lightly. To be sure the concept of self-government represented a key component of aboriginal efforts towards self-determination, yet there was little consensus regarding its form or function. Even fixing a level of self-government within Canada's existing tiers proved to be problematic, running the gamut from federal to provincial to municipal structures. Not surprisingly, despite Native assurances that entrenchment of self-government was intended as a progressive innovation to promote development rather than a plot to undermine existing powers, provincial authorities stayed clear of any proposal to open a pandora's box of aboriginal self-governing rights.

In view of this conflict of interest between Native and government sectors over the issue of contingent versus inherent rights, the proceedings ground to a halt. As far as native groups were concerned, until the right to aboriginal self-government could be tested by the courts, it was not a right worth pursuing. By way of contrast was the government sector which rejected any prior entrenchment of aboriginal self-government until jurisdiction details were settled. In an effort to break the log jam, the Prime Minister put forward a compromise solution based on conceding the principle of an *explicit* right to aboriginal self-government. This compromise proposal aimed at guaranteeing for native communities certain enforceable rights such as the power to negotiate over land bases, as well as the resources to institute legislative bodies with powers similar to municipal councils. At the same time the 'explicit' rights notion sought to protect federal and provincial governments from infringement upon existing powers and jurisdiction. Federal and provincial governments would be shielded against court challenges by 'irresponsible' native groups intent on undermining already existing provincial laws to their advantage. Eliminated also by the compromise would be the fear of conferring upon the courts they were entitled to, at the risk of eroding provincial/federal power and resources.

Despite this last-ditch attempt at compromise, the conference did not attain its goals. Unlike the 1985 conference of First Ministers which managed to attain political if not native support, the provincial and federal governments failed to reach any consensus among themselves, let alone to present a coherent proposal for assessment before the native groups. British Columbia and Alberta opposed any effort to entrench an unfettered guarantee of self-government within the constitution. Saskatchewan and Newfoundland voiced certain problems with the concept of entrenching an unqualified right and decided eventually to reject the compromise. Ontario and the remaining Maritime provinces appeared willing to make the necessary adjustments to reach a compromise, but only Manitoba among the provinces was prepared to accept an intrinsic right to aboriginal self-government without reservations.

It came as little surprise that no consensus was attained. Considering the politics of power at the core of the constitutional debate, nothing short of a miracle could have pulled out a solution. The conflict of interest proved to be insurmountable for, as Professors Menno Boldt and J Anthony Long from the University of Lethbridge pointed "The differences between what Indians demand and what the first ministers are prepared to concede was virtually irreconciliable." On the surface, Native Indians appeared to be the losers in this exchange, frustrated by the inability of the constitutional process to negotiate a self-governing agreement. The loss of the only regular avenue for bargaining with the nation's top politicians did not sit well with many aboriginal spokespersons. But the situation is far from hopeless notwithstanding this temporary setback at the post-constitutional table. Alternate strategies and tactic are available. Native leaders have vowed to carry on the struggle to entrench the constitutional right to self-government even if this should entrail a reliance on either the courts or international forums. None other than Premier Peterson suggestion that in lieu of any 'big solution', there remains the possibility of 'mini solutions' whereby individual bands seek negotiating agreements with the provinces over land claims and the right to self-determination through Indian self-government. The creation of Nunavut (the merging Inuit homeland in the North) constitutes but one example where Native and government leaders are positioned to negotiate for mutually acceptable changes. But if future constitutional talks are to be proposed as a basis for delineating aboriginal self-governing structures, the First Ministers will need to reassess procedures and tactics. They must at minimum (a) clarify jurisdiction (who will pay for self-government, and who is responsible for metis and non-status Indians?); (b) institute a more generous approach to native land claims; (c) establish a new sensitivity to community self-government; and (d) institute more flexible funding arrangements than exist at present. Until these concessions are incorporated as part of the overall negotiating process, there is always the chance of alienating aboriginal peoples to the point where open confrontation is a possibility.