

The Labor Movement And The Struggle for Black Liberation

Good Afternoon sisters and brother! What an honor and pleasure it is for me to be here today to express to you our common concerns in what I believe to be a life and death struggle for democracy and an end to racist oppression and economic and social injustices.

The AFL-CIO Labor Commission On Racial and Economic Justice had this to say on Feb. 25, 2015:

“The demand for racial justice cannot be divorced from the fight for economic justice, and the fight for economic justice cannot be pursued without considering educational equity. It is no secret that communities of color continue to face higher unemployment rates, lower wages, job discrimination and more economic insecurity—one consequence of which is more encounters with the criminal justice system. Negative encounters with our criminal justice system have long-lasting impacts on families and their surrounding communities, and they harm our efforts to create shared prosperity for all.

Movements like #BlackLivesMatters, Not1More, Fight for \$15 and Not Your Model Minority have shown tremendous courage in tackling these issues, which many in this country want to ignore. We in the labor movement should stand with them as partners, allies and fellow community members. Their fight is our fight.”

We can stand here today and say with all sincerity that the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression has reached out to the labor movement and asked them to join us in the campaign to establish by City Ordinance an all elected Civilian Police Accountability Council. And I can report that the response has been better than anything in our over forty years of organizing around the issues of police crimes and encounters with the criminal justice system. When we put 3000 people in the streets this past August 29 we were joined by United Electrical Workers, SEIU locals 73 and HCII, the Black Caucus of the Teachers Union, Fight For 15, and AFSME. It was very encouraging and I believe a very positive development.

As good as these developments are and as much as we embrace our labor allies in this struggle we are still only just beginning to address the deep and abiding issues of racism we face as a community and as a nation. One of those issues, that is claiming the lives of our people on a daily basis, is police crimes. Mostly Black people but not just Black people are being murdered by the police throughout this country. Ferguson is everywhere and here in the Greater Chicago Area we have the equivalent of about five Fergusons just on the South east side alone.

We have open and blatant cases of murder as in the cases of Rekia Boyd, Flint Farmer, Ronnie Johnson with the list growing every week and no one is being prosecuted. We have literally hundreds of cases of people who were tortured and are still languishing in jail decades later while their torturers are still active on the police force and/or enjoying retirement with a pension. How can we claim to be a democracy and live with such travesties of justice?

But that is not all. We live in a City where the Mayor has apologized for people being tortured and falsely accused, where a City Council has passed a Reparations Ordinance for some victims tortured by Jon Burge and yet torture victims remain in jail and continue to be presently tortured. Now how ludicrous is that? This is a reflection of a broken criminal justice system and an utterly corrupt political body that is totally incapable of correcting itself.

So where does this leave us? We are left under the agonizing heel of repression to wither and die unless we stand up, organize and fight back. We need the labor movement here in the Greater Chicago area to join us so that we the people can take power away from those who are killing us and oppressing us.

We need you to help us get CPAC passed into law, because as an Ordinance it will empower us to have community control over the police. To sum it up CPAC will take power from the Mayor to appoint the Superintendent of the Chicago Police Department and put this power in the hands of the people, and it will replace the Police Board, the Independent Police Review Authority, and the Internal Affairs Department. All members of CPAC will be elected civilians chosen by the people who live in the various police districts. This is not about good cop vs. bad cop, psychological training, better professional training or community relations strategies. CPAC is the democratic solution to police crimes and the political tyranny it creates. CPAC is about community control of the police.

We need your help with the support petitions. Presently we have 25,000 signatures. Our goal is 100,000 asap. We need your help in every aspect of this campaign as we go about organizing our communities door by door, block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, precinct by precinct and ward by ward. We are organizing CPAC Neighborhood Committees. Like any real political campaign we need feet on the ground for our field operations so these are practical ways in which labor can help.

We also will need your help this December 10, 2015, international human rights day, when we will renew our complaint to the U.S. Department of Justice demanding federal investigation and prosecution of cases here in Chicago and the closing down of Homan Square, a torture site that has victimized thousands of people.

Finally let me say this. Just about eight years ago we experienced perhaps the greatest transfer of wealth from working people to the corporations and banks in the entire history of our country. This financial crisis has precipitated a political crisis that is unprecedented. More people have been left economically devastated than ever before yet our government pursues a policy of bailing out Wall Street and the banks while cutting the budgets that offer any kind of services and help to workers, oppressed people of color, women and the LGBTQ community. Given how the institutional arrangement of our country is deeply rooted in racism from slavery to the present Black people are the ones hardest hit and Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO, recognizes this fact and calls upon labor to partner with Black people in their struggles against racist injustices. We endorse this call and we boldly ask you who make up the labor movement here in Chicago to translate this important policy statement by President Trumka into action by joining the campaign for CPAC. We end with a quote from Trumka:

“Now, some people might ask me why our labor movement should be involved in all that has happened since the tragic death of Michael Brown in Ferguson. And I want to answer that question directly. How can we not be involved?”