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**UFCW - Smithfield Settlement:  
One Step Forward & Hopefully Not Two Steps Backward!  
By Saladin Muhammad  
BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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The announcement of a settlement between the UFCW and the Smithfield Company represents an important juncture and possible victory on the one hand, as it shows the impact of a sustained and social movement type union campaign that organizes workers and consumers against this giant corporation and plant in North Carolina. The state, with very low union density and anti-laws, have produced some of the most vicious employer campaigns against unions.

On the other hand, the settlement raises concerns about the UFCW's future relationship to the Black majority community movement against environment racism, which the UFCW campaign began to align with only after having RICO charges filed against the union by Smithfield. The environmental justice movement has been targeting the nearly 10,000 Smithfield owned and controlled hog operations and lagoons in rural Black and poor communities which have ten million hogs being raised for slaughter for Smithfield's Tarheel, NC plant.

The UFCW's call for suspending of all activities that target Smithfield's profits and corporate image will likely mean severing the relationship between the union and Smithfield workers and the struggle against environmental racism. Smithfield workers living in these communities will be told not to speak as UFCW members about the pollution, diseases and the lowering of property values caused by Smithfield's hog breeding operations. It might also mean the UFCW withdrawing any financial or in-kind support it might be providing the environmental struggle.

I am sure this is one of the major aims of Smithfield. Certainly the election of Obama and his support for the Employee Free Choice Act, makes Smithfield's agreement to a

settlement seem like it is giving way to the popular sentiment for change in a way that slows the worker and Black and Latino momentum that might be inspired following the election.

While the tactical need to move the union election forward is understood, it is important that UFCW support the right of Smithfield workers and union members to speak out against environmental racism. Union support for this struggle is a critical part of building and maintaining an alliance between labor and African American and Latino communities and issues.

This joint UFCW-Smithfield "feed the hungry program", I'm afraid, promotes a direction of labor-management "cooperation" that could have a dis-empowering and co-opting effect on the level of rank-and-file consciousness and organization that the UFCW campaign has been able to build.

The "gag-order" of making no "public statements about the settlement until the election" actually stopped the popular aspects of the campaign to build the union, including preparing for the election. There was a similar "gag-order" on UNITE workers around the Sodexo Marriot campaign.

We must learn more about the terms of the settlement and be careful and critical of how we promote this important advance for Smithfield workers and the union as a victory.

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