Chicago steps up police crackdown

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Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel is seizing on recent reports of increased criminal violence to intensify police state measures directed against the city's working class. The crackdown comes in the wake of the massive operation targeting demonstrations against the NATO summit in Chicago in May, which included the prosecution of suspects on trumped-up terrorism charges.

Tiffany Rent, who was 8-months pregnant at the time, was recently tasered by police in front of her two young children over a parking dispute. Her boyfriend had his elbow dislocated trying to defend her from the police. During an unseasonably warm week in March, at least 39 people were wounded and 10, including a 6-year old child, were killed in violence attributed to gangs; 22-year old Rekia Boyd was shot in the head at a city park by an off-duty police detective.

Over the Memorial Day holiday weekend, more than 40 people were reported shot, and at least 10 were killed. This year, Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy closed the city's most popular beach at North Avenue. Over the Memorial Day weekend last year, North Avenue Beach was closed after several reported violent incidents.

Police have increased traffic stops and the policing of city transit. More than 800 arrests have been reported on the Chicago Transit Authority this year alone, a staggering number when less than 1,150 were made all year in 2011 for minor offenses on the transit system, like fare jumping. Recently, arrests have been made for so-called suspicious activity, like passing between train cars. City officials have also ordered the closure of neighborhood stores that police claim contribute to violent crime.

McCarthy, last month, announced an unprecedented 49 percent increase in homicides in the first quarter of 2012 over the previous year. Counter-intuitively, McCarthy attributes the recent increase in gang violence to successful policing, which he claims has removed gang leaders and led to the splintering of gangs and violent battles for turf.

These "successful efforts" have resulted in a surge in the number of active gang factions to 600, with more than 68,000 members, according to police. If this data is correct, New York City would have less than one-third the number of gang members despite being about three times the size of Chicago.

The police-state policies are strongly supported by both Democratic and Republican leaders. During his 2011 mayoral campaign, Chicago community leader Dock Walls—once the Rainbow/PUSH coalition political director and a staff member for Mayor Harold Washington—called for the National Guard to be deployed in the streets of Englewood, an extremely impoverished neighborhood in Chicago.

In point of fact, over the last two decades, homicides in the city of Chicago have fallen by more than half, from a high number of 929 in 1994, to 440 in 2011, according to FBI reports. And while no one would dispute that violent crime remains an acute problem in Chicago, it is itself a consequence of the social crisis. Sensationalized media reporting and law-and-order rhetoric from politicians aims not to ameliorate the conditions that lead to crime, but to distract the population while implementing iron-fisted measures that will be used against the entire working class.

Crime is the inevitable outcome of social policies carried out by Emanuel, currently the co-chairman of President Obama's reelection campaign, and his Democratic predecessor, Richard Daley, and more broadly the entire American ruling class. Factory closures, the gutting of public housing, the rollback of city services and public transportation, the shutdown of schools, and the collapse of neighborhoods in the recent mortgage crisis have created the desperate conditions in which crime thrives.

The 2010 US Census shows the effects of these policies. Over ten years Chicago experienced a historic 17.2 percent decline in its African-American population. Populations in the suburbs have swelled due to large numbers of working people moving out of the city. Many others have moved from Chicago to the Southern US due

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to rising living costs.

Cuts to social programs, especially federal funds for summer employment and training for teenagers, have resulted in significant loss of opportunities for youth. A state-funded 2010 study found that the youth unemployment rate in Illinois had risen by 67 percent over the five years from 2002-07, to more than one in four. The same study found 44 percent of African-American youth unemployed. This has certainly worsened since the onset of the economic crisis.

The call for increased policing is doubly hypocritical in light of recent reports of city officials' collaboration with gangs that provide them political support. In January 2012, a *Chicago Magazine* exposé on aldermen's collaboration with gang leaders revealed quid pro quo relationships all over the city where gangs have in significant measure replaced the patronage armies that supported local Democrats in decades past. Ward officials provide certain protections for the operations of the gangs that support them, furthering recruitment, and contributing to territorial violence, giving virtual sanction to the marketing of drugs and prostitution.

A massive attack against this working class city has been conducted through the Democratic Party. Over the last 20 years there has been a concerted effort to push poor and working population out of the city, through a near-total eradication of public housing, the dismantling of public education, and unremitting cuts to badly needed social services. These policies have been intensified since the global economic collapse of 2007-2008.

As the global crisis intensifies, the policies pursued by both parties of big business and their supporters in the trade union bureaucracy will meet growing social opposition in the working class. Increased policing in cities like Chicago are preparing to suppress mass opposition.

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