

Thank you. Good evening my sisters, my brothers, my comrades--good evening. This is an especially important event this evening and this weekend. Those of us who have a history of radical organizing and activism have learned that oftentimes the language we choose to use, including the slogans we create, the that language often reflects more accurately our political desires, rather than historical reality. The theme of this rally, of course, is "On the Road to Freedom". and although the freedom road may not be the one this country is presently navigating, the people who have gathered here this weekend are certainly trying to map this road for the USA. And at this moment in our history, our most powerful inspirations come from a part of this planet that, until very recently, could claim some of the most insurmountable barriers to freedom the world has ever known. But today, several months after the inauguration of a new president, we can say with certainty that South Africa is truly on the road to freedom.

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And we are all we are all immensely honored that the General Secretary of the South African Communist Party Charles Nqakula is here with us this weekend injecting the spirit of that freedom road into our lives and struggles, thank you. We honor that Dulce Maria Ferrera, representing the rising Workers Party in Brazil, is also here to let us know that the road to freedom can be more than a utopian desire. We thank you. And that Andrey Brie is here to let us know that the vision of socialism is still very much alive in Germany and throughout Europe, thank you.

We celebrate our comrades and sisters and brothers in other lands who have refused to give up. And we celebrate ourselves. We celebrate the fact that finally we've learned how to come together, and how to be together. Who would have thought that many of us who are here in Chicago this weekend--some of us with a very embarrassing history of battling each other--could have ever been capable of jointly discussing the formation of a new organization. And I say this also for the benefit of those of you who have come to attend the rally this weekend, but may not have participated in the ongoing sessions of the convention.

But we are here, we're all here. And considering our combined political histories, we can rely on literally on centuries of experience, literally on centuries of experience. Experiences in organizing in the trade union movement, and anti-racist campaigns, and organizing against homelessness, against political repression, for environmental justice, for women's rights, for gay and lesbian rights, against war and imperialism, and perhaps most important of all for this new organization, for radical democracy and for socialism.

And so and so we are here and we need to learn how to celebrate ourselves. But this does not necessarily mean that we express the kind of satisfaction that prevents us from taking note of the problems that persist. Taking note for example of who might not be here this evening who might need to be here, who we might need to be here. And I'm thinking of larger numbers of younger people, larger numbers of people of color. But to say a few words about the older generations among us. Because those of us who are older need to celebrate our experiences, and our wisdom, and the fact that we are determined survivors, we are still here.

Not only if we manage to live and keep living when life is by no means promised to us, and when many of our beloved have passed on. But we've made the future of this planet, the democratic and socialist future of this planet, the most important goal of our lives. The younger generations among us are just embarking upon what will hopefully be an equally long history of fighting for progressive social change. Because the struggle goes on. It goes on, and on, and on. And they are learning from us veteran activists, hopefully they will learn from, us but hopefully they will also teach us. Hopefully they will help us rethink outmoded theories and practices that have become embedded on the left for too many decades. Hopefully they will teach us. And hopefully they will lead us in new directions.

One of the most important lessons we've learned over the last decades, as we have witnessed the proliferation of political and personal identities and issues and struggles, is that the old practice of erecting a hierarchy of struggles leads not to progress but rather to irreconcilability, to isolation, to stasis.

There was a time, when a man fighting on the frontlines against police brutality and violence, could brutally beat his own wife or girlfriend with impunity. His work against police violence was considered politically significant, while the violence he perpetrated against his partner was considered personal, private, and insignificant. Although people who consider themselves to be left activists can no longer ignore such issues as violence against women, such campaigns against violence against women are often considered to be women's issues and campaigns, and are still viewed as less worthy of radical political attention. Perhaps they are worthy of feminist attention, but not radical political attention. Less worthy than, for example, violence in the streets, or violence perpetrated by the police.

I want to say that this circle of people of ideas and action which is gathering this weekend should be the place where connections are made, where intersections are emphasized, where we both affirm Marxism and explore new ways of constructing political theories and

practices. Where we think about a new political vocabulary. Where we truly explore the possibilities that democracy and socialism can enter into every dimension of our lives.

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The advantage of intergenerational work in which we must all engage, is that we can become aware of the profound truth of the platitude that “though things change, they remain the same”. But we also learn that all though things remain the same, they nonetheless change.

As much as we can claim victories in the fight against racism, and those victories are extremely important, racism is still very much alive. Racist logic is deeply entrenched in the nation's material and psychic structures. It's something with which we are all familiar--racist logic, as a matter of fact can persist even when allusions to race are removed. Thus, “criminal,” is now virtually synonymous with young Black or Latino men. And teenage mother is synonymous with Black or Latina woman on welfare

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And what we have to realize, I think, is that oftentimes even those communities that are most deeply injured by this racist logic have learned how to rely on it. Especially when it's not necessarily to openly allude to race. Thus in poor black, Latino, and Asian communities so devastated by the new forms of youth perpetrated violence, the ideological options are so few that there's no way to express the rage and despair except by demanding that the police sweep the community clean. Clean of crack, clean of uzis, clean of the people who sell drugs and wield the weapons. Even our illustrious sister Carol Moseley Braun has succumbed to that logic.

