

POLITICS, POLICY, AND FEDERALISM:
DEFINING THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

by

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Institute of

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PREFATORY NOTE

This report was prepared by the author for the use of the Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government.

political tensions within it Attention is paid on the one hand to

SUMMARY

1. Canada faces deep-seated political problems. Some of them arise out of difficulties that confront most or all industrial countries, where the post-war consensus on the role of government -- in the economy, on welfare issues -- is evidently breaking down. Other problems are somewhat more specific to Canada and reflect

the tensions arising out of linguistic dualism and the highly regionalized make-up of our economy.

2. In Canada major political controversies over race which elsewhere

3. The public is weary of the acrimony and confrontation that has marked federal-provincial relations in recent years.

Accordingly, it is important to determine what can be done to

8. Political accommodation will be easier to achieve if the conduct of intergovernmental relations becomes more open or "public" than in the past, especially at early stages in the policy process, when the options are being defined and when debate on the merits of various choices is least confined.

9. At the present stage in Canada's history the need for achieving a

higher degree of cooperation among governments, and a greater measure of political accommodation among Canadian groups and regions, is an urgent one. The problems Canadians face call for concerted action and enhanced governmental capacity to realize policy objectives. At the same time, the political context

13. The Institute's aim is to support democratic norms of government and to promote the processes of political accommodation, which those norms imply.

14. The rationale for the Institute's activities is that knowledge and understanding are indispensable to the realization of those norms.

15. The Institute's mandate is:

(a) to extend knowledge through research on federalism and

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

The Court and the Constitution: Comments on the Supreme Court Reference on Constitutional Amendment, 1982.

Douglas Brown and Julia Eastman, with Ian Robinson, **The Limits of Consultation: A Debate Among Ottawa, the Provinces and the Private**

John Whyte, *The Constitution and Natural Resource Revenues*, 1982.

Alexander V. Zlatoski, *Unfinished Business: Aboriginal Peoples and the*

Roger Gibbins, *Senate Reform: Moving Towards the Slinnerv Stone*, 1983.

