

**In response to many social media comments and inquiries directed to Unifor in general, and to our Local President personally, Colin James has written the following on his personal experience as well as providing information as to why...**

## **... Racism Is Not Accepted Here**

by Colin James  
President, Unifor Local 222

### **What is Systemic Racism?**

Specifically, this form of racism is expressed in the day-to-day practices of social and political institutions. It is reflected in the disparities regarding wealth, income, criminal justice, employment, housing, healthcare, political power and education among others. These are systems whose processes benefit the white community and put up roadblocks for people of colour.

Racism is defined as actions and behaviours towards others because of their race. Ignorance and stereotyping such as racial profiling fuel systemic racism.

### **Racism Does Not Exist In Canada?!**

When I hear these denials they make my blood boil, as people who maintain this view either have been turning a blind eye to it or deliberately refuse to admit racism exists.

As a white brother or sister, you may not have been involved in a racial incident but most of you have witnessed a person of colour being treated differently, had negative comments made to them, heard the “N” word being used to describe them. You likely have heard negative, slanderous comments about Indigenous peoples all being drunks or not wanting to work and equally negative comments about Asians.

These all fuel racist stereotypes and breed systemic racism. Most if not all Indigenous people and people of colour have faced racism since they can remember. It will only stop when we all treat each other as we want to be treated and call out those individuals when they cross that line.

### **Black Lives Matter**

Many have questioned this statement in the past and continue to have issues with it.

This statement puts forth that all lives should matter equally—but we are all aware that they do not. Until we have true equality and all of us are treated equal regardless of the colour of our skin, Black Lives Will Matter.

Some think this is a movement against the police. The protests are not against police services, they are against the historic and continuing brutal abuse of power as well as racial profiling by police.

### **How Can I Be An Ally?**

Be brave. Have the courage to hold tough conversations and listen to the stories of Indigenous people or people of colour, watch some of the movies based on racial injustice. Educate yourselves on the history of slavery and how we got to where we are. We need allies and we all have to be united in order to change society and treat us all equal.

When you vote, do not vote for those who have a racist agenda, or don't stand up to those with a racist agenda. Vote for those who have an agenda of improving people's lives regardless of the colour of their skin, ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation. Get to know people of colour rather than avoid them or profiling them.

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### **My Personal Story**

I was born in England and grew up hearing the negative and derogatory racist comments directed at myself and other people of colour in schools. My parents instilled in us that we should stand up for our rights but neither I nor my siblings should get in fights unless it is self-defense. It is hard to hear these comments and have to ignore them, but you learn to grow a thick skin. Of course the odd time I got in trouble as I just heard enough and made the decision that I am not going to listen to it on that particular day.

When I was a teenager, my family moved to Canada in 1974 where we lived in Toronto for two years before moving to Pickering. My very first day in school I encountered racism. The teacher asked the question, 'Who were the first settlers in Canada?' and a boy, thinking that it was funny, answered the "N" word. I got up and walked out of the class while others laughed, as there were no consequences for this individual other than being told 'that is not nice'. It was clear that this behaviour was accepted prior to me being in the class. Being the only person of colour in that class, it was continued to be difficult to turn the other cheek, as this person continued to smirk and make subtle comments. After two weeks, I again got in trouble for fighting, but he never bothered me again.

Once I was old enough to drive, my parents had the talk with me that people of colour have to have with their kids. If you get pulled over do not panic. Be respectful to the officer, no matter how rude he or she may be. I am glad we had

the talk but I was pulled over regularly and my brother, who had saved and bought a sports car, was pulled over even more.

When I got to college things seemed to be much better. Then in 1980 I got hired and walked into General Motors. What an eye-opener, of the worst kind. Behind those walls, people felt empowered to say whatever racist or sexist comments they felt like. This was made worse for anyone who complained and at the time, both the union and the company did very little if anything to create a safe workplace for all. It wasn't until the 1990s that the union started the discussions about zero tolerance policies regarding racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. These were welcome policies to most but many others opposed these changes, as they now could be held accountable. Things have improved but at a much slower pace than expected or needed.

To make real change we all need to be involved and speak out when we see racism raise its ugly head. Too many times I have heard "he or she did not mean it like that".