What this means, you know, what this means is that there's a lot of work before us. A lot of organizing work, a lot of educational work, a lot of ideological work, a lot of cultural work. We have to think about how to seriously propose strategies of abolishing jails and prisons for a great number of people who are pegged as criminals. Drug use needs to be decriminalized, and we have to think about a range of alternative institutions to replace police and jails and prisons.

Even on the left we've become so mesmerized by the idea that the only way to deal with serious social problems such as violence and drugs is by locking people away that we often end up concurring with the reactionary notion that you don't get rid of the problem, but you simply get rid of the people who have the problem. Lock them away!

And as we make interventions in the current debates around healthcare, around welfare reform, let's be radical about it, let's be radical about it.

Since the tendency of conservative and neoliberal rhetoric to become the same, has a lot many people in a situation where they have forgotten how to oppose the government. How to assume a radical oppositional posture. So yes, let's get rid of welfare, we can say yes, we agree let's get rid of the welfare system. But let's replace it with jobs, and let's replace it with the guaranteed annual income for all. Welfare women and black women, especially, have been scapegoated, represented as the problem. The tendency of women on welfare to have children is represented as the problem. No one is upset about wealthy women, and wealthy women, whether they have husbands or not, no one is upset about their having children. No one gets upset about the Cosby family. You know, but there's this assumption that that many people have been influenced to make that welfare mothers are prone to abuse the system and to use their pregnancies to get more money. Now, first of all, welfare is only 1% of the federal budget. But there is this notion that "illegitimacy" is morally wrong, and that it leads to crime and violence. This is so widespread that many people are willing to accept Clinton's proposal for cutting off payments to women who have children while they are on welfare. And here again it's not about saving money because the average monthly increase amounts to only about 67 dollars, far less than is required to raise a child, the underlying reasons for this proposal are ideological. And it has fascist echoes. And you see those of us who are older, can tell you that for decades welfare, rights organizers have been arguing that we need to get rid of welfare, and replace it with jobs replace it with a guaranteed annual income. Not jobs at McDonald's with minimum wage and no benefits, but jobs with creative potential, and decent pay. Instead of punishing single women who have children, why not provide federally funded education from kindergarten to the postgraduate level? I mean it costs a lot less to send someone to college than it does to send someone to prison.

But there is this criminalization process that functions through representations of welfare mothers as monsters. This criminalization process marks a number of women as undomesticated, as hypersexual, as women who refuse to embrace the heterosexual nuclear family. The woman who does drugs is often criminalized both because she is a drug user and because, as a consequence, she cannot be a good mother. And in some states she can be imprisoned for using drugs if she is pregnant because of possible damage to the fetus, as if she were, as someone pointed out in our workshop earlier, simply an incubator

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This criminalization process is extended to immigrant women and men. Capital immigrates around the world, and it opens up circuits of immigration which poor and working

people follow. But capital reaps more profit while poor and working people are penalized for this globalization of profit, of capital. Something is wrong my sisters and brothers, something is wrong.

And let me say that we should all be supporting the boycott of Jessica McClintock that was initiated by Asian immigrant women in the San Francisco Bay Area. The courts recently established certain limitations for the picketing of Jessica McClintock stores and for her home. But we have to keep the boycott rolling. Don't buy clothes from Jessica McClintock.

Many of us who are older socialists--oh I have no more time? Did I just see you no more time? Okay I'll take one, no more than one more minute. I'm sorry, I wasn't watching my time cues here.

Let me just say that many of us who are older socialists remember that the powerful attraction of anti-communism. And how effective this construction of the enemy was. The ideological space for the proliferation of the fear of crime, welfare, immigration has been opened up by the fall of European socialist countries. Communism is no longer considered the quintessential enemy against which this nation imagines its identity. The space is now inhabited by ideological constructions of crime, drugs, immigration, welfare, and of course an enemy within is far more dangerous than an enemy without. Especially if the enemy is marked as racially different.

So comrades, sisters, and brothers there is a lot of work to be done and we are among the ones who will have to do it. So let us not be afraid of the political differences among us. Let us continue to creatively debate new strategies of struggle. Let us realize that the more fronts we are fighting on, the more knowledge and experience we accumulate and the more powerful we become. And we are linked together throughout the Americas. We continue to resist NAFTA, we support the con struggles in Mexico, in Brazil, in Haiti, and we say Cuba we steadfastly stand behind you. And we say to the ANC in in South Africa you are our beacon of light and to the Communist Party of South Africa, thank you for demonstrating that the passionate fires of socialism and democracy still burn in the hearts of struggling people.

Thank you.

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