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# CURRENTS

Volume 6, No. 3

READINGS IN RACE RELATIONS

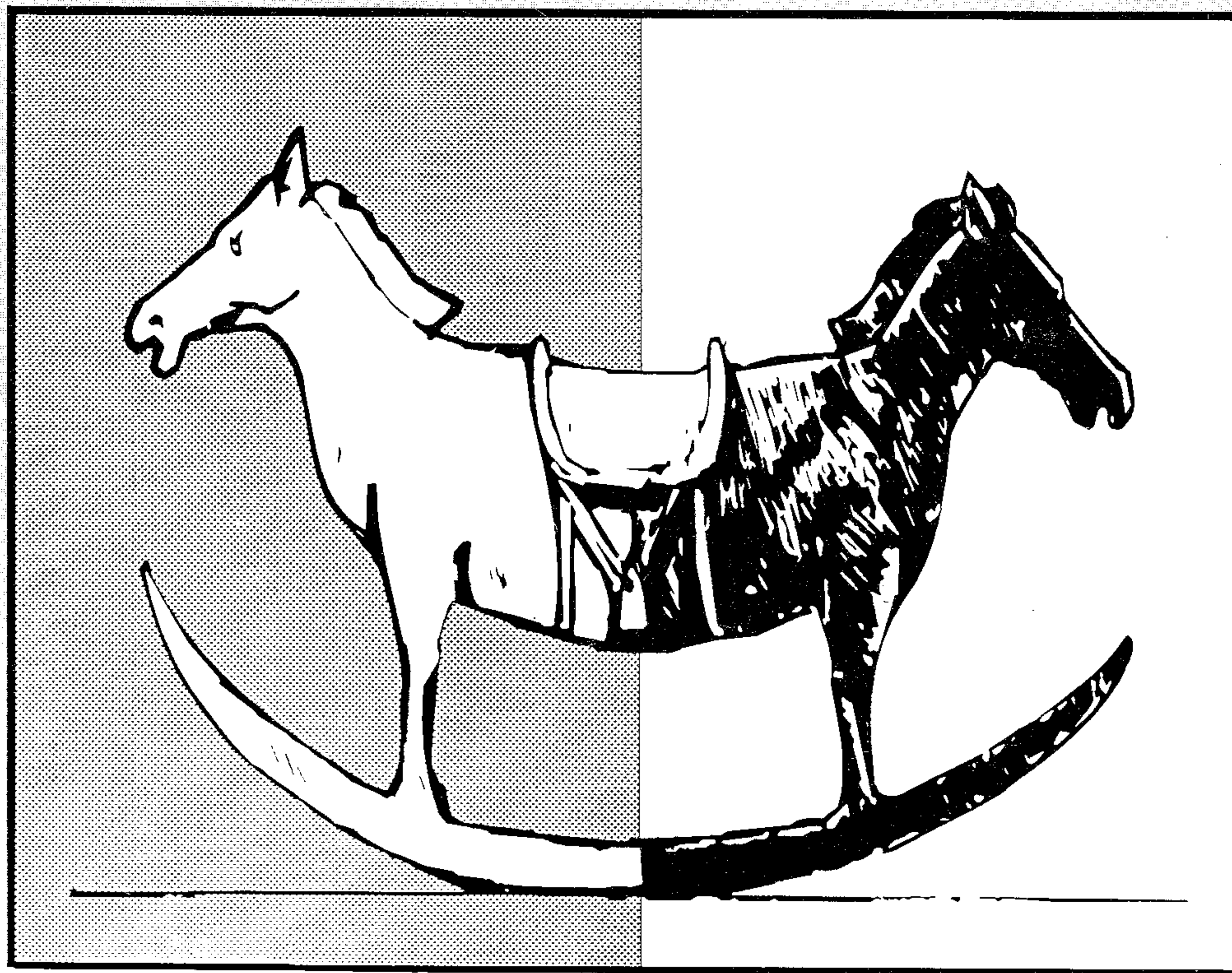
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## PLURALISM AND INTEGRATION