1 POLITICAL CHOICE AND THE FEDERAL SYSTEM

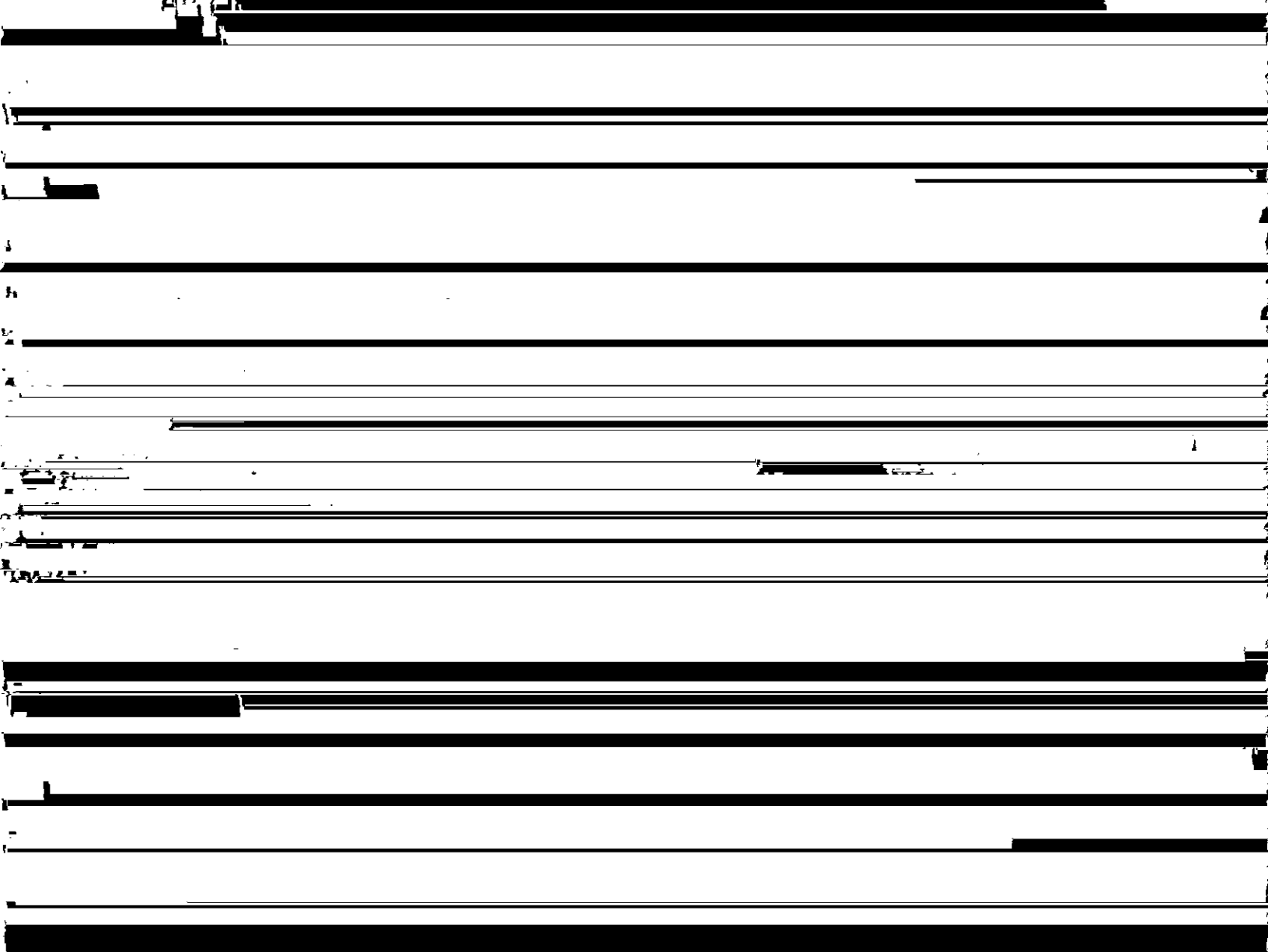
Introduction

Canadians have the good fortune to live in conditions of physical security, political liberty, and economic well-being which must surely be the envy of most of mankind. Nonetheless the confidence we feel in

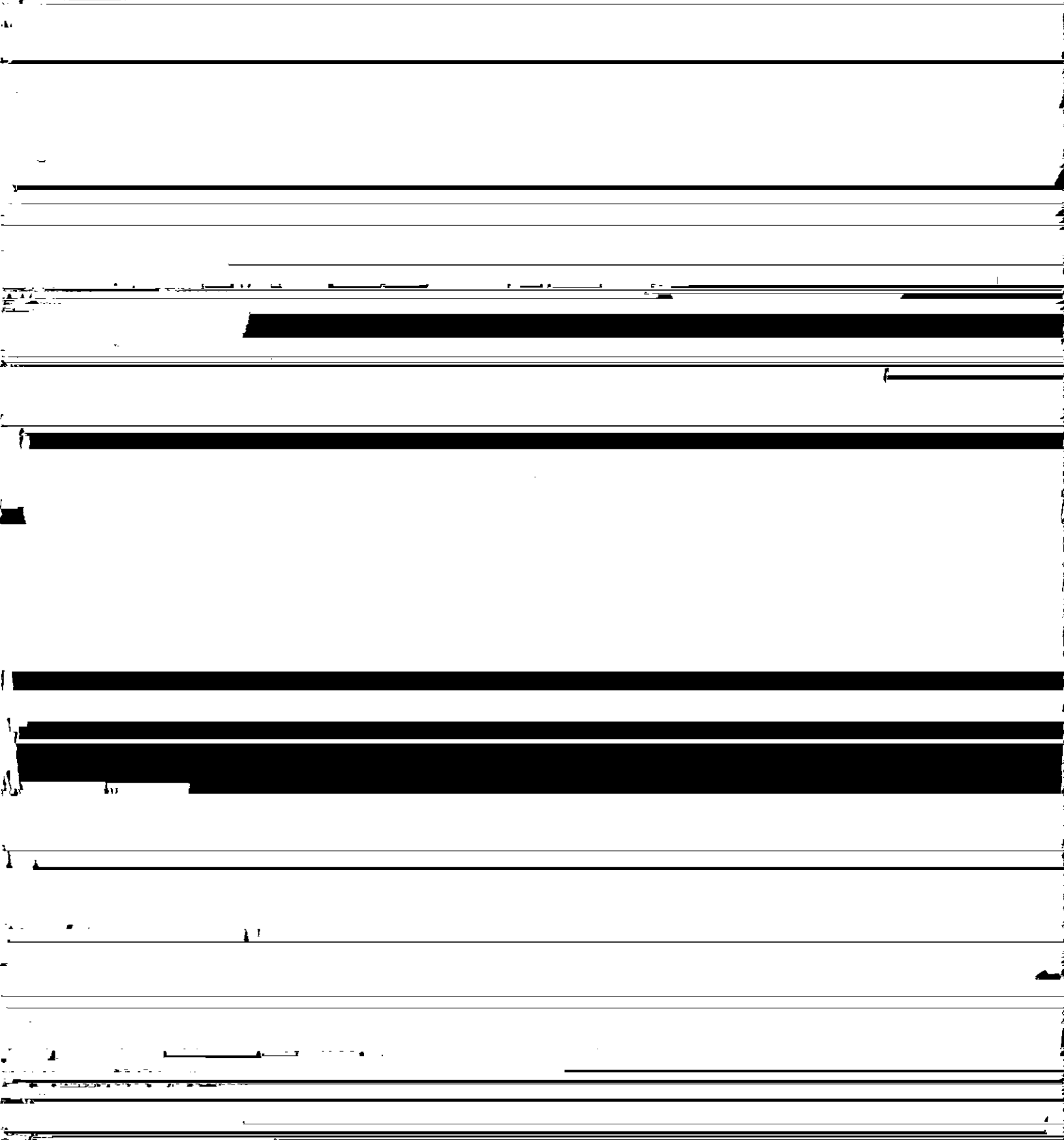
for all serious reflection on the structure and operation of our political institutions.

