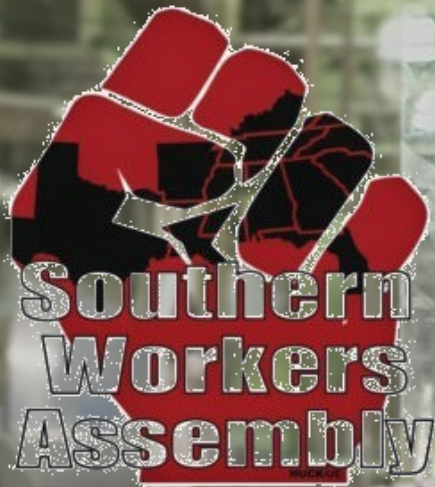


June 2020



# ***The Meatpacking Industry***



**The Two Pandemics:  
Police Violence in Black and  
Poor Communities**

**And**

**The Impact of COVID-19  
on Southern Workers in the  
Meatpacking Industry  
Statement by Ajamu Dillahunt**

**The *Southern Workers Assembly 2nd Webinar*, held on Sunday, June 14, 2020 from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm examined the Conditions for Southern Workers in the Meatpacking Industry under the COVID 19 Pandemic.**

**Speakers included:**

**Facilitator:**

**Libby Devlin**, National Bargaining Director for the National Nurses United

**Freddie Ash**, steward, UFCW Local 1529, works at Pekoe Foods in Brooksville, MS

**Magaly Licolli**, Director, Venceremos, organizing Latinx poultry workers in 5 plants across Arkansas

**Andre Barnett**, Secretary Treasurer, UFCW Local 1208, Smithfield foods, Tar Heel, NC

**Evelyn**, works at Case Farms in Morganton, NC active member of the Western NC Workers Center

**Abdul Akalimat**, professor of African-American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign speaking on the research done by the SWA about the meatpacking industry and COVID-19 and the new meatpacking pamphlet.

**Ajamu Dillahunt**, Black Workers For Justice, speaking about Black Lives Matter and the role of the working class and unions in fighting police murders

*A link to the complete webinar can be found at: <https://southernworker.org>*

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***The following remarks are an excerpt from the presentation given by Ajamu Dillahunt — a member of the Southern Workers Assembly steering committee, a leader in Black Workers for Justice, and a retired local president of the American Postal Workers Union — at the opening of the Southern Workers Assembly webinar held on June 14, 2020.***

We are in the midst of two interrelated Pandemics that are creating death and devastation across the United States. The Covid-19 Virus has generated a worldwide Pandemic causing more than 423,000 deaths worldwide and 118,000 in the U.S The handling of this public health crisis in the US has been guided by the dictates of the capitalist, the 1%, and their administrators in government in Washington and in the states.

The Pandemic has pulled backed the covers on capitalism and racism. What many of us know from our lived experiences is being viewed by the world and reinforcing the need for system change. Inequality, poverty, unstable employment, low wages, and lack of health care are in the spotlight as Black and Brown people experience the disproportionate impact of the disease, the layoffs and being forced to work in dangerous situations to protect the profits of the corporations. They still refuse to be transparent with data about the impact on Black and Brown communities, driving communities to struggle against them for this information.



Meat packing plants re-open despite the dangers posed by the Coronavirus Pandemic.

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The government's response has been criminal. With knowledge about the potential virus in early January it wasn't until March that 45 started to implement any of the critical measures to address the developing crisis. On February 28 he even said "It's going to disappear. One day, it's like a miracle, it will disappear." He must be held accountable for the deaths of thousands.

The other Pandemic is the increasing rise of Police murders of Black men and women across the country with impunity, that is to say, in spite of body cameras and the cameras of by standers, they kill Black people with bullets, choke holds and in the case of George Floyd, a knee and the full body weight of a Minneapolis cop on his neck. As we meet, yet another murder has taken place in Atlanta Friday night. Rayshard Brooks was shot in the back by a police officer after being tested for DUI at a Wendy's drive in line.

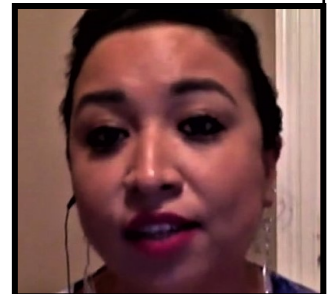
Black communities have been in the streets in a rebellion since the murder of George Floyd. Cities large and small have seen protest in support of the demand that Black Lives should matter. The police have responded with violence and the national guard has been deployed with 45 threatening to mobilize the Federal troops. Symbols of white supremacy are being taken down by the people or local governments fearing the masses will do it. Solidarity with the rebellion has been seen internationally from Africa, to Europe to the Caribbean. Africans on the continent and African descendants in Europe are tearing down symbols of colonialism and the slave trade.

