

Mayoral candidates silent on secret Chicago police prison

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In the days since the British *Guardian* newspaper revealed the illegal detention and abuse of citizens at a Chicago Police Department facility known as Homan Square, nine people have come forward detailing their experiences of being held for hours or days in cages, handcuffed to walls and shackled, denied access to counsel, food, water and bathroom facilities, with no record of their having been held at Homan.

At least one man, 44-year-old John Hubbard, has died while in police custody at the Homan Square compound, of an “accidental heroin overdose,” according to the Chicago Police Department.

Despite calls from former Justice Department officials and from Amnesty International for investigations into the reports, Chicago mayor and former Obama administration official Rahm Emanuel has said virtually nothing about the *Guardian* reports of illegal detention and abuse. He commented briefly on Chicago Tonight, “That’s not true. We follow all the rules ... Everything’s done by the books.”

Emanuel’s so-called “progressive” opponent in the upcoming April 7 runoff election for mayor, Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, has made no comment on the reports of the secret prison in the Humboldt Park neighborhood. Garcia has campaigned on his commitment to increase policing, including hiring of 1,000 more officers, as part of efforts to “improve the relationship” between the city’s population and one of the most notoriously violent and corrupt police forces in the country.

Though defense attorneys have confirmed that their clients’ rights were violated by Chicago police as they were taken into custody at Homan Square, the illegal detention and torture have been going on for more than a decade with no apparent scrutiny from the local press.

In response to the *Guardian* revelations published in late February, the two main Chicago dailies, the *Sun-Times* and *Tribune*, have published little more than the

Chicago Police Department’s own denials of the allegations, a significant departure from those newspapers’ roles in an earlier period, when they published exposés of the Chicago Police Department’s practice under Cmdr. Jon Burge of torturing suspects to elicit murder confessions.

The ostensibly “independent” local public radio station WBEZ has published a report dismissing the *Guardian*’s reporting on the Homan Square “black site” as a “mischaracterization” while hypocritically calling for further investigation into Chicago Police Department’s treatment of citizens in general.

Tracy Siska of the Chicago Justice Project reports in Crain’s that questions were being raised about detentions at Homan Square as far back as 2011. Siska claims that Chicago police policy governing communications for those in police custody was changed in early May 2012 “in direct response to the Chicago Justice Project and other organizations including the Cook County public defender’s office, American Civil Liberties Union and First Defense Legal Aid bringing the problems of Homan Square to their attention in 2011.”

First Assistant Public Defender for Cook County Patrick Reardon spoke with the WWSWS about the Homan Square revelations and the rights violations regularly faced by those arrested in the city of Chicago.

“In the many years I’ve been practicing, I have had great difficulty getting in touch with clients. It’s an occupational hazard. Sometimes it could be a day or two, and then I find out they’re to be in court.”

About the allegations of off-the-record detention, Reardon said, “It’s absolutely, obviously unconstitutional. It’s a violation of Sixth Amendment rights, and if they’re questioned, it’s a violation of Fifth Amendment rights.”

“I was somewhat taken aback by the reports, but Illinois is not a stranger to this. In *Escobedo v. Illinois* [1963],

Mr. Escobedo's lawyer was told to cool his heels while his client was being interrogated." In the course of the interrogation Escobedo confessed to murder.

Retired Chicago police detective and Navy reservist Richard Zuley had also been investigated for torturing prisoners in the 1990s, using the same methods described by those held at Homan Square who have come forward. Earlier in February, *Guardian* reported Zuley carried out the 2003 interrogation and torture of Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a Mauritanian national held at the US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, which Slahi details in his autobiography.

About these abuses, Reardon said, "Yes, I cross-examined him [Zuley], many times as a matter of fact, with little luck. You know, judges just weren't willing to accept that a police officer was involved in wrongdoing."

Francis Boyle, University of Illinois professor of law and human rights attorney, also spoke with the WSWS about the erosion of civil rights in the US under the guise of the phony "war on terror" in the wake of September 11, 2001.

"Ashcroft got rid of the Levi guidelines that stopped COINTELPRO, which were instituted when President Ford told Levi to bring the program to an end. After 9/11 Ashcroft repealed Levi guidelines, basically bringing COINTELPRO back to life. Nothing's really changed since 1968... with one exception, the CIA used to be prohibited from domestic law enforcement."

Under Emanuel, local police powers have been expanded. Ahead of the 2012 NATO summit in Chicago, local and federal law enforcement collaborated on a massive crackdown on anti-war protests, including the entrapment, conviction and imprisonment of three protesters. (See, "Anti-NATO protesters sentenced to years in prison")

On Saturday February 28, several hundred protested against illegal police detention and abuse outside of the Homan Square compound. Another protest is planned for March 7.



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