The Political Setting

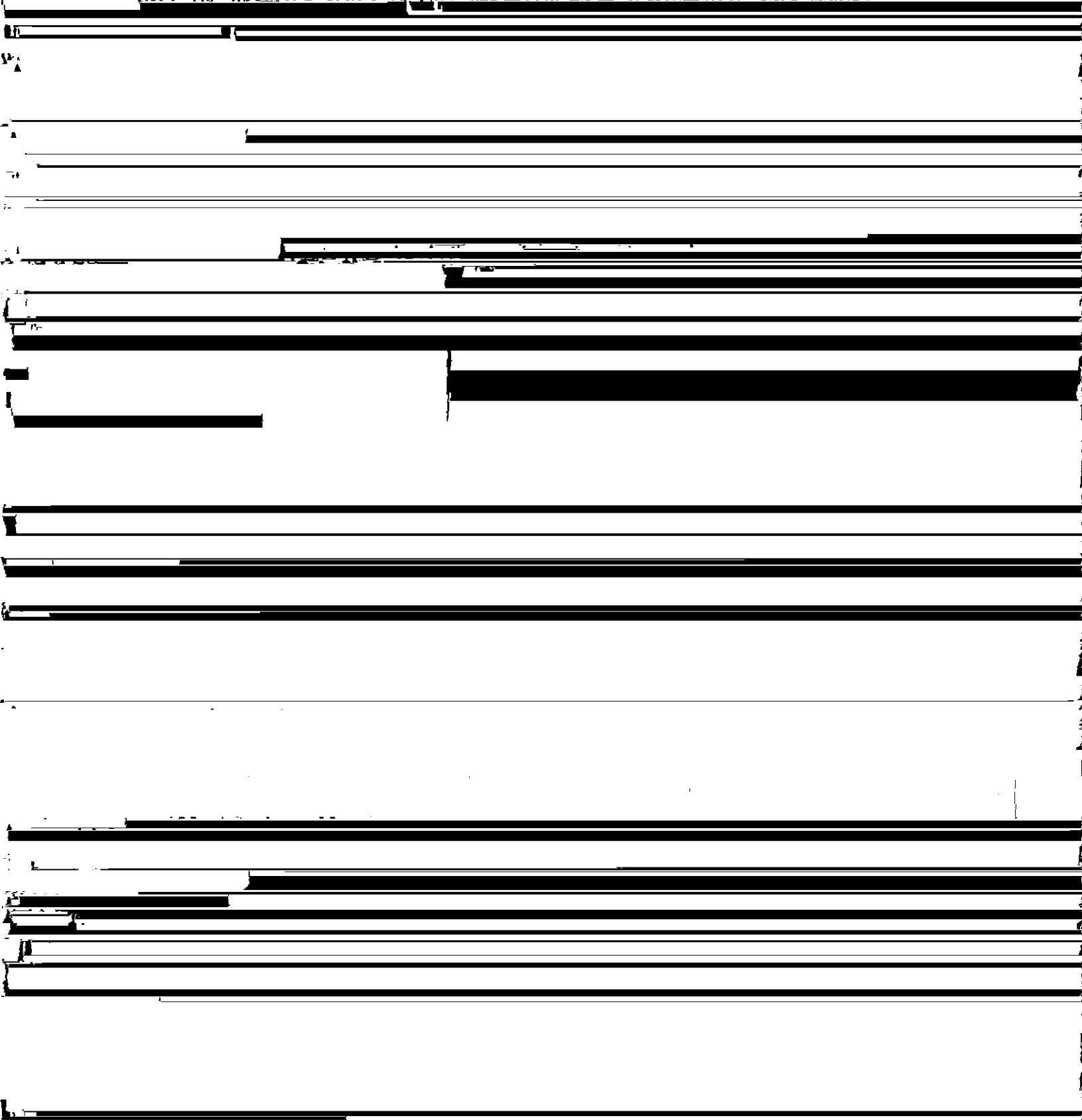
In many respects the political problems that beset Canadians are typical of industrial countries generally. For example, across western Europe and in North America a new consensus is being sought on the role of government in the economy. This is made necessary by the



