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CURRENTS

READINGS IN RACE RELATIONS

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"VISIBLE MINORITIES: INVISIBLE"

A Content Analysis of
Submissions to the Special Committee
on the Participation of
Visible Minorities in Canadian Society

Published by THE URBAN ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS

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The Urban Alliance on Race Relations, formed in July 1975 "to promote a stable and healthy multiracial environment in the community," is a non-profit organization made up of volunteers from all sectors of the community.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations is an educational agency and an advocate and intermediary for the visible minorities. It works toward encouraging better race relations, increased understanding and awareness among our multicultural, multiracial population through programmes of education directed at both the private and public sectors of the community. It is also focusing its efforts on the institutions of our society including educational systems, employment, government, media, legislation, police, social service agencies and human services, in order to reduce patterns of discrimination and inequality of opportunity which may exist within these institutions.

The work of the organization is carried out through working committees such as: Education Institutions; Legislation; Media; Law Enforcement.

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I

Preface

Why is a Parliamentary Committee Not Enough?

Tim Rees and Carol Tator

The Special Parliamentary Committee on the Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society that held hearings across Canada between September 15th and November 2nd of 1983 provided a unique opportunity for community groups to collectively express their concerns and suggestions on the state of race relations in this country.

As such, the briefs and testimony submitted to the Parliamentary Committee represent the most comprehensive and extensive body of knowledge that has ever been compiled on the issues faced by the two million non-white Canadians, as well as the solutions to these issues as expressed by the visible minority communities themselves.

This process has provided a rare opportunity to gain a massive collection of experiences, perceptions and recommendations, on a truly national scale, of the problems and needs of the visible minority communities viewed from their own perspective. This special issue of *Currents* is an ambitious attempt to synthesize this huge body of data and to share and disseminate it as widely as possible.

As an independent synthesis of the briefs and testimonies separate from the Parliamentary Committee's own report, this issue of *Currents* is an attempt to illuminate the nature and degree of racial discrimination in Canada from the point of view of those who suffer from its practice. Independently from the process and interpretation of the Special Parliamentary Committee, this issue of *Currents* offers a content analysis of the largest

body of documentation on racism in Canada available to date.

Although it was not possible to obtain all the briefs that were submitted to the Parliamentary Committee, the 65 briefs that were analysed represent more than an adequate sampling of the total and indeed comprise the major proportion that were submitted by the organizations representing the visible minority communities in Canada.

Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the support and interest of all those groups who shared with us their briefs. To support the additional expenses of producing this special issue we would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Canadian Council for Multicultural and Intercultural Education, and Multiculturalism Canada. Finally, we would like to extend our grateful appreciation to Monica Armour for undertaking the almost impossible task of putting together a coherent and very readable reflection of the views and concerns of the community as expressed in their briefs. This report, accomplished within severe time restraints, is a result of her dedication and commitment.

The Special Parliamentary Committee

A Parliamentary Committee is a much used means whereby Parliament can review policy, legislation and administration. Such Committees have a fairly broad mandate as to method of enquiry and topics for discussion. Com-

mittees can and do range widely, consult whom they like and report and publish a wide variety of opinion.

A Parliamentary Committee is expected to make constructive and useful suggestions which, carrying the imprimatur of Parliament, can be commended to relevant branches of government for their consideration in terms of policy and practice. This is a reasonable demand about a Committee's recommendations; it does not however define or limit the kind of analysis it makes.

Will the whole process of submitting carefully considered briefs and recommendations to the Parliamentary Committee, which has in turn undergone the process of submitting carefully considered recommendations to Parliament, make any difference at all to the course of events? Will the Parliamentary Committee make any attempt to find a means to put pressure on Parliament, on the Government to accept its recommendation? What reply will Government return?

"Equality Now"

We must certainly applaud the initiative of Parliament in establishing the Special Committee on the Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society. And we must certainly endorse and support the general thrust and spirit of the Committee's Report, entitled "Equality Now". Notwithstanding the above, it is with some disappointment and apprehension that we must view the substance of the 80 recommendations as a wholly inadequate basis for seriously dealing with

racial discrimination in our society.