In 1992, I got elected as alternate committeeperson, became involved in our union and moved up in the leadership, being elected as Local President in 2016. During that period I heard racist comments from both coworkers and others in leadership. When I ran for the position of President, I heard the racist comments and even received texts from some of the racists. I chose to ignore them and not stoop to that level but we all need to be aware that racism continues to be firmly entrenched in our schools, our workplaces and our society.

I'm asking everyone to please read the following; knowing our history can help us understand how Canadians ended up where we are today.

## ***Canada's History Of Racism (reference Wikipedia)***

### **Exclusionary anti-Chinese immigration laws**

The Canadian government passed the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 levying a \$50 head tax upon all Chinese people immigrating to Canada. When the 1885 act failed to deter Chinese immigration, the Canadian government then passed the Chinese Immigration Act, 1900, increasing the head tax to \$100, and, upon that act failing, passed the Chinese Immigration Act, 1904 increasing the head tax (landing fee) to \$500, equivalent to \$8000 in 2003 – when compared to the head tax – Right of Landing Fee and Right of Permanent Residence Fee – of \$975 per person, paid by new immigrants in 1995–2005 decade, which then was reduced to \$490 in 2006.

The Chinese Immigration Act, 1923, better known as the "Chinese Exclusion Act", replaced prohibitive fees with a ban on Chinese immigration to Canada – excepting merchants, diplomats, students, and "special circumstance" cases. The Chinese who entered Canada before 1923 had to register with the local authorities, and could leave Canada only for two years or less. Since the Exclusion Act went into effect on 1 July 1923, Chinese-Canadians referred to Canada Day (Dominion Day) as "Humiliation Day", refusing to celebrate it until the Act's repeal in 1947.

### **Indigenous Peoples**

The living standard of indigenous peoples in Canada falls far short of those of the non-indigenous, and they, along with other 'visible minorities' remain, as a group, the poorest in Canada. There continue to be barriers to gaining equality with other Canadians of European ancestry. The life expectancy of First Nations people is lower; they have fewer high school graduates, much higher unemployment rates, nearly double the number of infant deaths and significantly greater contact with law enforcement. Their incomes are lower, they enjoy fewer promotions in the workplace and as a group the younger members are more likely to work reduced hours or weeks each year.

Many in Europe during the 19th century, (as reflected in the Imperial Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines), supported the goal put forth by colonial imperialists of 'civilizing' the Native populations. This led to an emphasis on the acquisition of Aboriginal lands in exchange for the putative benefits of European society and their associated Christian religions. British control of Canada (the Crown) began when they exercised jurisdiction over the first nations and it was by Royal Proclamation that the first piece of legislation the British government passed over First Nations citizens assumed control of their lives. It gave recognition to the Indians tribes as First Nations living under Crown protection.

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It was after the treaty of Paris In 1763, whereby France ceded all claims in present-day Canada to Britain, that King George III of Great Britain issued this Royal Proclamation specifying how the Indigenous in the crown colony were to be treated. It is the most significant pieces of legislation regarding the Crown's relationship with Aboriginal people. This Royal Proclamation recognized Indian owned lands and reserved to them all use as their hunting grounds. It also established the process by which the Crown could purchase their lands, and also laid out basic principles to guide the Crown when making treaties with the First Nations. The Proclamation made Indian lands transferred by treaty to be Crown property, and stated that indigenous title is a collective or communal rather than a private right so that individuals have no claim to lands where they lived and hunted long before the British came.

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### **Indian Acts**

In 1867, the British North America Act made land reserved for Indians a Crown responsibility. In 1876 the first of many Indian Acts passed, each successive one leached more from the rights of the indigenous as was stated in the first. The sundry revised Indian Acts (22 times by 2002) solidified the position of Natives as wards of the state, and Indian agents were given discretionary power to control almost every aspect of the lives of the indigenous. It then became necessary to have permission from an Indian agent if Native people wanted to sell crops they had grown and harvested, or wear traditional clothes off the reserves. The Indian Act was also used to deny Indians the right to vote until 1960, and they could not sit on juries.

