



INTERNATIONAL UNION OF PAINTERS AND ALLIED TRADES, AFL-CIO

June 1, 2020

Brothers and Sisters,

Today is a dim moment in America. Although in the last few decades, we've made progress, as a united front against the injustices that workers have been subject to, Black Americans are still, systemically and disproportionately murdered, beaten, and incarcerated at rates unheard of in much of the rest of the developed world. In just the last several months we have had to mourn for Black and Brown working people disproportionately dying from this deadly virus that is COVID-19, while another disease, a much older and more deadly threat, Racism, has continued to add to that body count. Today, I say the names of Breonna Taylor, Sean Reed, Tony McDade, and now of George Floyd as yet another name in a long list of people who have died at the hands of American police officers, so we never forget them.

As General President of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades and as a Black American, I am sick and tired of being sick and tired - The forces that allow for the extrajudicial killing of Black Americans are the same forces that keep working people fighting for scraps and crumbs. The IUPAT is committed to organizing and building power among all workers to create a more just and equitable society. That includes a society where people who look like me can walk freely and proudly and without fear that they will be unjustly stopped, brutalized, or murdered simply for being Black.

Unions are not only the vehicle for members of all communities to raise a collective voice but organizing around our collective values is what stands at the core of our power. We are the better idea. We are part of the solution.

George Floyd's murder has ignited protests across the country. In Minneapolis and elsewhere, our brothers and sisters are taking their own lives into their hands, standing up for justice. They are asserting that in fact, their lives do matter and as such we must raise our voices and join their cries for justice.

As with the labor department, the fox has been put in charge of the henhouse at the Department of Justice as well. Rolling back oversight and consent decrees, meant to curb unnecessary brutality while stoking the fires of division at every public forum has accelerated the position the country finds itself in now.

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We must recognize that our current struggle is part of a broader problem that all workers face. The United States has been built on an economic system that thrives on dividing us by race, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status. The wealthy thrive while the working class suffers.

The only path to achieving a more just and equitable society is through struggle. True justice does not lie solely with prosecuting a few criminals or holding the murderers of George Floyd accountable. We must go above and beyond and we must educate, organize, strategize, and mobilize all working people – black, brown, and white, towards a true understanding of what solidarity looks like. The IUPAT's mission to organize the unorganized does not end when workers head home from a construction site. In fact, that's where we start.

We will never succeed if our Black sisters and brothers live and work under a looming threat of violence at the hands of those who are sworn to protect and serve. There has been a knee on the neck of Black America for hundreds of years; enough is enough. We, as a nation, must stand together and fight to hold the murderers of George Floyd accountable. We cannot drown in mourning, we must organize, and we must fight like hell to ensure that his death is the last name in that terrible list of dead Black Americans. We must also build a true understanding of what solidarity looks like, take action, and organize to build a society where all labor is valued, all people respected, and Black lives matter.

Thank you, for your thoughtful consideration of what truly lies beneath the surface as we, once again, come together peacefully as One Union.

Respectfully and in Solidarity,

Ken Rigmaiden, IUPAT General President