One of the reasons the document is flawed is that the Committee communicated largely with the minority communities. While this of course is essential, they made very little effort to consult with those agencies and institutions where discrimination takes place and who are in a position to make changes. One cannot expect that all the solutions and remedies can be provided by the victims. To use an analogy, one should not expect the patient to be the doctor.

Many of the recommendations are of such a broad, general nature that they allow for nothing more than a broad, general response. In other words, they can be responded to positively without necessitating any immediate or measurable change.

— On the other hand, many recommendations that are specific are relatively minor and insignificant and can be responded to within the mandates and criteria of existing Government programmes. In other words, they do not, or should not need the force of a Parliamentary Committee to make them happen.

— Other recommendations anticipate or reiterate initiatives that are already being undertaken or have already been accepted. As recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee they are redundant and superfluous.

— A significant portion of recommendations are directed to a "proposed" Ministry of Multiculturalism. If a new Ministry is not established can we assume that other provisions will be made to accept all these recommendations?

— Yet other recommendations suggest further "sharing", further study, and further dialogue. It should be evident that the time has long past for further talk. The time has come for action.

Rather than the recommendations as such, it is perhaps the implications of the spirit and intent contained within the body of the Report that is far more important as serving as the basis for response. The recommendations would appear to be wholly inadequate conclusions to the more urgent messages contained in the substance of the Report.

We do **not** want quick superficial responses. What is required is a commitment to undertake a major review of how the evil of racial discrimination in all its forms can be eradicated from all areas and within all institutions of Canadian society.

This was what was required before the establishment of the Parliamentary Committee. It is still required.

Further Initiatives

The Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Visible Minorities is in itself of course an insufficient initiative for improving the state of race relations in this country. It requires as a necessary corollary further initiatives the effects of which would be a significant process of change. There is always a danger with political intervention in "race relations", perhaps more so than in most areas of social policy, that initiatives will be mere gestures or tokens, and only provide substitute for long-term and significant change.

Part of the purpose of this special issue of **Currents** is the recognition of this danger. The individuals and groups who prepared briefs and submissions cannot look to the Parliamentary Committee itself for the solution to the issues they identified. The solutions, as we all know, lie within a whole range of public and private institutions and that is where efforts must continue to be placed.

The successful outcome of this continued need for campaigning by all those concerned with improving race relations, will and should take a number of forms, depending on the more specific aims and ideological premises of each individual and group. While it is unrealistic to expect much coordinated effort on a national scale to lobby for improved race relations, this publication should clearly demonstrate at minimum a surprising degree of unanimity across the country of what the issues and problems are.

One might suggest that greater effort in this campaigning should focus on political organization and action. The issue of racism should be interjected at minimum into the policy platforms of the major political parties. Relationships should be strengthened with politicians at all levels of government

as well as with the media. This issue of **Currents** is intended to help facilitate this process.

Myths and Realities of Racism in Canada

This independent content-analysis of the briefs has clearly highlighted a concern by the visible minority communities about the process by which Canadians have persistently misunderstood and thereby reduced or ignored the serious nature and extent of racial discrimination in our society. The continued maintenance of a whole array of myths and misconceptions about the problem of racism has continued to permit a wholly inadequate response to improved race relations in Canada. The myths and assumptions that have allowed Canadians to deflect and dismiss the realities of racism in Canada are emphatically refuted by the evidence contained in these 65 briefs from across the country. These include:

(1) "Canada is not a racist society. There are unfortunately however, some individual Canadians who are racist". The problem has been defined according to prior assumption and expectations. Racism is reduced to a psychological problem, and any view of the problem in terms of the basic structures and organization of our society is ruled out. This is a superficial definition of the problem. It is defined merely in terms of the visible symptoms or manifestations of something whose deeper roots are not explored.