In 1885 General Middleton after defeating the Metis rebellion introduced the Pass System in western Canada, under which Natives could not leave their reserves without first obtaining a pass from their farming instructors permitting them to do so. While the Indian Act did not give him such powers, and no other legislation allowed the Department of Indian Affairs to institute such a system, and it was known by crown lawyers to be illegal as early as 1892, the Pass System remained in place and was enforced until the early 1930s. As Natives were not permitted at that time to become lawyers, they could not fight it in the courts. Thus was institutional racism externalized as official policy.

When Aboriginals began to press for recognition of their rights and to complain of corruption and abuses of power within the Indian department, the Act was amended to make it an offence for an Aboriginal person to retain a lawyer for the purpose of advancing any claims against the crown.

### **Métis**

Unlike the effect of those Indian treaties in the North-West which established the reserves for the Indigenous, the protection of Métis lands was not secured by the scrip policy instituted in the 1870s, whereby the crown exchanged a scrip in exchange for a fixed (160–240 acres) grant of land to those of mixed heritage.

Although Section 3 of the 1883 Dominion Lands Act set out this limitation, this was the first mention in the orders-in-council confining the jurisdiction of scrip commissions to ceded Indian territory. However, a reference was first made in 1886 in a draft letter of instructions to Goulet from Burgess, 17 May 1886 (NAC RG 15, Vol. 501, File 140862). In most cases, the scrip policy did not consider Métis ways of life, did not guarantee their land rights, and did not facilitate any economic or lifestyle transition.

Most Métis were illiterate and did not know the value of the scrip, and in most cases sold them for instant gratification due to economic need to speculators who undervalued the paper. Needless to say, the process by which they applied for their land was made deliberately arduous.

There was no legislation binding scrip land to the Métis whom applied for them, Instead, Métis scrip lands could be sold to anyone, hence alienating any Aboriginal title which may have been vested in those lands. Despite the evident detriment to the Métis, speculation was rampant and done in collusion with the distribution of scrip. While this does not necessarily preclude a malicious intent by the federal government to consciously 'cheat' the Métis, it illustrates their apathy towards the welfare of the Métis, their long-term interests, and the recognition of their Aboriginal title. But the point of the policy was to settle land in the North-West with agriculturalists, not keep a land reserve for the Métis. Scrip, then, was a major undertaking in Canadian history, and its importance as both an Aboriginal policy and a land policy should not be overlooked as it was an institutional 'policy' which discriminated against ethnic indigenous to their continued detriment.

## **Enfranchisement**

Until 1951 the various Indian Acts defined a 'person' as "an individual other than an Indian", and all indigenous peoples were considered wards of the state. Legally, the Crown devised a system of enfranchisement whereby an indigenous person could become a "person" in Canadian law. Indigenous people could gain the right to vote and become Canadian citizens, "persons" under the law, by voluntarily assimilating into European/Canadian society. It was hoped that indigenous peoples would renounce their native heritage and culture and embrace the 'benefits' of civilized society. Indeed, from the 1920s to the 1940s some Natives did give up their status in order to receive the right to go to school,

vote or to drink. However, voluntary enfranchisement proved a failure when few natives took advantage. In 1920 a law was passed to authorize enfranchisement without consent, and many Aboriginal peoples were involuntarily enfranchised. Natives automatically lost their Indian status under this policy and also if they became professionals such as doctors or ministers, or even if they obtained university degrees, and with it, their right to reside on the reserves.

The enfranchisement requirements particularly discriminated against Native women, specifying in Section 12 (1)(b) of the Indian Act that an Indian status woman marrying a non Indian man would lose her status as an Indian, as would her children. In contrast non-Indian women marrying Indian men would gain Indian status. Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, neatly expressed the sentiment of the day in 1920: "Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question and no Indian Department" This aspect of enfranchisement was addressed by passage of Bill C-31 in 1985, where the discriminatory clause of the Indian Act was removed, and Canada officially gave up the goal of enfranchising Natives.

