

# Examine how inequalities get reproduced

BY WALID CHAHAL

**D**ESPITE the good work and efforts of many us, and that as a community we have come a long way, we have yet to rid Thunder Bay of racism and racial inequity. Diversity Thunder Bay's report, *A Community of Acceptance* (2002) (online), has revealed discrimination and racism against members of racial and ethnic groups in our city. Racism exists.

Yet, because racism is systemic, many who reproduce it do not necessarily do that intentionally. Often, racism is invisible for those who do not face it, especially for those who belong to privileged groups. Combating racism requires a critical perspective so that we can be conscious of how we think and act and how we respond to people of certain ethnic and racial backgrounds.

To a large extent, ethnic inequality and racial discrimination have political, economic and ideological roots in history and in Canadian social institutions. This includes the family, schools, workplaces, sports, religion, justice, arts, and the media. Thunder Bay is no exception.

The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples (1996:46) is relevant for us in Thunder Bay. The report stressed the need to redirect policies to not only redress the injus-



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**Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.**

tices inflicted on Aboriginal people, but also to better meet the needs of all Canadians.

The report called for a number of recommendations including: more and better jobs for Aboriginal Peoples; services more sensitive to Aboriginal needs and cultures; and better and more adequate and accessible health and social services for Aboriginal Peoples.

In the long run, these improvements would mean that Aboriginal Peoples will "require less health care and social services, leading to fewer cases of Aboriginal people in conflict with the law, and the justice system, could be far more effective in dealing with Aboriginal people than they are now."

Both the Diversity Thunder Bay report and the royal commission report are reminders for us not to commit the same mistakes of the past, and to strive towards more harmonious relations where racism, sexism and class discrimination will have no place in our community.

To attain equity, justice and fairness, representatives of our social institutions have been striving to follow democratic ideals.

With this in mind, and rather than wasting our energies by repeatedly denying racism, we have to examine how inequalities of race, gender and class get reproduced in our city.

Examining our community and the larger society by rethinking history and the social construction of our problems brings us closer to living in harmony, and more specifically, racial harmony.

**R**ACIAL harmony can be achieved through understanding the root cause of our problems, antagonisms and hostilities, how they get reproduced, and why they persist. Living in racial harmony will enable us to go beyond assumptions of "them and us" and superiority and inferiority.

By overcoming rigid ways of thinking, whether in relation to race, ethnicity, class or gender, we

can consider the variations that exist not only between groups, but also within social groups, as well as between individuals.

We need to question the commonplace perception that sees social problems, including racism or other types of problems (such as crime), as separate from ideological, economic or other structural conditions.

This perception often holds youths, especially those from certain ethnic and racial backgrounds, solely accountable for problems.

In other words, we blame young people without considering how larger social, economic and political forces and their historical links impact on individuals, families, and communities.

The more we are able to transcend limited ways of thinking and consider our community's problems at the individual, collective and organizational levels, and the more our words, actions and our politics come out of understanding, wisdom, compassion and love, the more we will be able to achieve harmonious existence.

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