

City of Chicago offers payouts for police brutality and torture

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28 April 2015

The City of Chicago recently announced two proposals to try to contain mass outrage against decades of police torture and brutality.

City officials with the backing of Mayor Rahm Emanuel recently announced that an absurdly small \$5.5 million reparations fund will be set up for victims of the torture that occurred for more than two decades under former police commander Jon Burge. Burge's actions had the full sanction of the Democratic Party establishment in control of Chicago and the Cook County area.

Additionally, a permanent memorial to the victims will be built, the city will issue a formal apology, and eighth and tenth grade students in Chicago Public Schools will be taught about the Burge case.

From 1972 to 1991, Burge and his team of detectives used torture to coerce victims and suspects into confessions for violent crimes on the South Side of the city. Cook County prosecutors and criminal court judges repeatedly ignored reports of torture. Burge, who still receives a police pension, was convicted of perjury in a federal court for lying under oath about the torture and was sentenced to four and a half years in prison. He was released last October and currently resides in Tampa, Florida.

One of the victims of torture, Darrell Cannon, said that police played Russian roulette with his life. The police put a shotgun in his mouth, pretended to load it, and pulled the trigger. Police also shocked his genitals with an electric cattle prod. Under such duress, the police got Cannon to confess to a murder he did not commit, putting him behind bars for 24 years. Similar reports have emerged from multiple victims, many of whom still remain imprisoned and face onerous legal battles.

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the city's \$5.5

million reparations proposal for victims of torture would include free counseling for substance abuse and psychological issues, free tuition to city colleges, and other assistance up to a maximum of \$100,000 per individual. The amount is a just a tiny fraction of the money paid out by the city in lawsuits related to police abuse. Overall, the case has already cost the city an estimated \$100 million in lawsuit settlements, judgments, and other legal costs.

In one recent case, the Chicago City Council approved a \$5 million settlement with the family of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald, who was killed after being shot by a Chicago police officer 16 times last October. Federal investigators and prosecutors were brought in to investigate the shooting. CPD officials alleged he was wielding a knife and "lunged" at police officers. City officials and the police department have refused to release dash-cam footage of the shooting, even as aldermen voted to approve the \$5 million payment before a formal lawsuit could be filed in an effort to forestall a federal lawsuit.

The officer involved in the shooting had a previous record of brutal behavior. In 2007, a jury found him guilty of using excessive force in a routine traffic stop, where he handcuffed cable company worker Ed Nonce so violently he broke his shoulders.

There is simmering social anger over police violence both in Chicago and around the country. The rise in social inequality all across the US has only made the social and political environment more volatile. From Ferguson to Baltimore, the police increasingly respond to mass protests with militarized repression.

It is within this context of deep anger against police brutality and growing social polarization that the limited financial settlements have been offered in order to prevent mass outrage against police brutality from

reaching a boiling point.

The political establishment hopes to sweep the claims of torture under the rug. However, every section of the state is implicated in covering up the institutionalized practice of torture by the Chicago police. Former mayor Richard M. Daley was the Cook County State's Attorney during the height of Burge's torture crimes, refusing to press charges, despite repeated claims of torture by prisoners.

Emanuel has sought to distance himself from the history of torture in recent weeks. "Jon Burge's actions are a disgrace to Chicago, to the hard-working men and women of the police department, and most importantly to those he was sworn to protect," Emanuel said in an official press release. "Today, we stand together as a city to try and right those wrongs, and to bring this dark chapter of Chicago's history to a close."

Far from the "dark chapter" being closed, as Emanuel hypocritically suggests, recent reports from the *Guardian* revealed the existence of torture "black sites" like Homan Square, under Emanuel's watch.

Reginald Ross, who was detained illegally in Homan Square, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "They came to my house in 2014 looking for someone who didn't match my name and claimed that I was selling drugs. They raided our house and tore it down and took me and my son to this place on Homan. We were both put in separate places there. We got no phone calls. It was like dead silence.

"They told me they were not the regular police. They said, 'Whatever you think, we're not regular police.' So they put me and my 19-year-old son there with no lawyer and no phone call. Then they took us to some other place in Iowa and Mayfield before we were finally released."

Lillian, a young student at Malcolm X College, spoke about the revelations of torture at Homan Square: "I think it is heartbreaking that we have a secret prison where people are tortured.... It should not be happening. The fact that there is no real news reporting on this is shocking. How is that possible? That's police brutality. These days the police just harass you when they are supposed to respect you."

The renewed revelations of police torture at secret police prisons such as the one in Homan Square came about during the mayoral elections in Chicago, where both candidates, Jesus "Chuy" Garcia and the

incumbent Rahm Emanuel, remained completely silent on the matter. In fact, the employment of torture in Chicago has been accompanied by a massive and relentless attack against working people by the Democratic Party. Emanuel, a former investment banker and right-hand man in the Obama administration, has presided over the destruction of public education, the closure of mental health clinics and cuts to vital social services. Working with Illinois governor Bruce Rauner, Emanuel is now preparing to intensify the attacks on Chicago's working class in his second term.



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