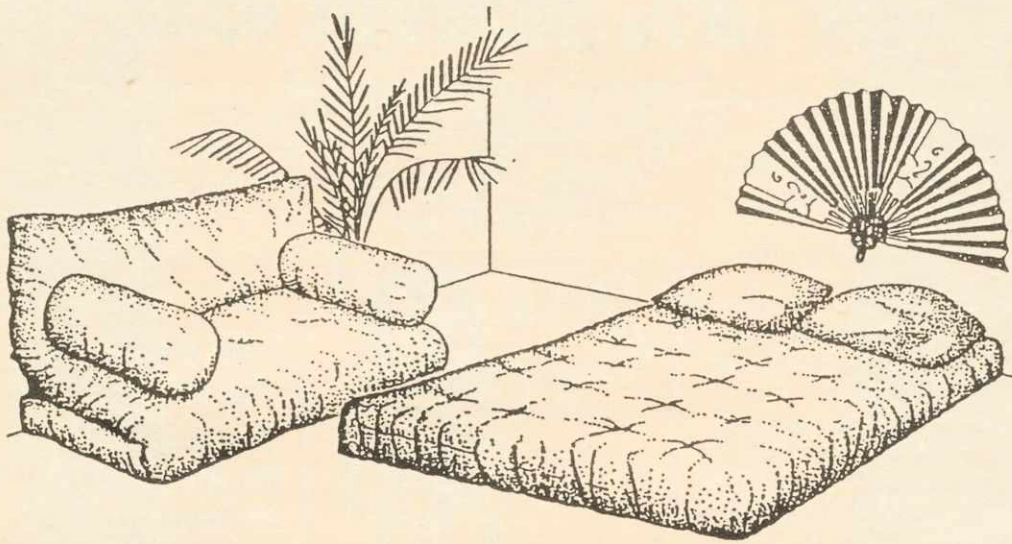


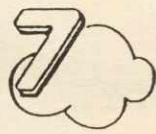
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Visible minorities talk to the police

BY JERRY WEST

RCMP representatives and local Black activists met for a workshop about visible minorities and policing last weekend at the Halifax Hilton.

The panel of Law Enforcers began the meeting by listing their accomplishments and ongoing efforts on behalf of visible minorities.

Tempers flared occasionally as some Blacks in the audience related the reality of those statistics.

"I am pissed off to the limits," said Dolly Williams, Executive Secretary of the Black United Front, in a speech so emotionally charged that it was sometimes difficult for her to voice her opinion.

She expressed dismay that many people believe fast-tracking of minority candidates means a lowering of standards.

"In this day and age," said Williams, "people don't apply for jobs they don't have the qualifications for."

Wayne Desmond of the Black Advisory Council to the RCMP was concerned that black law enforcement officers are seldom promoted to senior positions, this makes it difficult to form valid role models.

Desmond was also concerned that young candidates often have their hopes dashed by being accepted into the program, and then not actually hired.

"Stop creating enthusiasm and then saying that there is a hiring

freeze on," said Desmond.

with the RCMP's recruiting team countered saying the onus lay not only with the various police forces, but with the candidates themselves.

"I'm going to take some flack for this," said Upshaw, "but the responsibility doesn't just lie with the RCMP. We, the black community have to go back and try again [when we're not hired]. Drive 'em nuts until they hire you."

In response to questions about the levels of racism among the officers, Upshaw said that he received occasional comments from co-workers. He also said that he has had his superior officers put an end to racist goings-on in the unit.

"That makes me feel good," said Upshaw, "it makes me feel that my boss is looking out for me."

Frank Beazley of the Halifax Police Department added that no matter how racist an officer was, they would never willingly allow harm to come to another officer.

"You would never lack support [on a call]," said Beazley. But he also added that the process of lodging a complaint against another officer is fraught with politicking. "As soon as you speak out against another officer you're an outcast."

In the end Williams, the most outspoken of critics called for concrete action, wondering aloud what would be changed by this time next year.

Afterwards, though, she was very candid in her assessment of the situation. "A lot of very good things have come out of this weekend."

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