From the chaos and struggle of these pandemics the people will come to a better understanding of the system and become permanent fighters for a society free of capitalist exploitation and racism. Let's all contribute to making this happen.



Thousands across the US and around the world rebel against racism and police brutality in lieu of the heinous murder of George Floyd.

## Organizing Is Our Best Defense!



Magaly Licolli, Director Venceremos

signatures. And in the Georgia plant, it was around 100. So we did actions outside the plant and the companies began feeling the pressure.

So right now the workers have been doing strikes inside the plants, like organic strikes.....These plants are composed by marginalized Latinx communities, Black folks, and what the government really and companies are doing is just attacking them and they are dehumanizing them completely. And so the workers need to stand up. They need to continue to organize, to do actions.

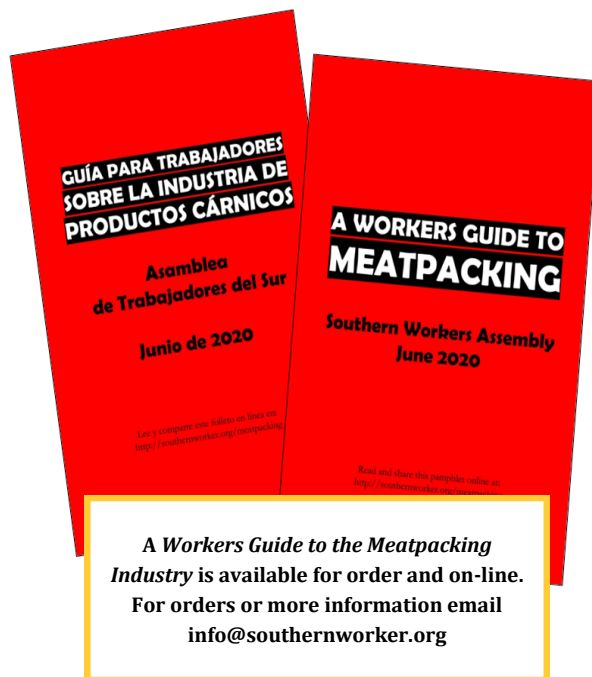
Right now the companies are trying to blame the workers by saying that the workers got sick at the stores, parties, or social gatherings which is not really the truth. The company has allowed these workers to get sick and continue allowing the workers to get sick. So right now we are going to organize a march coming next Saturday on calling the governor, and calling the companies that they need to shut down. Workers want these facilities to be shut down for deep cleaning and put all the workers who are at risk in paid quarantine. And so this is how we are going to assure that we are going to contain the virus.



We began organizing workers, I began organizing workers around the pandemic, in early March, because in early March, workers were not provided PPE, they were not providing any social distancing measures. Poultry workers are used to working while sick because they don't have paid sick leave. So we began doing our online campaign addressing all of these issues and making demands of the budget companies.

Venceremos is a worker led organization, and I co-founded this organization with a group of Latinx women, poultry women. So with them, we began addressing: how are we going to tackle these demands, tackle these issues? We began organizing workers inside the plants by gathering signatures and creating petitions to Tyson Foods and George's, so in one of the Tyson plants we gather close to 200

## SWA “Safe Jobs Save Lives” Campaign Webinar #2 Report



### *Join the “Safe Jobs Save Lives” Campaign*

Workers across the US South are on the move demanding workplace safety amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic. Southern workers also need a strategy and self-organization to secure any gains they make through collective action. As we reach nearly 17 million people becoming recently unemployed, our for-profit health care system tied to a job is increasingly being exposed. Health care should be a human right for all.

Studies show that the Black working class, because of the capitalist system’s historical oppression and neglect, has suffered the highest number of deaths from COVID19. Fifty-seven (57%) percent of the US Black population live in the South, a region where racial, economic, social and political inequality has been the highest for Black America.

How do we use this moment to advance the organization of workers at the workplace and to build solidarity formations such as local workers assemblies, especially in the Southern region with lowest union density? How can this crisis help us get closer to a universal, single-payer health care system?

We seek to launch a South-wide campaign that unites workers on the following **PRINCIPLES**:

**1) Right to a safe workplace** – everyone has the right to a safe workplace and a right to refuse unsafe work.

**2) Building workplace organization** and uniting with your co-workers in collective action is best way to combat unsafe conditions, and

**3) Healthcare is a human right** – health care should not be tied to the employer, it should be provided to everyone, even those recent unemployed through a universal single-payer system like “Medicare for All”, and all testing and treatment related to COVID-19 should be covered by single-payer public health insurance like Medicare. While also recognizing that we need to immediately fight our employers to provide affordable health insurance coverage until the day this is won.

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**<http://southernworker.org>**