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Fall 2020 Report

**HRRR Committee Report
NE Meeting October 6-8, 2020**

During these past few months, we have often heard the term, “we are in unchartered territory” and facing unprecedented times due to the corona virus Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, implying, that we have a foreigner in our midst. Theoretically, the whole atmosphere is different now. I would like to expand on the word foreigner, as it could be, at times, uncomfortable for some people.

Here in North America, we are all foreigners, unless we are from the First Nations. We all came here voluntarily. The only people who did not come here voluntarily were the slaves, who were brought here from Africa.

There were positive and negative effects to the foreigners who came here. From the positive perspective, they brought their talents, knowledge and experience to expand civilization. However, on the negative side, the people who were already here decided they knew what was best for the Indigenous people. The Indigenous children were taken away from their villages/towns and put into residential schools.

Having expanded on the word foreigner, let us transcend into the present times and examine how racialism continues to haunt us. Systemic racialism has created a toxic environment for a very long time.

The word racism is not a comfortable word to discuss, however it needs to be acknowledged, that racism still exists. We need to be aware that systemic racialism is still present and continues to occur. Confronting it, is the first step in making progress to eliminate barriers that prevail in our society.

On that note, on July 30th, 2020, I addressed racism at the S+HR UMCC (Service + Human Resources-Union Management Consultation Committee). I felt this would be an appropriate time to raise awareness and discuss racism in the workplace. I mentioned the concept of racialization, which refers to the processes by which a group of people are defined by their “race”, and the perception of **conscious, unconscious or direct biases** as it refers to racism. This is a highly prominent conversation in society today, as demonstrated by movements, such as “Black Lives Matter”.

Further illustrating that George Floyd, a black man, was killed on May 25th 2020 by the Minneapolis police. His death sparked an outrage all over the world, inviting us to examine the pandemic on racism.

I mentioned that it would be reasonable to ask ourselves, what does racialization mean?

Suggesting that the concept of racialization refers to the processes by which a group of people are defined by their “race.” In doing so, I provided examples on the perception of conscious, unconscious or direct bias as it refers to racism in our workplace.

In closing, I suggested that if the department would like to feel the true pulse of our employees, perhaps a survey should be conducted for those employees who have self-identified, with an emphasis on racialized people.

Fabienne Jean-François NVP-Quebec Region supported my statement, indicating two recent examples that occurred in the department which show that there is still a lot of work to be done in order to have an honest discussion on racism in the workplace.

Sister Jean-Francois stated....*“I have to say when you ask us to speak on our lived experience and how we face racism within ESDC, you need to see it as a privilege, if we allow you to come and listen to us. It’s a privilege when you ask us to go, into a part of ourselves, that is painful to recollect moments. We have lived that were painful and to share them publicly with people who happen not to be our friends and not to be our family.”*

Chris Gardiner NVP-Manitoba & Saskatchewan also spoke in support of my statement and related the story of a member who left Regina because of endemic racism in Saskatchewan that prevented him from being able to raise his son there. He noted that these are difficult topics and we might learn disturbing things about the people we work with, both in the experiences they have had, and/or in some cases, in the attitude, they might harbour.

My statement on racism, echoed support by my colleagues, sister Fabienne and brother Chris, which had a profound impact at this meeting. Danièle Besner – Director General, thanked us for sharing and providing a topic requiring reflection. She stated that we still have not done enough, and she looks forward to working with union colleagues in order to push the envelope within ESDC, so that we are an employer of choice for everyone.

The HRRR (Human Rights Race Relations Committee) had its first meeting since the pandemic via zoom, on July 28th. The committee members discussed racial issues in the workplace.

The committee members shared experiences with racial discrimination in the workplace and concerns with communicating with their members during the present Covid-19 epidemic. Committee members discussed the feedback that they are getting from their members across the country.

The committee also deliberated on the need for an open forum where members could voice their issues and receive support.

In closing, it is evident that Covid-19 impacted our members of the First Nations/Métis/Inuit, Members with Disabilities and the LGBTQ2+ lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender and transsexual communities, Racially Visible members who have faced some challenges and have had to manage emotional self-care, as a result of having to deal with mental health issues.

I think we would need to take a deeper dive into the organization's culture, as we have not explicitly defined the culture of the organization with respect to microaggression, dealing with systemic racialism, and, addressing white fragility.

During these difficult times, I am very pleased to say that, whenever I addressed equity issues with the CEIU's (NE) National Executive, I can honestly say that the NE has been supportive, which helps in promoting equity issues within the union, and with the employer.

Respectfully submitted.

In solidarity,

Sebastian Rodrigues

National Vice President Human Rights &

Chair National Human Rights/Race Relations Committee

"We are way more powerful when we turn to each other and not on each other, when we celebrate our diversity... and together tear down the mighty walls of injustice." Cynthia McKinney