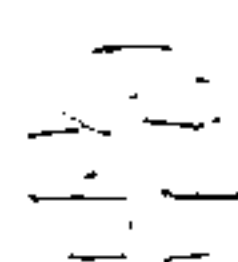
also

Segregated Trade Unions  
Employment Equity and Banks



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The Urban Alliance on Race Relations is an educational agency and an advocate and intermediary for visible minorities. It works towards encouraging better race relations, increased understanding and awareness among our multicultural, multiracial population through programs of education directed at both the private and public sectors of the community. It focuses 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 committees such as:  
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**Table of Contents**

**Editorial**

*Pluralism and Integration* .....1

**Initiatives**

*Refugee Status Determination  
Immigration and Refugee Board  
by George Brimmell* .....3

*Municipalities and Racism  
by Ray O'Neill* .....5

**Perspectives**

*Internal Rights Systems  
by Raj Anand* .....6

*Segregated Worship  
by Roland Kawano* .....8

*Segregated Trade Unions  
by Melinda Ham* .....11

*Separate Schools for Minorities  
by Sushil Jain* .....13

*An Aboriginal Justice System* .....14

*Employment Equity and Banks  
by Phebe-Jane Poole* .....16

**Profile**

*Dr. Carrie Best* .....20

*Poem  
by Cyril Dabydeen* .....21

*Ethiopians in Canada  
by John Sorenson* .....21

**Findings**

*Segregated Health Care in New York* .....24

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## Editorial

### *Pluralism and Integration*

In this sombre post-Meech era, Canada once again seems to be suffering an identity crisis. The concepts of pluralism and integration — key elements that have defined the distinctiveness of Canada — need to be looked at more closely. Are they mutually supportive of each other or are they in fact contradictory and competing concepts?

The concept of pluralism for example may promote and protect individual freedoms, but it does not help the individual in finding an identity within the larger societal context. The notion of Canada as a pluralistic society breaks the whole into protected parts, but it does not help in putting the parts back together again.

As Professor Reginald W. Bibby of the University of Lethbridge worries, "If different parts only have to coexist side by side as inanimate components of art on a wall, all is well. But if each of those different parts needs to come alive as interdependent components of a living organism, that's quite a different story."