ourselves and other countries. Nonetheless we Canadians make too



why constitutional issues have been prominent in Canadian politics
over the past few years is that new structures would noticeably modify



is that an unambiguous decision at the federal level in favour of

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

rules, and public assistance programs are all subjects of federal-provincial negotiation and not infrequently of dispute. Again, neo-liberal and interventionist (or "statist") tendencies are observable.

It thus appears that in Canada the federal system is involved in processes of political choice, even in relation to issues which in most countries are not considered "regional". This is one consequence of the demise of "classical federalism".

According to the above...

2 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS TODAY

[REDACTED]

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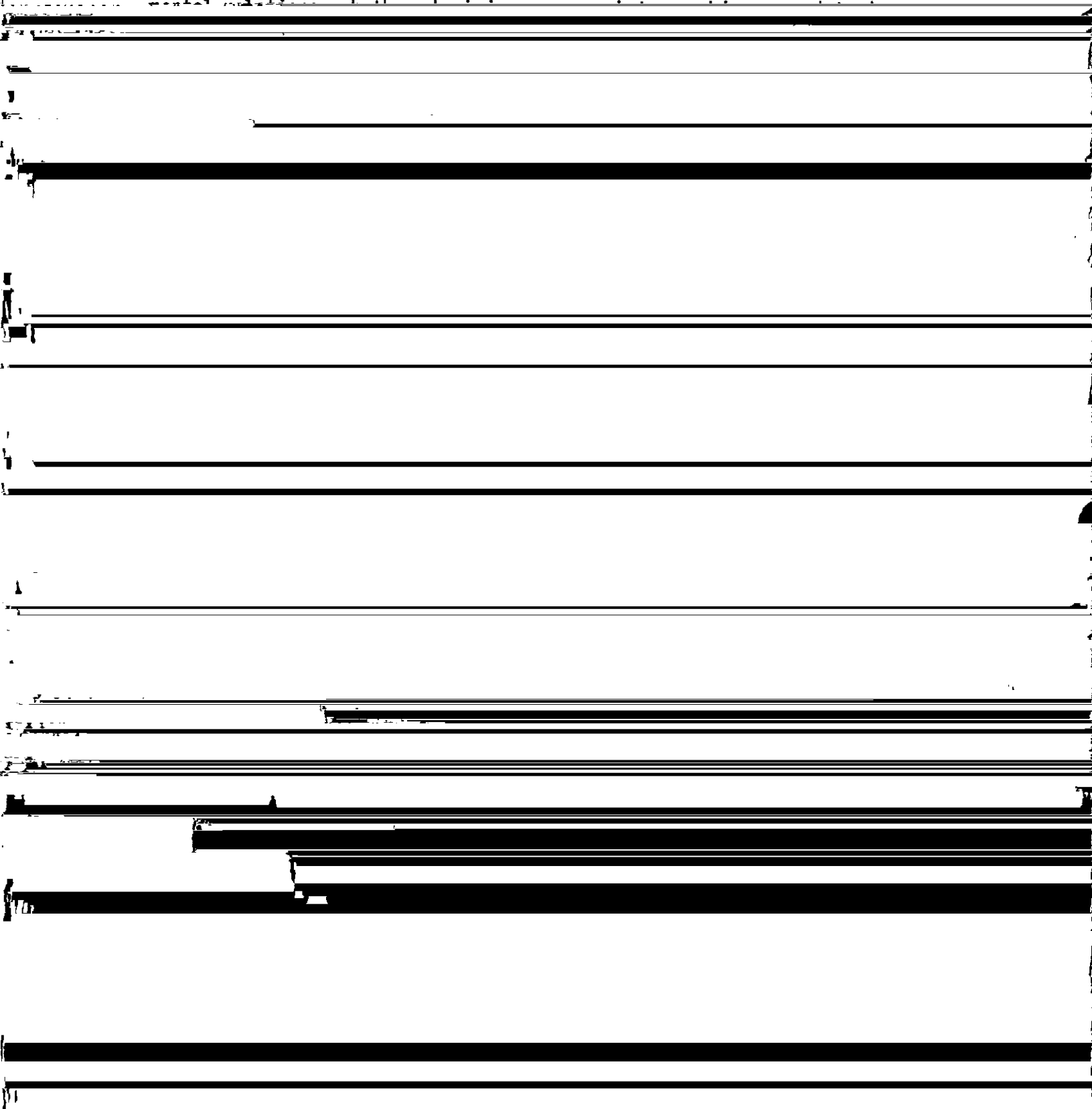
complex political processes we describe as "federalism" provide us with machinery which may and should be used to devise and implement policies in the democratic manner -- that is, in a manner which is guided by the will of the majority, but also is constrained by respect for the rights and the political sensitivities of minorities.

