

RACISM STILL PRE

Layout & Design: Tim Judah
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As Canadians, we see ourselves as fair and decent people. We are aware that our reputation as live and let live is known around the world. In many ways, as we look at the racial violence and hatred in countries around the world, we consider ourselves lucky - and better!

This idealistic view of ourselves is reinforced by a strong body of Canadian laws, stating our belief in equal protection and equal opportunity for Canadians of every colour, origin or background. And it is reinforced by our international obligations, through the United Nations, to the elimination of racial discrimination, the enhancement of social justice, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms for all people.

We, as a nation, are opposed to any form of prejudice, intolerance and discrimination wherever and whenever they may exist.

This aspect of our national character has helped make Canada a peaceful and prosperous nation - a nation which should offer every individual an equal chance to achieve his or her dreams.

But it doesn't.

Although we may think of Canada as a fair and caring nation, we have not yet succeeded in creating a society which can always deal with our differences - of race, colour and cultural background - and make them a truly part of the Canadian way of life.

Racism and racial discrimination are facts of life in Canada.

They exist openly and blatantly in the attitudes and actions of individuals. They exist privately in the fears, in the prejudices and stereotypes held by many people, and in plain ignorance. And they exist in our institutions.

Racial discrimination may take a different form and substance in different regions of the country, but the essential problem remains the same.

By not using the diverse skills and talents of Canadians of all origins, we lose important human resources and creative potential. And, through the build-up of tensions and hostility in communities and between groups, Canada loses the solidarity of a national family.

Obviously, racism and racial discrimination help destroy the confidence of individuals and their hopes for the future. But the larger impact is even more serious.

The values and beliefs binding Canadians together are put under pressure. We all feel that weight, not just members of minority groups who personally experience the indignity and the injustice of discrimination in any of its forms. Racism devalues us all. And it diminishes our international reputation as a fair, open and generous country.

Canada's growing multiracial and multicultural population means we must learn now to recognize discrimination in all its forms and eliminate it.

By the year 2000, it is estimated that visible minority Canadians and Aboriginal Canadians will make up 13 per cent of the total population. Canada's largest cities, in particular, will be increasingly multiracial.

What kind of society will we have in the year 2000 - and, more importantly, how will we treat each other as Canadians?

Will we understand and respect each other? Or will we become increasingly uneasy about our multiracial identity and unwilling to realize its vast potential? Will we build this nation on the strength and unity of all its people, or sink in the quicksand of division?

The doctrine of racial superiority is not supported by any biological differences between individuals or

groups. It arises from the way society deals with physical and cultural differences. But scientists long ago reached agreement in recognizing that humankind is one.

Even so, racism continues to haunt the world, and Canada's overall record could be much better. There are still longstanding problems of genuine acceptance and equality for members of this country's racial minorities. Canadians still have to come to terms with the ideal of full and equal participation in Canadian life and the reality of racism which denies such participation.

There's clear evidence that a significant number of Canadians have racist attitudes or, as one poll concluded, "are racist in their hearts." Such attitudes have resulted in actions ranging from name-calling and threatening gestures to writing hate propaganda directed at a specific racial group, damaging property or physical violence. More widespread and more difficult to deal with is the existence of what's being called "silent" discrimination or "polite" prejudice in our institutions and in daily Canadian life.

The facts show that people who are non-white or have a definite accent have a harder time finding a good job, getting promoted and being paid fairly.

*A major 1984 Toronto study showed that white job applicants got three job offers to every one for blacks, who were also treated differently during the hiring process.

*An in-depth survey showed that 80 percent of corporate headhunters and all job agency recruiters received requests to discriminate by race. A total of 94 percent said they rejected job seekers on the basis of colour.

*The first Annual Report on the Employment Equity Act in industries under



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*DRAWING BY SANDY RIDLEY, 15, A STUDENT AT NEPEAN HIGH SCHOOL IN OTTAWA, ONT.



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