

Proposed Chicago anti-protest laws to be permanent

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9 January 2012

Not even a month has passed since Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel, a Democrat, requested that the Chicago city council enact what he termed “temporary” and “one-time only” anti-protest measures in advance of the overlapping NATO and G-8 summits that will be held in the city from May 15-22. During a press conference held on January 4, Emanuel claimed that he “misspoke,” and that many of the proposed antidemocratic ordinances will in fact be permanent.

Emanuel, who resigned as President Obama’s Chief of Staff in October 2010 to take the position of Chicago mayor, told reporters: “I made a mistake. Real simple, OK? I thought when I answered the question, I was answering the question about contracting, OK? So, if I made a mistake, I bear the responsibility.” According to Emanuel, only the powers given to the mayor for the purpose of concluding contracts in relation to the meetings will be temporary.

The new laws will impose drastically increased fines on protesters, increasing the maximum fine assessed against those found to be resisting arrest or “aiding escape” from \$500 to \$1,000. The maximum duration of demonstrations would also be reduced by 15 minutes, to two hours. In addition, public parks and beaches would “open” at 6 AM, two hours later than they do currently. Loud noise, music or amplified sound would only be legal between 8 AM and 10 PM.

Other provisions impose onerous requirements on parade organizers, and allow the city to levy punitive fines when they are violated. For example, one of the new regulations demands as part of the permit application process “a description of any recording equipment, sound amplification equipment, banners, signs, or other attention-getting devices to be used in connection with the parade.” Another regulation requires the presence of one parade marshal per 100

marchers.

One notable change gives the police superintendent the power to deputize law enforcement officials from other agencies, including the FBI, DEA, ATF, Illinois State Police, Illinois Attorney General, Department of Justice, Cook County State’s Attorney and other unspecified agencies.

Even the temporary measures relating to contracts, referred to in the *Chicago Tribune* as “blanket spending authority,” have implications for the protesters, as they allow Emanuel to conclude contracts for, among other things, security and logistics.

Democratic mayors such as Emanuel have spearheaded efforts, coordinated with the Obama administration, to shut down, intimidate and stifle emerging social protests. The proposed Chicago ordinances, taken together, represent an escalation of these efforts.

As with other NATO and G-8 summits, no expense is being spared to facilitate the crackdown. For a combined meeting of the G8/G20 in Toronto in 2010, the Canadian government spent nearly \$930 million. The French government brought out nearly 12,000 police, gendarmes and troops earlier this year for the G-8 meeting in Deauville.

The Department of Homeland Security—the ostensible purpose of which is to combat terrorism—has already given the city \$55 million to cover preparation costs, with much of it going to the police department to cover security and overtime. The CPD has announced that during the summits, police officers will work 12-hour shifts in order to deploy a third of the city’s 12,000 officers against protesters.

Underscoring police hostility to protesters and freedom of speech, Chicago Fraternal Order of Police president Michael Shields declared, “these aren’t

14-year-old kids running wild downtown stealing iPhones. These are people who travel around the world as professional anarchists and rioters. We're concerned not only for the safety of our own Chicago police officers but for the safety of citizens of Chicago and the security of local business properties."

Emanuel's appointee to the office of Chicago Police superintendent, Garry McCarthy, was previously the director of the Newark Police Department. Under his leadership, that department developed a reputation for excessive use of force, discriminatory policing and retaliation against those who legally observe or record police activity, resulting in an investigation by the Justice Department.

While the new laws were written from the standpoint of maintaining "order" during the summits, there can now be absolutely no question that the political establishment intends to use them against Occupy Chicago and any other protest movement or mass movement that develops.

Already, Rahm Emanuel and the CPD have made over 300 arrests of Occupy Chicago protesters, in attacks which are now widely acknowledged by the media to be the precedent for those that will be employed during the NATO and G-8 events. The justification cited for the Occupy Chicago arrests was the violation of "park closing hours." Those attempting to protest near the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago were threatened with arrest for "blocking the sidewalks."

Emanuel was installed as mayor of Chicago in large part due to his ruthlessness, which was deemed an essential quality for a politician charged with the imposition of substantial budget cuts and layoffs. Since then he has brushed aside numerous sit-ins and protests by groups whose perspective is to apply pressure on politicians.

On January 4 members of the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization staged a sit-in at city hall to demand school reforms. Emanuel did not meet with the parents, students or teachers who participated, and who were told by police that they would have to leave by 5:30 p.m. or face arrest. When the protesters tried to come back for a second day, they were denied the use of folding chairs, placing additional burdens on some of the older participants.

As with all the other antidemocratic and reactionary

measures being passed around the world, the source of Chicago's new ordinances lies in the basic incompatibility between the agenda of austerity demanded by the ruling elite and the needs and desires of the working class.

On January 2, 172 workers at the Chicago Public Library (CPL) were laid off—a consequence of Emanuel's \$3.3 million in budget cuts to the system. The CPL administration recently announced that branch libraries would no longer be open on Mondays, rather than the reduced hours originally envisioned when the cuts were announced.



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