~~It is precisely because federalism is a political process~~



Removing unnecessary irritants.

Opinions observably vary among the "practitioners" of intergovern-



"anti-Ottawa" crusade, but actually to dish the opposition. Similarly, federal ministers may launch an attack on provincial leaders in order to divide and embarrass an opposition party which has close links with several of the provincial governments.

(2) Political leaders at either level may seek to undermine public



Federalism and political accommodation.

In an era when people disagree widely on policy goals, it becomes increasingly difficult to establish and maintain

effectiveness of government or to evaluate institutional arrangements.

seems to have contributed to governmental immobilism and to have complicated the process of devising effective policy responses to economic and social problems. Naturally, this lessens confidence in government, eroding legitimacy.

Political accommodation is not assisted by sweeping disagreements under the rug. On the contrary, it is furthered by the public expression and reasoned defence of diverse attitudes and preferences. Since

Agreement on what courses of action to take is conspicuously absent. Rancour persists in Quebec, the West, and in the Atlantic region: this is a legacy of recent battles over constitutional and policy issues, in which large parts of the country have felt disenfranchised, politically overwhelmed. Specific grievances remain unresolved, while resentments built up in the past reinforce present-day regional and linguistic tensions.

Our needs are clear: we must search for ways of overcoming the resentments built up in the past, we must adapt the working of the

federal system to cope with deep-seated policy problems, and we must

3 THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

-- policy issues challenging the federal system in its present form.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Institute's mandate is:

(a) to extend knowledge through research on federalism and inter-

[REDACTED]

