over the past two decades. Comprehensive claims are based on aboriginal title arising from traditional use and occupancy of land not covered by treaties or other means. Specific claims arise from the non-fulfilment of Indian treaties or alleged wrongdoing on the part of the Crown related to the administration of Indian land and other assets. Both types of claims

provide an opportunity to establish a land and economic base, and the mechanisms with which Indian communities can pursue self-government.

Self-Government

The Cree-Naskapi (of Quebec) Act, 1984, set in place the first Indian self-governments in Canada. Along with efforts to arrive at a constitutional amendment on self-government, the federal government authorized community-based negotiations leading to self-government arrangements. For example, the Sechelt Indian Band Self-Government Act, 1986, provides for the Sechelt Band of British Columbia to assume control over its lands, resources, health and social services, education and local taxation.

Bill C-31

Until the mid-1980s, a registered Indian woman lost her status if she married a person other than a registered Indian. Any woman who married a registered Indian, however, became a registered Indian. This changed with passage of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1985. Notwithstanding opposition from some Indian people, government realization of the need to remedy past discrimination led to an amendment (known as Bill C-31) to the Indian Act. The amendment allowed for the reinstatement or registration for the first time of certain Indian women and their children. More than 65 000 people have obtained registration or had it restored. It is expected this number will reach 90 000 by 1991. Bill C-31 also eliminated all forms of "enfranchisement" (see definition above)

and provides Indian bands with the opportunity to assume control over their own membership rules.

Culture

Since the 1950s, there has been a remarkable reawakening of Indian culture. Native language, culture and history programs have been instituted in schools. Cultural centres are flourishing, and traditional practices and beliefs are increasingly being used to combat alcoholism and drug problems. Indian elders are once again playing a vital role and linking the generations. Every summer, Indian groups across Canada host "powwows" — spectacular celebrations reminiscent of the annual gatherings held by Indians in earlier times.

The Future

Indians want recognition of their rights as the original inhabitants of Canada — in effect, the country's "First Nations." There is no consensus, even among Indian and other aboriginal groups, as to how these rights should be defined.

Indian peoples want to be recognized as partners in Canadian society, with access to the same opportunities as other Canadians. They wish to protect and revive their languages and cultures. They are adamantly opposed to assimilation. In addition, Indians are actively seeking settlement of land claims and other long-standing grievances, joint management of resources in regions in close proximity to their lands, and powers to govern their communities according to their own priorities and values.