(2) "Is not discrimination a problem faced by all of us from time to time?" Such perceptions seek to devalue the distinctive racial elements of the issues being considered by reducing them to a level where all sorts of people tend to feel that they have been victimized. It implies that there is nothing distinctive or special about visible minority concerns. Such questions deny the fact that for non-white people it is precisely because they are non-white that makes the crucial difference. In a society which uses racial characteristics as a basis for discrimination, non-white people inherently carry the permanent potential cue for discriminatory practices. Race therefore is not incidental, but is in fact the cen-

tral crucial factor in relations with the wider white society.

(3) A third myth regarding racism in Canada is that it is a product of the 1970's and 80's caused by an increase in the numbers of non-white immigrants at a time of economic decline and recession. As such it represents a recent unfortunate and hopefully only temporary aberration of Canadian thinking and behaviour, of our way of life.

Racism however, as many of the briefs clearly detail, has been practised systematically by Canadians since the very beginning of our history. It has been institutionalized at all levels of society and has been integrated into our social, economic systems including immigration practices and policies.

(4) A fourth misconception is that the historical experiences and conditions of white European immigrants and the contemporary situation of non-whites is similar. The assumption is that all immigrant groups must expect to start at the bottom of the social and economic ladder and it is only through their own initiatives can they expect to achieve upward mobility and thereby full and equal treatment.

However, second and third generation non-white groups in Canada continue to experience the same prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviour as their parents and grandparents. Thus, they are severely hampered in their opportunities for mobility. Discrimination does not go away for racial minorities.

(5) Racism has been dismissed by many as simply the result of recalcitrant minority groups refusing to fit in and adapt to the so-called host community's cultural demands and expectations. In other words, equality of opportunity is assumed to exist in Canada, and racial inequality is attributed to inadequate socialization into the value system of the host society.

This is part of the syndrome of blaming the victim.

(6) Related, but separate to the above myth is the argument that non-white immigrants remain at the bottom of the social and economic ladder because they lack the skills, education, motivation, etc. to succeed in Canada. Research indicates that non-white

immigrants to Canada are more highly educated with higher levels of skills and qualifications than most other immigrant groups. It has been estimated that over the past two decades less than 2% of non-white immigrants could be described as unskilled or uneducated.

In addition, a significant proportion of non-white immigrants originate from major urban centres and are already acculturated to a post-industrial and cosmopolitan society with the values and social skills required for urban survival.

(7) Many Canadians perceive racism and racial conflict as flowing directly out of different cultures being brought into close proximity with each other. In other words, racism has been imported by the cultural jealousies and conflicts brought by immigrants.

Racism however, is not an accident or inevitable by-product of differences. In any society where racial discrimination has been entrenched in the structural and value systems, the seeds will be sown for the exclusion of racial minorities from normal opportunities for social and economic mobility.

Racism is not a matter of inevitable tension between people who are different. Racial conflict will exist only if there is power of one group over another. The white majority has power over every aspect of life in this country.

(8) Many have suggested that policies of Multiculturalism are sufficient to address the problems of racism — they simply need a legislative mandate and greater resources.

Issues of ethnic inequality and racial discrimination which have political and economic roots in the history and social institutions of Canada go far beyond what multicultural programmes and policies can offer. Cultural solutions cannot solve non-cultural problems.

It is an illusion to expect that programmes to support cultural retention can also achieve racial equality and harmony. Racial and ethnic justice cannot be attained in Canada without addressing some fundamental changes in our institutional structures.

(9) Present public policies and programmes addressing the problem of

racism are largely directed at educational activities which focus on changing attitudes. By increasing the awareness of the racial diversity of Canada, by accepting or trying to understand "the people next door", the illusion is maintained that Canada is essentially a just, harmonious cultural mosaic. Such an approach ignores or denies the hidden dimensions of discrimination — its systemic nature, and the isolation of certain groups from the mainstream of society. The assumption that informational, "sensitization" programmes will lead to changes in attitudes, which in turn will lead to changes in behaviour is a process which social scientists regard as highly questionable.

(10) A common myth dictating much discussion on the topic is that racism is a problem of non-whites.