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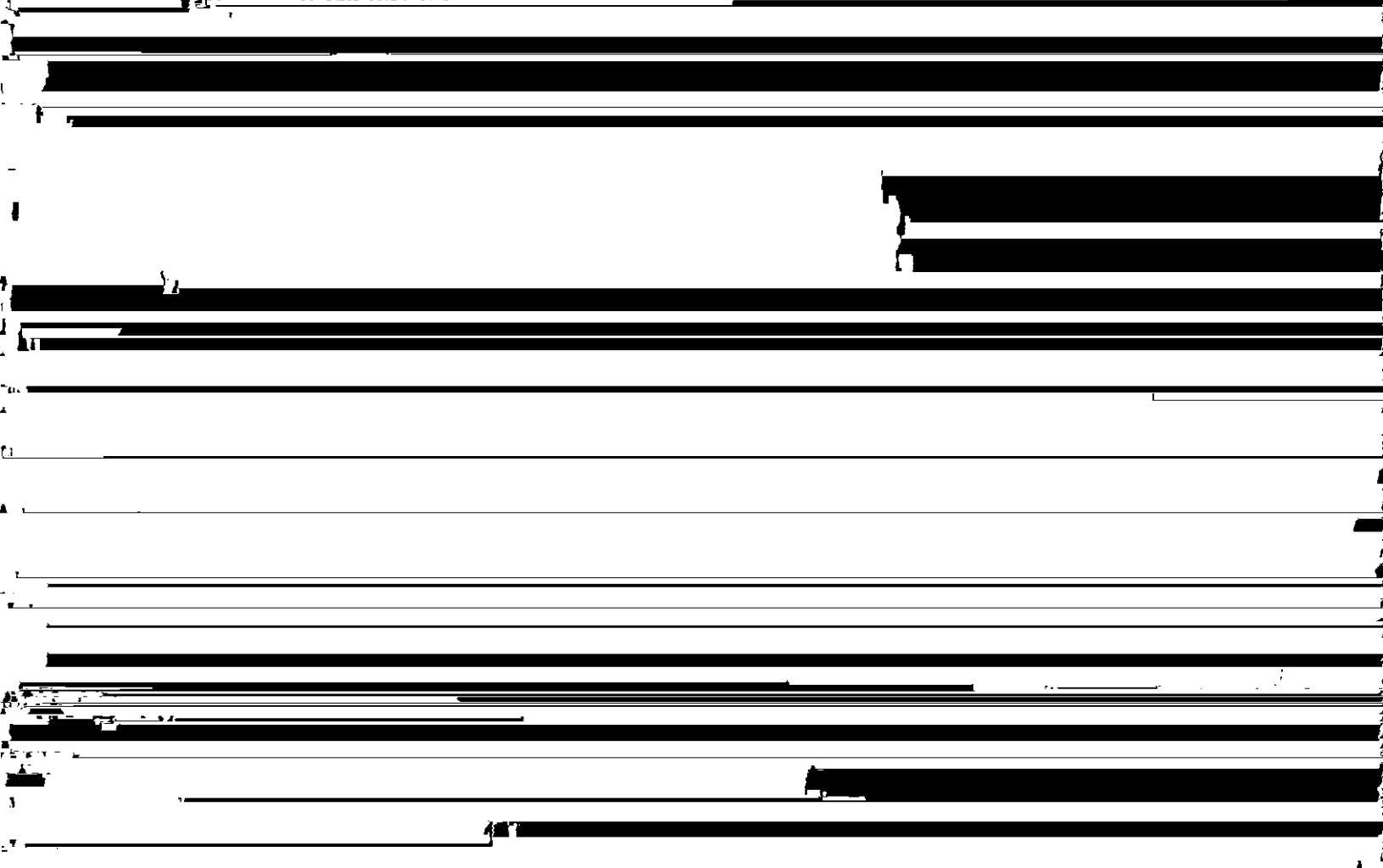
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(b) to broaden the public's understanding of federalism inter-

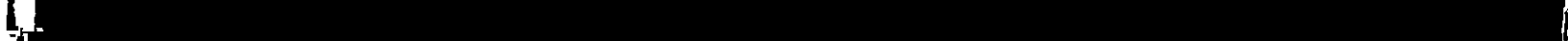
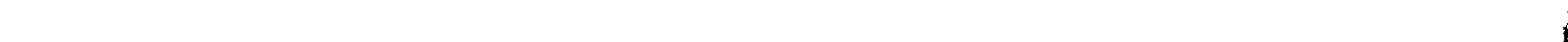
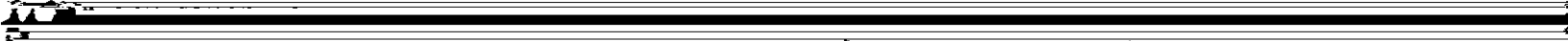
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attention being paid both to formal constitutional change and proposals relating thereto, and to changing modes of interaction among governments. Shifts in the pattern of fiscal transfers and the exercise of taxing powers, and new policy initiatives (whether unilaterally announced or jointly undertaken) may easily have an impact as great as that of formal constitutional revision, modifying the de facto distribution of policy responsibilities and governmental power. Accordingly, changes in the style of conducting intergovernmental relations, and shifts in the distribution of political resources available to various governments in Canada, have been and remain at the core of the Institute's research program.