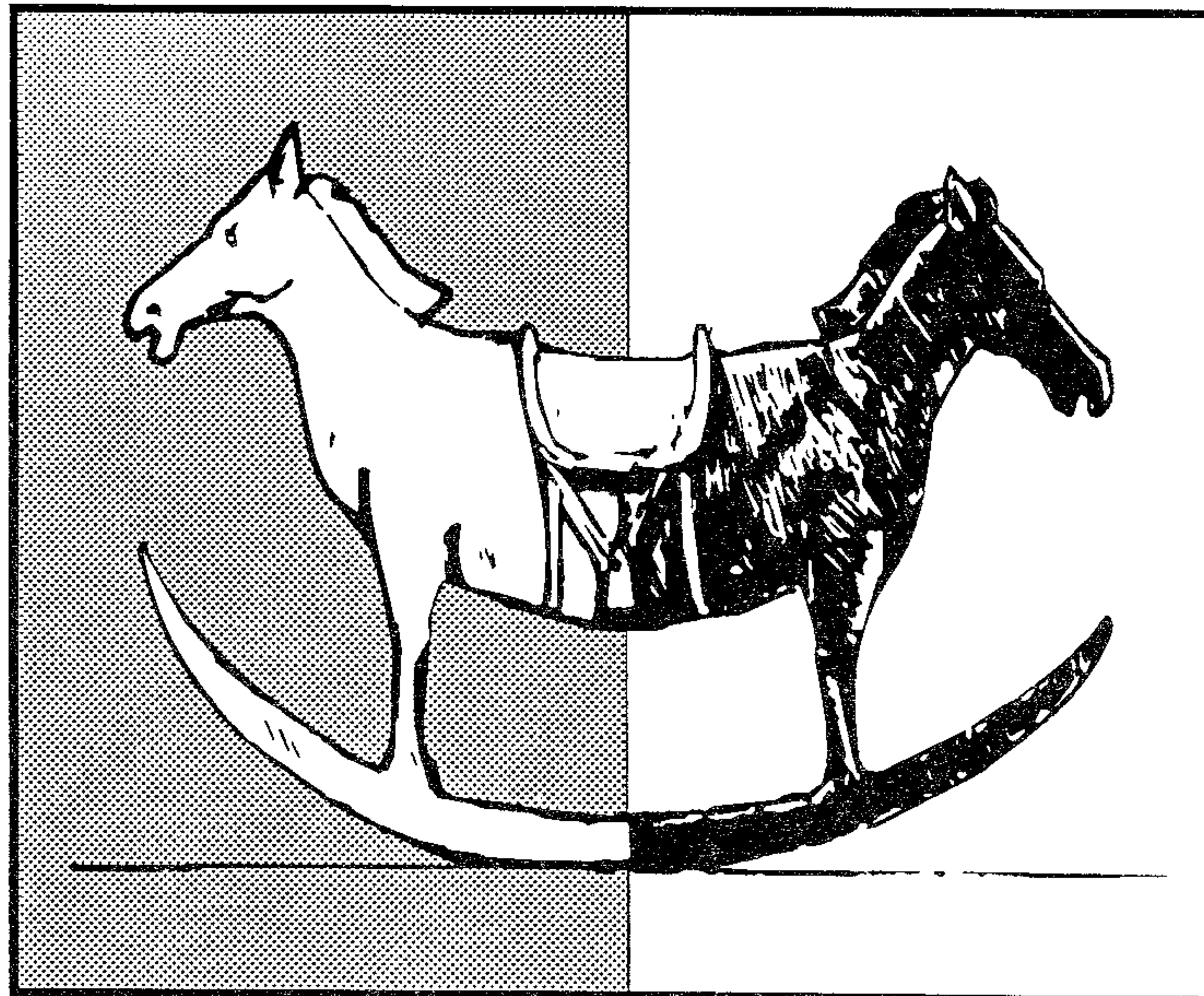
If the public policies of multiculturalism were nothing more than the endorsement of a pluralistic society then, as Gad Horowitz of the University of Toronto suggests, they would indeed be nothing more than "the masochistic celebration of nothingness." But the policies and programs of multiculturalism, together with those of race relations and human rights are concerned with the central issue of integration. Integration, not in the vague and indeterminate context of harmony, but with breaking down the structural organizational and personal barriers that perpetuate injustice. Integration serving perhaps as the twin concept of pluralism addresses itself to eliminating the institutional and

systemic inequalities existing in Canadian society.

While the concept of pluralism is appropriate at the individual level, if group life is becoming increasingly impossible as Bibby suggests, is it because the systems and institutions of our social, economic and political structures have failed miserably to embrace the implications of the concept of pluralism in their policies and practices?

If the major institutions of Canadian life continue to operate as if the realities of a culturally and racially diverse population have nothing to do with the way they carry out their activities; if they continue to exclude racial minorities from their workforce; and if they continue to ignore the needs of minorities in their service provision, then yes the notion of a pluralistic society as interdependent components of a living organism is a naive concept.

Integrative policies are at a crisis point in Canada. With the Canadian army now being called in to resolve racial



conflict, the last thing these policies can afford to be is celebratory. Integrative strategies need to address the discriminatory structures and customs of institutional life. These institutional change strategies are fundamentally "local" in their orientation in that they focus on organizations one at a time. At the moment however, racial justice and equality at the societal level appears to be disparagingly slow in coming when it is being pursued, in a half hearted fashion, if at all, at this institution by institution level. The few limited success stories that one can point to in Canada seem to indicate the lack of understanding and the low priority given to these integrative approaches for achieving national purposes.

The development of plural systems, of separate services based on ethnicity may be seen as positive in that they encourage a process of empowerment. They also give communities an opportunity to do things that they see as culturally sensitive, responsive and fair. Thirdly, the process of separateness

gives minorities a measure of responsibility and also of determination, self-determination in pursuit of their own way of life.

While one may support these arguments as appropriate within some areas of institutional life, it certainly does not absolve the political and bureaucratic commitment to remedy the social inequalities that operate and perpetuate themselves differently in such institutional areas of life as employment, justice, social services and health. The notions of pluralism and integration should not be concepts in conflict with each other. On the contrary, integrative strategies need to be dramatically strengthened and pursued in order to sustain and support a pluralistic society.

