

COVID-19 and

Racism

**P2P Conference** 

Marichu Antonio

Executive Director
Action Dignity Society
Marichu.Antonio@actiondignity.org

www.actiondignity.org



## **Action**Dignity

Our vision is a just and equitable society for all

Our **mission** is to facilitate the collective voice of Calgary's ethno-cultural communities toward full civic participation and integration through collaborative action

#### Our values:

- Respect for diversity
- Active citizenship and democratic participation
- Equity and social justice
- Collaboration



# COVID-19 & its Impact on Cargill Workers

## We are not all in the same boat.



We are all in the same storm.

## The Pandemic is Highlighting Inequities in our Society, Economy & Culture

#### **Essential Workers**



- \*Disproportionately racialized
- \* Earn minimum or low wage
- \* Lack of access to basic health and safety in workplace
- Pathway to permanent residency and citizenship

\*CPPA: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

- Produce 70% of Beef in Canada, along with JBS
- April 20, 2020: largest outbreak in Canada & forced to shut down
- 945 cases among Cargill workers, another 600 in the community
- Worker concerns about virus were ignored
- Cargill Plant deemed as essential: Alberta Government



#### .....

## Diverse communities in Calgary facing discrimination over Cargill's COVID-19 cases



By Jill Croteau · Global News

Posted April 29, 2020 5:00 pm · Updated April 29, 2020 5:01 pm



WATCH: With concerns growing about COVID-19 outbreaks at Alberta meatpacking plants, so too is a troubling sentiment of racism. As Jill Croteau reports, community groups supporting members of a diverse community say their connection to Cargill is making them a target for discrimination – Apr 29, 2020



www.actiondignity.org info@actiondignity.org

ActionDignity actiondignity actiondignity

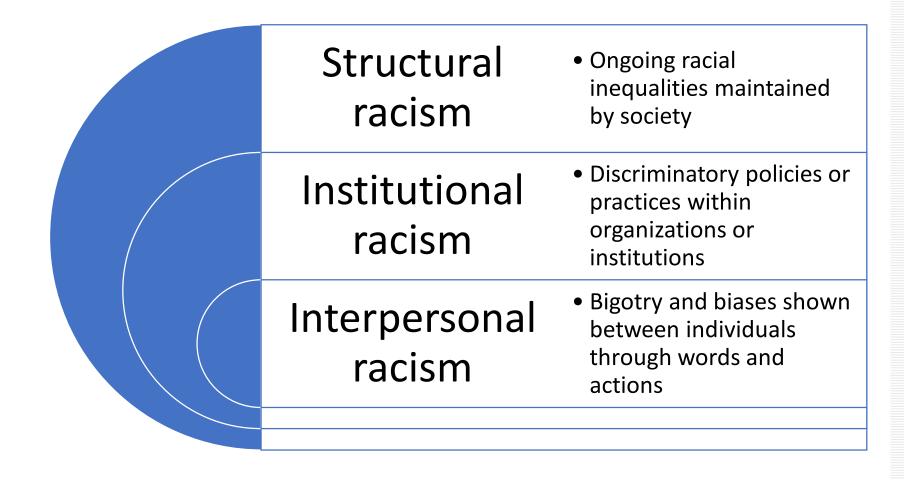
## Racism & Discrimination



www.actiondignity.org info@actiondignity.org

ActionDignityactiondignityactiondignity

### What Racism looks like

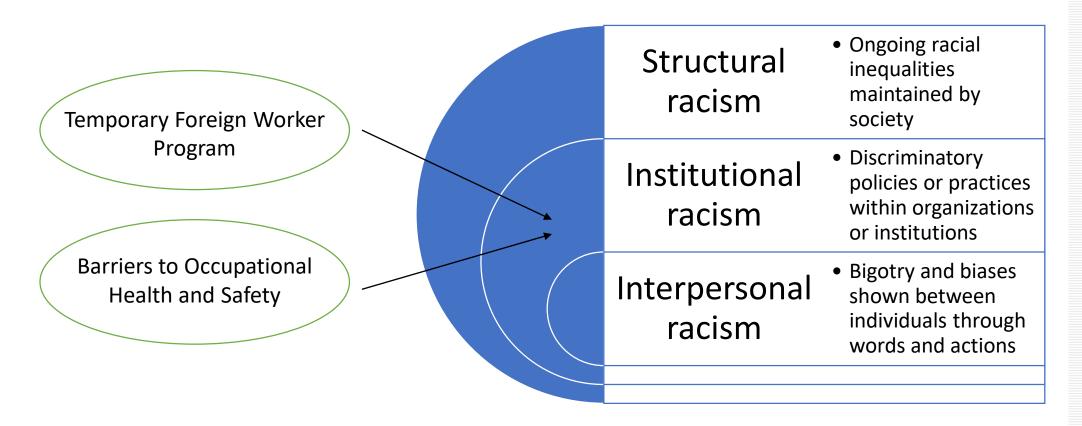




www.actiondignity.org info@actiondignity.org

ActionDignity actiondignity actiondignity

### What Racism looks like





www.actiondignity.org info@actiondignity.org

ActionDignityactiondignityactiondignity

Temporary
Foreign Worker
Program

## Examples of Systemic Discrimination

Difficulty accessing "safety voice"

Barriers to accessing Occupational Health and Safety

Internal responsibility system

## **Temporary** Foreign Workers

Temporary foreign workers face specific disadvantages in relation to safety at work for the following three reasons:

- 1. Workers depend on employers for authorization to remain in Canada,
- 2. Workers are sometimes dependent on their employer for a referral for Canadian Permanent Residence, and
- 3. Should they become sick or injured, they fear losing their job, their work authorization, and being sent home.