In part the Institute's research on the structure and working of the federal system is aimed at providing a record of the evolving character of our political institutions in their federal aspect. Perhaps more importantly, the intent is to interpret and analyze



that federal structures have an impact on policy though it remains an



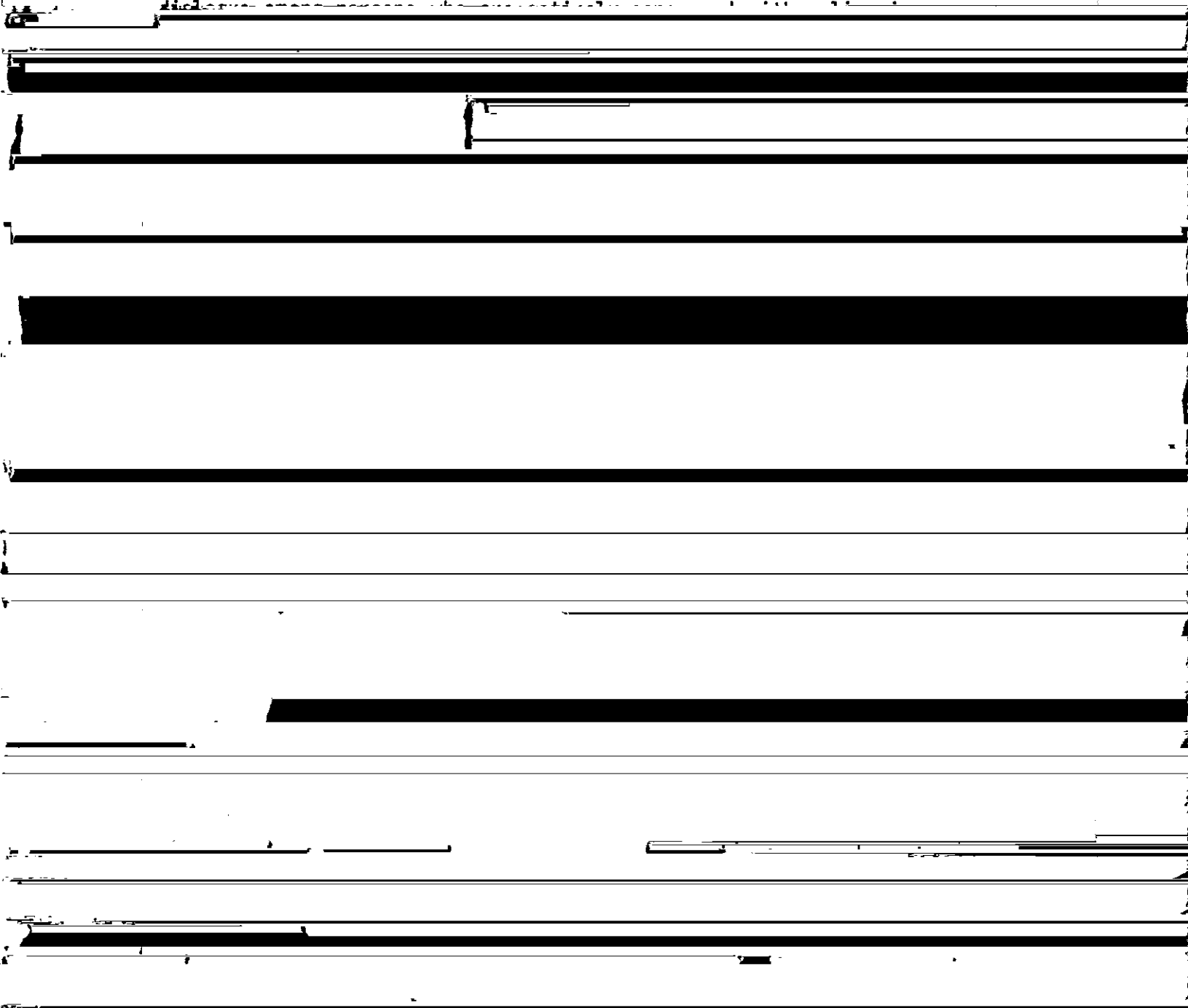
projects are selected according to their urgency or topicality, and according to the financial and human resources available at the time. The Institute's research role, however, is not limited to what can be done "in-house". An important aspect of its role is to keep informed about research being carried out by other institutions.

