

Massive security preparations for NATO summit in Chicago

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The NATO summit scheduled for May 20-21 in Chicago has resulted in parts of the city being placed virtually on lockdown, per security arrangements organized by the Secret Service with the close cooperation of Mayor Rahm Emanuel and city police. The pervasive police and military presence has resulted in the arrests of protesters and an atmosphere of intimidation prior to a large march and rally scheduled for Sunday.

Repressive actions have included an apartment raid by police and the arrest of nine individuals on trumped-up charges.

The main agenda item for NATO is the engineering of a strategy for Afghanistan following the expected withdrawal of most foreign forces at the end of 2014. NATO member-states are expected to sign separate treaties with Afghan President Hamid Karzai outlining terms of continued political and military involvement in Afghanistan, including securing about \$4 billion to fund Afghan police and military forces.

The decision to hold the NATO summit in Chicago is a consequence of Rahm Emanuel's connections to the Obama administration, which he served as chief of staff prior to being elected. Aside from the decisions made at the summit itself, the event is designed to serve as a showcase of the city's importance and is supposed to be a consolation for former mayor Richard Daley's failure to win the 2016 Olympic bid for the city. Perhaps more importantly, the event is an opportunity for Emanuel and the police to show that they can shut down protests and other expressions of social opposition.

For several weeks prior to the summit, the Federal Protective Service has been patrolling areas of downtown Chicago, supposedly to protect federal buildings from being affected by protests. Patrols

featured uniformed officers in full battle dress and carrying "non-lethal" weapons, as well as a more conspicuous presence of local police.

Other security measures imposed for the summit include massive restrictions on transportation, including the closing of Lake Shore Drive in both directions north and south of McCormick Place, where the summit is being held. There will also be intermittent shutdowns of the Kennedy Expressway and other roads between O'Hare airport and downtown so that dignitaries' motorcades can proceed unimpeded.

Riders of the regional Metra train system are being particularly affected. The Electric District line, which runs under McCormick Place, is having one of its branches suspended during the summit and will not be making many of its scheduled stops. Riders of other Metra lines will be restricted from carrying food and beverages or any other items with them except for one bag no larger than 15 inches by 15 inches by 4 inches. They will also face potential pat-downs or other security screenings.

The neighborhood surrounding McCormick place is also being subjected to parking restrictions and local road closures, as well as the construction of a perimeter fence and the imposition of checkpoints to get in and out of the area. Contractors were expected to employ 3,600 linear feet of eight-foot anti-scale fencing and 17,000 linear feet of concrete barricades—nearly four miles worth of barriers.

Many of these measures are no doubt being employed in an attempt to accustom the population to invasive and flagrant violations of democratic rights as well as the militarization of cities, and to intimidate those who disagree with the policies of the bourgeoisie. The expected protests at the NATO summit have served as an excuse for the militarization of a large area of the

city, but the reaction of the police indicates the extreme fear harbored by the ruling class and law enforcement towards the outbreak of social opposition.

Chicago officials have been trying for months to prevent protesters from ending their march near McCormick Place and had changed the terms of the permit held by the Coalition Against NATO/G-8 (CANG8) several times. Only recently did it become clear that CANG8's rally would be allowed to conclude approximately three blocks from the convention center.

Police have made several arrests of protesters this week, including eight supporters of the Catholic Worker movement who attempted to enter Obama's campaign headquarters. Four Occupy Chicago protesters were arrested for protesting US immigration policy when they refused to leave a building hosting an immigration court.

Even more disturbing is the raid of an apartment in the Bridgeport neighborhood and the arrest of nine protesters staying there under the pretense that the protesters were making or possessing Molotov cocktails, the equipment for which turned out to be a home beer-making kit. The arrests were first publicized in a statement by the Chicago chapter of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), which says that the Chicago Police Department's Organized Crime Division organized a raid of the apartment building, broke down the door and arrested occupants, searched the unit and removed items, including the kit and a cell phone. The officers are said to have entered with guns drawn and tackled at least one occupant to the ground.

According to the report, police initially refused to produce a search warrant, and then returned several hours later with a search warrant that was said by witnesses to lack a judge's signature, and which would therefore be invalid. Rather ominously, two tenants were handcuffed in the living room for over two hours while police searched the apartment and referred repeatedly to one of them as a "Commie faggot."

NLG lawyers have stated that the arrests are completely without justification. In a flagrant violation of the protesters' democratic rights, the arrests were not acknowledged to their guild lawyers for 17 hours and the police department still denies that anyone is being held, even though the *Chicago Tribune* has obtained police reports showing that people are being

held.

Kris Hermes, a spokesman for the National Lawyers Guild, said at the time: "The Chicago Police Department has basically disappeared as many as eight activists. There's absolutely no evidence of wrongdoing."

Zoe Sigman, a resident of the raided apartment building, said: "I'd like to stress that we have done nothing wrong. We have been planning to protest NATO and there is nothing illegal about expressing our feelings about a war machine. Now we're being treated as mere criminals. As if we're part of an organized crime that they're trying to take down. Who knows what they're going to pin on us? We're terrified."

William Vassilakis, who holds the lease to one of the raided units, stated, "Nothing that we've done is criminal. There was no warrant. We have been terrorized in an extreme way."

This police operation serves as a grave warning to political protesters that they will be treated as criminals and subject to arrest and imprisonment.

The arrests, which bear signs of police infiltration of the protesters, also raise fundamental political questions about the nature of genuine opposition to NATO and attacks on democratic rights. CANG8, which has served as the umbrella organization for many of those participating in this week's protests, including Occupy Chicago and local trade union and middle-class protest groups, operates firmly within the orbit of the Democratic Party. Their perspective ultimately is to pressure the Obama administration into moderating its stance.



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