A number of articles in this issue of Currents raise this theme from a number of institutional perspectives. Is the development of internal human rights systems within each individual workplace as proposed by Raj Anand not only appropriate but necessary largely because

the public human rights systems are failing miserably? Is a separate legal system for aboriginal people necessary because the present assimilation into an alien criminal justice system simply processes indigenous people into the jails? Evidence from across the country indicates that the legal system, in its investigatory roles, its prosecutorial function, and in the trial function itself is neither responsive to the needs of aboriginal people nor representative of them. Should we therefore try and replace it with some kind of a community justice system because it is unrealistic to expect the major structural changes to the existing legal system that would make it truly fair and impartial for all groups in society?

The article by Roland Kawano indicates that the history of religion in Canada has been organized along ethnic lines. With the concern for declining congregations, is it too late for the 'mainstream' churches to attempt to reverse this trend? In another article, John Sorenson

highlights the difficulties faced by the settlement and social service system in being able to adequately serve the needs of immigrants and refugees from Ethiopia. The article by Melinda Ham on the development of black caucuses within the trade union movement suggests that this trend is largely as a result of the inevitable consequence of the inadequacy of the action taken by the established unions on behalf of their minority workers.

These articles reinforce the need to be more forthright and unequivocal in tackling the racial inequalities embedded in all areas of institutional life in Canada. If more aggressive efforts are not made to implement new integrative policies and practices that are truly just and fair, then it is likely that racial divisions and conflicts in Canada will only deepen.

Tim Rees

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## Initiatives

### **Refugee Status Determination : Immigration and Refugee Board**

by George Brimmell

In 1987 and 1988, there was intensive debate in Canada over the federal government's plan to reform the refugee determination process. Critics of the proposals called them draconian and condemned what they saw as harsh measures which would slam the doors on people fleeing oppression in other parts of the world.

On the other side of the debate, however, was the urgent need to undertake reform. The refugee determination system that existed at the time was cumbersome and unable to meet the huge demands being made upon it. As a result, an enormous backlog of some 100,000 claims had developed; people making claims for refugee status were forced to wait years before their cases were concluded. The extensive delays caused serious difficulties for claimants who, because they had no status in Canada, could do nothing to help family members left behind when they fled to this country.

The impact did not end there, however. The delays acted as an incentive to those seeking a way into Canada without going through the normal immigration process. By claiming refugee status, they could enter Canada and remain here for a very long period of time... perhaps permanently if immigration officials decided on an amnesty as a way to reduce the number of claims in the system (there was such an 'amnesty' by way of administrative review in 1986).

So, despite the opposition, Parliament passed Bill C-55 which created the Immigration and Refugee Board (the IRB) and a new process for determining the status of refugees. That new process came into effect on January 1, 1989.

#### **What's Happening With The New System**

The mandate of the IRB was to confirm the status of genuine refugees as quickly as possible without sacrificing fairness in the interests of efficiency. The objective of all members who were appointed to the Board was to ensure that Can-

ada's long tradition of humanitarian treatment of refugees — a history that resulted in Canada receiving the Nansen Medal from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — was adequately reflected in the manner the Board dealt with claimants for refugee status. To that end, a two-stage hearing process was established:

The initial hearing during which an Immigration adjudicator and IRB member determine whether or not the claimant is eligible to be considered a convention refugee as well as establish if a sufficient basis of credibility exists for the claim to move forward to the second level; and

The full hearing during which two IRB members give claimants every opportunity to put forward their stories and then apply the definition of a Convention refugee to the facts of the claim. If either of the two members believe there is a sufficient basis of credibility to the claim, the person receives refugee status and is entitled to ap-

ply for landed immigrant status in Canada.

Under the new system, claimants are entitled to the full protection of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to be represented by counsel, to have the appropriate translators present and to appeal adverse decisions (with leave) to the Federal Court of Canada. Immigration officials review the circumstances of all claimants who are denied refugee status to determine if there are humanitarian and compassionate grounds that would justify a decision to allow them to remain in Canada.

Claimants are also entitled to request that hearings be held in camera if they believe publication of their names or circumstances may cause harm to relatives they left behind. Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have full access to all proceedings to ensure that they are both fair and consistent with Canada's international obligations.

At the time of writing, the system has been in operation for two years, and results show that the refugee determination process is both fair and efficient.