- A monograph series, dealing with topics such as electoral reform, communications policy, and the organization of intergovernmental relations in Canada and elsewhere.
- Reports, conference proceedings, and monographs published jointly with other organizations such as the Economic Council of Canada and the Science Council of Canada.
- A discussion paper series on diverse topics, providing reports of less-than-monograph length, presenting research findings and/or

Not all of the Institute's work is published "in-house". It also

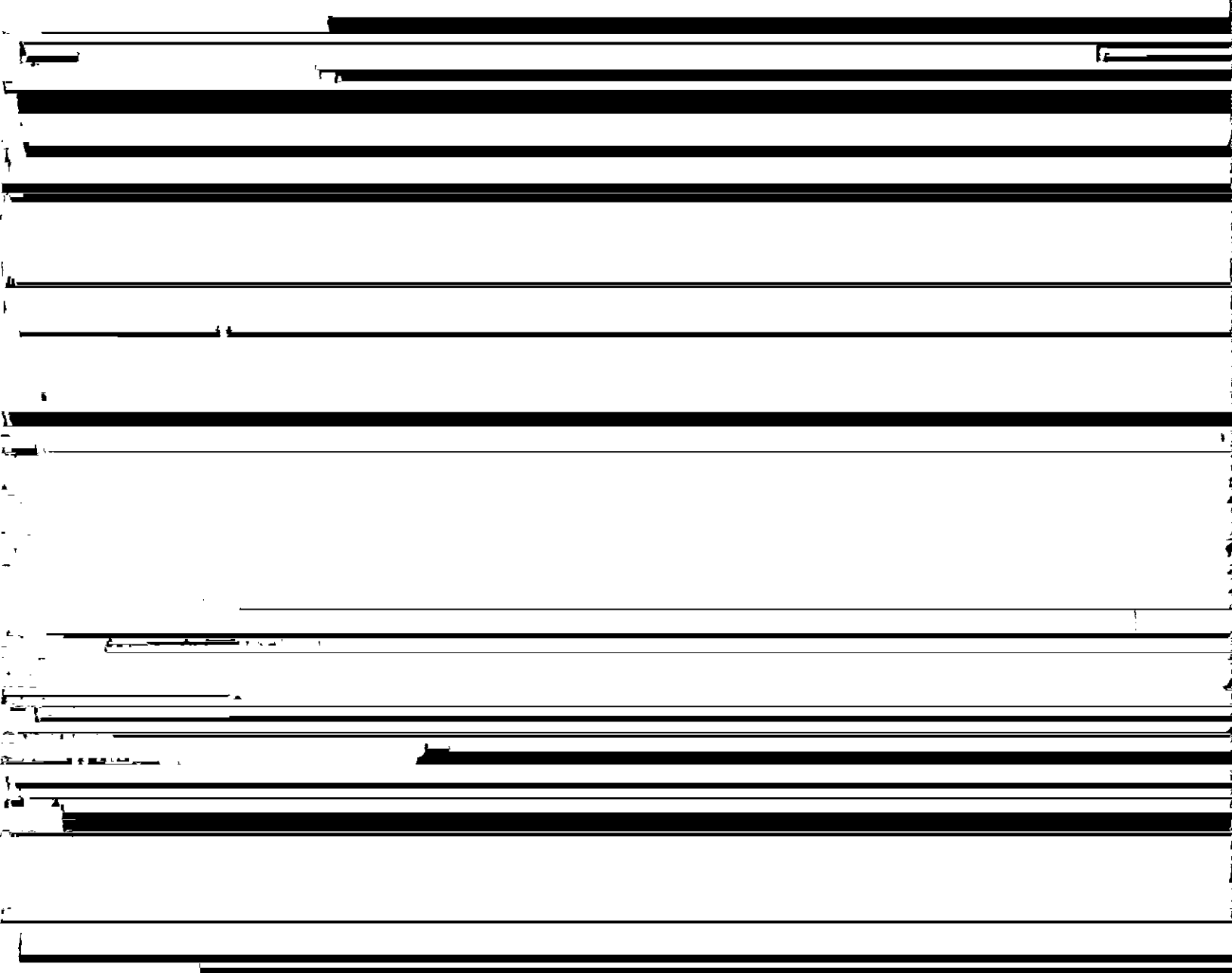
The "Catalyst" Mandate

Most of the Institute's work contributes only indirectly to public purposes (notably to processes of political accommodation); but its activities also extend to a more direct form of participation in public life. In the latter respect it has a dual role, to facilitate



intergovernmental affairs can perform a useful function in promoting dialogue among responsible officials and interested parties outside government.

Public Commentary. The Institute's role in stimulating public debate on issues of the day has already been noted. There is a difference in



They face policy difficulties not always of their own making, and operate under a set of political impulses and constraints -- the exercise of private power and the frequently intransigent demands of public opinion -- which they may attempt to manage but cannot absolutely control. In short, the operations of government are set within an institutional matrix and a political context which to some