The response to this fallacy is that in Canada, racism must be understood as a white problem in that whites developed, perpetuated, and have the power to solve it. The focus of attention therefore should be placed on those with the economic, social and political power to sustain and enforce discriminatory policies and practices.

(11) The notion that racism can be eliminated from society by treating everyone equally from now on by more rigorously applying universalistic criteria, is unfortunately too late. It ignores the historical development of racism within our social and economic structures. Such a limited solution is really no more than a neutral acceptance of the status quo, and a denial of the many forms in which racism is manifested in Canada.

We are apprehensive that the above myths and assumptions will continue to shape public discussion on the nature of racial discrimination in this country. We are apprehensive that Parliament will ignore the evidence contained in the briefs that have been analysed, and reject even the recommendations made by the Parliamentary Committee on Visible Minorities in Canadian Society. Only by fully confronting and categorically demolishing these myths and misconceptions will Canadians begin to acknowledge the possibility that the pervasive reality of racism represents a massive indictment of the nature of our society.

Canada is still racist, poll shows

Press urged to hire more non-whites

'Polite racism' plagues Metro



Strengthen laws on hate literature

Visible Minorities invisible

Fleming announces war on racism

Blacks axed from TV ads panel told

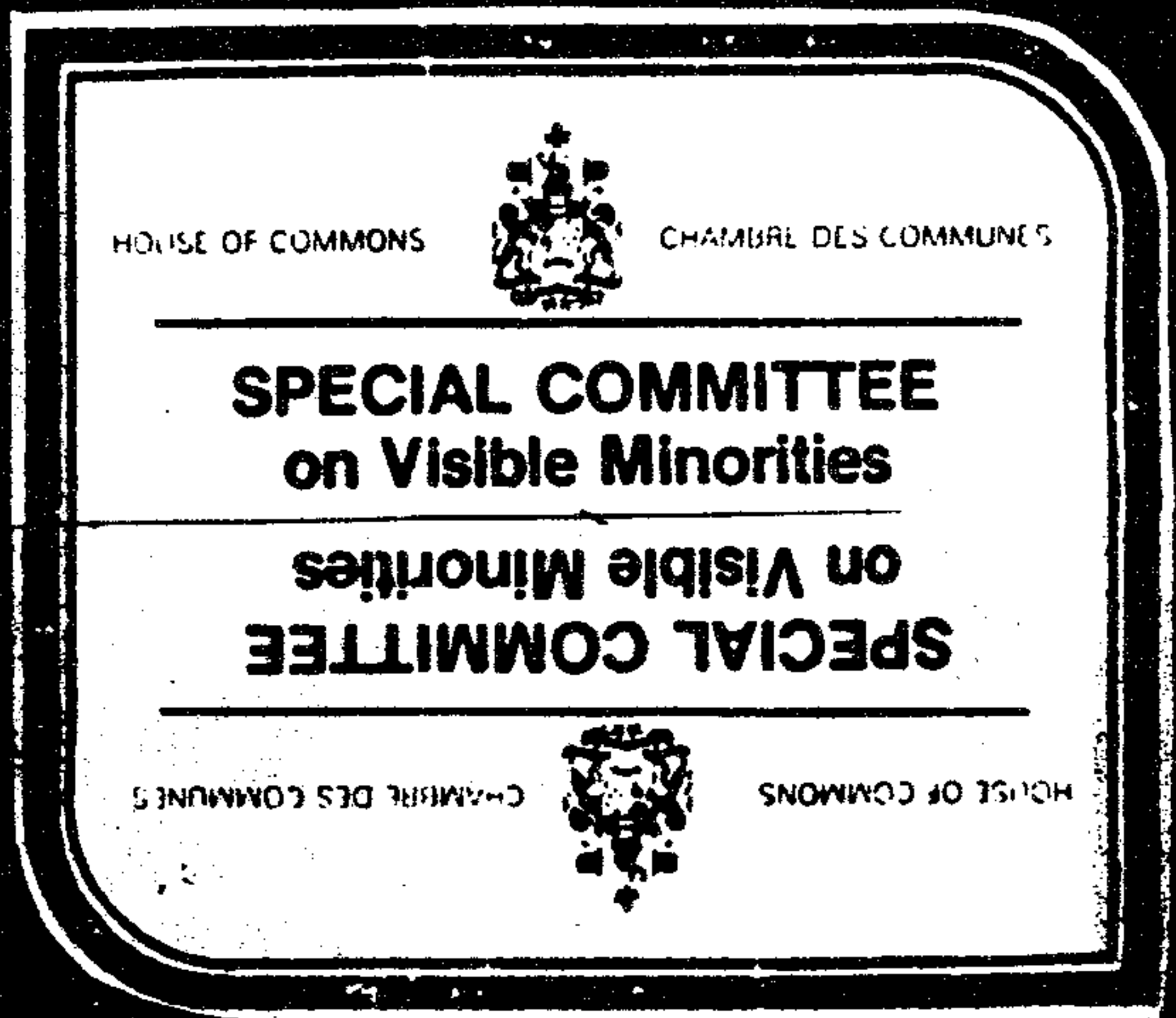
Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Committee on

Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society

Procès-verbaux et témoignages du Comité spécial sur la

Participation des Minorités visibles à la Société canadienne

Racism in Canada



Minority pupils hurt by bias in IQ tests teacher tells probe

Racism thrives in corporations

Racism increasing problem,

Racism may be hidden but it's there, MPs told

II

Introduction

Participants' Report on the Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society:

*A Content Analysis of Briefs and Testimony
Submitted to the Special Parliamentary Committee on
Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society*

Monica Armour

Historical Context

A Special Parliamentary Committee consisting of seven Members of Parliament was formed on June 16, 1983 and was named the Parliamentary Task Force on Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society.

Terms of reference for this Committee included the following objectives:*

- 1) to seek positive and constructive ideas and models pertaining explicitly to ameliorating relations within Canada between visible minority and other Canadians;
- 2) to identify and investigate positive examples and models of the promotion of harmonious relations between visible minority Canadians and other Canadians, particularly in institutional areas, and find ways and means of improving those relations;
- 3) to seek the views that contribute constructively and positively to the promotion of racial tolerance, understanding and harmony of concerned voluntary, community and minority groups and organizations and individuals, as well as business, professional and trade associations, labour unions, public and private institutions and relevant specialists;

- 4) within a general review to consider Federal Government policies and programs in the area of race relations;
- 5) to recommend the development of positive programs that the Committee finds necessary to promote racial understanding, tolerance and harmony in Canadian society; and
- 6) to encourage the continuation of the dialogue that will be initiated, in a climate that is open and constructive.¹

The Special Parliamentary Committee (hence-forth referred to as the Committee) invited organizations that focus on issues related to Canada's visible minority communities to submit briefs and to testify at hearings held between September 15, and November 2, 1983 at various centres across Canada. A press release about the Committee was sent to newspapers on August 10th. The Committee's request for briefs was dated August 23rd. September 23, 1983 was the deadline for brief submissions.

Reasons for and Purposes of this Report.

Initially, the primary reason for producing an independent analysis of the

briefs and testimony evolved out of concern that submitters' statements and views would not be fully or accurately reflected in the Parliamentary Committee's final report. Brief authors believed it would be important to have an independent analysis of what they had told the Committee. However, when the briefs began to arrive from across the country, it soon became obvious that collectively they represent the richest collection of data available in Canada today on the quantity and quality of racism in this country. The Committee's request for briefs and testimony has generated a large body of data, most of which has been submitted by the victims of racism, those who know best its guises and disguises, its open manifestations and the masks and myths behind which it hides.

Acknowledgement of the profound nature of this body of data has altered the major reason for producing this content analysis report. What started as a reactive endeavor has been transformed into a proactive document which illuminates the nature and degree of Canadian racial discrimination from the point of view of those who suffer the most from this widely spread social, cultural, economic, and political

*N.B. All quotations from briefs are introduced by the use of the colon.