## Barriers to Occupational Health and Safety

- Occupational health and safety (OHS) system driven by something called the "internal responsibility system"
- It is a complaint-driven system where workers have to assert their rights to safety
- This system ignores the power differentials between an employer and employee which might be impacted by variables including race, immigration status, gender, length of time in Canada, age and language ability



## **How Systemic Discrimination Shows Up**

'Death is so real': Alberta immigrant group says meat workers afraid after Cargill plant closure



By **Bill Graveland** The Canadian Press Sat., April 25, 2020 | © 2 min. read



#### Cargill:

- Many workers are TFWs
- 85% of 600 surveyed afraid to return to work
- CBC May 3, 2020
- Fear reprisal from company, continued to go to work despite being sick



www.actiondignity.org info@actiondignity.org

ActionDignityactiondignityactiondignity

## **How Systemic Discrimination Shows Up**



We appreciate all you are doing to ensure Cargill Protein – North America can safely continue operations.

The production facilities across our organization are critical to Cargill and to our global food supply – now, more than ever, families across the U.S. and around the world are relying on us to deliver safe, affordable protein.

Knowing this we are extending and expanding our pay recognition programs to share our appreciation for your commitment, focus and hard work.

#### **Your Safety is Priority**

Please do not come to work if you are sick

There are programs in place to help you during this time if you are unwell.

If you are feeling sick, your first priority is to take care of yourself.

#### Updated and Extended Pay Incentive:

Your commitment to Cargill and to providing safe, affordable food is incredibly appreciated. Beginning Monday, April 20th, we are updating our \$2/hour pay incentive to apply to ALL hours worked. You are not required to work all your scheduled hours for the week – attendance will not disqualify you from this temporary increase. This temporary pay increase applies to all hourly, non-banded plant team members and will extend through May 31, 2020.

#### COVID-19 Pay:

Employees that must be absent for COVID-19 reasons are eligible to receive their regular pay up to a period of 14 calendar days (80 hours) for time off due to COVID-19. This includes time off for childcare concerns, assuming that all options have been exhausted.

#### \$500 One-Time Bonus\*:

You are still able to earn a one-time \$500 bonus. This bonus will be paid to hourly production employees who complete their scheduled weekly shift for eight consecutive weeks beginning March 23<sup>rd</sup> and ending May 18<sup>th</sup>. If you have COVID19-related absences or pre-approved vacation during this timeframe, you will still be eligible for the bonus. Again, if you are sick, call in and stay home. Your safety is most important, and we want you to take the time necessary to ensure you are healthy.

NOTE: If your location is temporarily closed, you are still eligible for the bonus. Once the location reopens, your 8-week qualification timeline begins where it left off.

\*This amount is net – after taxes. The total amount part to you will be increased to accommodate federal, state or provincial taxes in your location.

This excludes pre-scheduled vacation or COVID19-related absences.

#### Cargill:

 Mixed messages from the employer about what to do about COVID-19



www.actiondignity.org info@actiondignity.org

ActionDignityactiondignityactiondignity



## How Systemic Discrimination Shows Up

**Cargill Meat Processing Plant** 

Employer failed to proactively protect worker safety and waited until it was too late



www.actiondignity.org info@actiondignity.org

ActionDignity actiondignity actiondignity

#### Calgary

#### Benito Quesada, union shop steward, identified as 3rd death linked to Cargill COVID-19 outbreak











More than 1,500 cases have been tied to the slaughterhouse near High River

Sarah Rieger - CBC News - Posted: May 12, 2020 3:33 PM MT | Last Updated: May 12



From left to right: Benito Quesada, 51; Hiep Bui, 67; and Armando Sallegue, 71, have all died of COVID-19, with their deaths linked to an outbreak at the Cargill slaughterhouse near High River, Alta. Quesada and Bui were workers at the plant, and Sallegue was the father of a worker. (UFCW 401, Action Dignity, Arwyn Sallegue)







14-dayClosure

Workplace Structures: Barriers Bus pick-up and drop off

## Actions Taken

What has ActionDignity done to address this?





Sprawlcast: Racial Dispar

## How did we respond?

- ActionDignity was one of first responders that participated in the social support group along with Alberta Health Services
- Hosted online forums in different languages to connect workers to benefits and support, as well as information about Occupational Health and Safety
- We have helped amplify worker voices through local and national media
- Helped shift the conversation away from victim blaming toward a bigger conversation around systems and policy issues
- Named the issue of racism against the workers and their families
- Helped ensure culturally accessible support services for workers and families



## Recommendations

For workers' empowerment

For workplaces

## Recommendations for communities & allies

- Focus on the structural and systemic barriers to worker safety & rights- be an advocate for more equitable policies
- Understand it may be difficult for employees to voice concerns about safety – hear them when they do
- Be PROACTIVE about safety & policy issues
- Include workers' representation in decision making processes in the workplace.



## Recommendations for communities & allies

- Have clear and concise information about safety available in multiple languages, make it widely accessible
- Listen to workers' stories, issues, needs, ideas, action
- Raise awareness of & provide information about rights, policies
- Be an ally and support workers through advocacy



## References and further reading

Block, S., & Dhunna, S. (2020). COVID-19: It's time to protect frontline workers. *Behind the numbers*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <a href="http://behindthenumbers.ca/2020/03/31/covid-19-its-time-to-protect-frontline-workers/">http://behindthenumbers.ca/2020/03/31/covid-19-its-time-to-protect-frontline-workers/</a>

Alberta Workers Health Centre. (2017). New Alberta workers: Improving workplace health and safety for Temporary Foreign Workers and other new to Alberta workers.

<a href="http://workershealthcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NewAlbertaWorkers report brief.pdf">http://workershealthcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NewAlbertaWorkers report brief.pdf</a>