### **Residential schools**

With the goal of civilizing and Christianizing Aboriginal populations, a system of 'industrial schools' was developed in the 19th century which combined academic studies with "more practical matters" and schools for Natives began to appear in the 1840s. From 1879 on these schools were modelled after the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, whose motto was "Kill the Indian in him and save the man". It was felt that the most effective weapon for "killing the Indian" in them, was to remove children from their Native supports and so Native children were taken away from their homes, their parent, their families, friends and communities. The 1876 Indian Act gave the federal government responsibility for Native education and by 1910 residential schools dominated the Native education policy. The government provided funding to religious groups such as the Catholic, Anglican, United Church and Presbyterian churches to undertake Native education. By 1920, attendance by natives was made compulsory and there were 74 residential schools operating nationwide. Following the ideas of Sifton and others like him, the academic goals of these schools were "dumbed down". As Duncan Campbell Scott stated at the time, they didn't want students that were "made too smart for the Indian villages". Additionally, "To this end the curriculum in residential schools has been simplified and the practical instruction given is such as may be immediately of use to the pupil when he returns to the reserve after leaving school."

The funding the government provided was generally insufficient and often the schools ran themselves as "self-sufficient businesses", where 'student workers' were removed from class to do the laundry, heat the building or perform farm work. Dormitories were often poorly heated and overcrowded, and the food was less than adequately nutritious. A 1907 report, commissioned by Indian Affairs, found that in 15 prairie schools there was a death rate of 24%. Indeed, a deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs at the time commented: "It is quite within the mark to say that fifty percent of the children who passed through these schools did not benefit from the education which they had received therein." While the death rate did decline in later years, death would remain a part of the residential school tradition. The author of that report to the BNA, Dr. P.H. Bryce, was later removed and in 1922 published a pamphlet<sup>[218]</sup> that came close to calling the governments indifference to the conditions of the Indians in the schools 'manslaughter'.

The worst aspect of Canada's residential schools, and that which anthropologists Steckley and Cummins said "might readily qualify as the single-worst thing that Europeans did to Natives in Canada" was the endemic abuses; emotional, physical and sexual, for which they are now known. Punishments were often brutal and cruel, sometimes even life-threatening or life-ending. Pins were sometimes stuck in children's tongues for speaking their Native languages, sick children were made to eat their vomit, and semi-formal inspections of children's genitalia were carried out. The term Sixties Scoop (or Canada Scoops) refers to the Canadian practice, beginning in the 1960s and continuing until the late 1980s, of taking ("scooping up") children of Aboriginal peoples in Canada from their families for placing in foster homes or adoption.

Most residential schools closed in the 1970s. Criminal and civil suits against the government and the churches began in the late 1980s and shortly thereafter the last residential school closed. By 2002 the number of lawsuits had passed 10,000. In the 1990s, beginning with the United Church, the churches that ran the residential schools began to issue formal apologies. And in 1998 the Canadian government issued the Statement of Reconciliation, and committed \$350 million in support of a community-based healing strategy to address the healing needs of individuals, families and communities arising from the legacy of physical and sexual abuse at residential schools. The money was used to launch the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

### **Canadian Indian residential school system**

In the 19th and 20th century, the Canadian federal government's Indian Affairs Department officially encouraged the growth of the Indian residential school



system as an agent in a wider policy of assimilating Native Canadians into European-Canadian society. This policy was enforced with the support of various Christian churches, who ran many of the schools. Over the course of the system's existence, approximately 30% of native children, roughly some 150,000, were placed in residential schools nationally, with the last school closing in 1996. There has long been controversy about the conditions experienced by students in the residential schools. While day schools for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children always far outnumbered residential schools, a new consensus emerged in the early 21st century that the latter schools did significant harm to Aboriginal children who attended them by removing them from their families, depriving them of their ancestral languages, undergoing forced sterilization for some students, and by exposing many of them to physical leading to sexual abuse by staff members, and other students, and dis-enfranchising them forcibly.

Starting in the 1990s, the federal government started a number of initiatives to address the effects of the Indian residential schools. In March 1998, the government made a Statement of Reconciliation and established the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. In the fall of 2003, the Alternative Dispute Resolution process was launched, which was a process outside of court providing compensation and psychological support for former students of residential schools who were physically or sexually abused or were in situations of wrongful confinement. On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a formal apology on behalf of the sitting Cabinet and in front of an audience of Aboriginal delegates. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission ran from 2008 through to 2015 in order to document past wrongdoing in the hope of resolving conflict left over from the past.