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## Northern Insights- cont'd from page 5

the media. Honestly sharing our differences and disagreements at the outset, the conference then moved into discussion groups aimed at finding solutions. The solutions that emerged will require a lot of follow-up work, but are definitely worth pursuing.

Unanimously, the conference accepted the proposals of Rick Torres, the President of Canadian Spectrum Limited. Spectrum, based in Mississauga, west of Toronto, broadcasts what Torres calls "horizontal multicultural programming", in addition to the traditional "vertical" programming. Vertical programs reach only the converted and the members of that particular minority group - televising Polish church services to the Polish community, Chinese New Year celebrations to the Chinese community. etc. "Horizontal" programs are done only in English, so everyone can understand, and have an educational component - not just broadcasting the event, but asking for explanations, in simple terms, of the origins and meanings of cultural practices. The intent of horizontal programs is to create understanding, rather than merely perpetuate the language and heritage of the ethnic groups.

Torres gave the conference a

rewording of McLuhan that made sense to everyone - "the messenger is the message". The people on television and radio present us with a societal image, and thus a "message", just by their presence and attitude. For young people, they are powerful role models. For adults, they represent a mirror of society. Those models and mirrors must make sure that their understanding of society is multi-racial, multicultural, non-racist, and non-sexist. Significantly, the ethnic group representatives at the conference argued just having brown, yellow and black faces on television along with the white, is not enough. Attitudes are just as important as skin colour.

The conference also undertook to try building new bridges between the media and ethnic groups, through committees and task forces. Media representatives will be asked to sit on the boards of individual ethnic groups, and perhaps even the Multicultural Association itself. Public forums will be organized, with media help, to discuss issues of racial discrimination, linguistic tolerance, and employment equity.

All these initiatives are overdue. As cities and towns become more diverse ethnically, racial bigotry and intolerance rear their ugly heads more often. The voices of reason, calling for tolerance and diversity, will have to be heard often, and loudly. As a media person, I look forward to honest discussion of our societal problems openly, without sweeping them under the rug. Yet the media will have to approach those debates with sensitivity, and renewed awareness of our role as messengers, looking for bridges to build, and gaps in understanding to fill. It will be an interesting and challenging time.

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