

Thousands “disappeared” at Chicago Police Homan Square black site

George Marlowe
29 October 2015

According to recent revelations, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) has “disappeared” more than 7,000 people at a converted Sears warehouse in Homan Square over the last decade.

A report last week in the *Guardian* showed that the number of people illegally detained at the department’s secretive interrogation center is more than double what was previously disclosed earlier this year.

The detention center located in the highly impoverished Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago has all the hallmarks of a paramilitary facility, referred to by reporters and lawyers as the domestic equivalent of a CIA “black site.” The drab and imposing red-brick warehouse is equipped with floodlights, cameras and razor-wire fences and has a heavy police presence. Many of those detained at the secretive facility have previously alleged that they were tortured, sexually assaulted and provided no access to legal representation

Significantly, more than 65 percent of the arrests and detentions in Homan Square in the last decade occurred under the administration of Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the former chief of staff for President Barack Obama. Indeed, the city has a long history of police violence and torture, with the full backing of the Democratic Party. The most notorious cases of torture occurred under former police detective and commander Jon Burge between 1972 and 1991, with the full complicity of the then Attorney General and eventual Democratic mayor, Richard Daley.

The recent analysis of the data of internal police records obtained by the *Guardian’s* transparency lawsuit into the facility revealed that 7,185 arrests have been logged between August 2004 and June 2015. The number of arrests disclosed to the newspaper is likely on the conservative side. Despite the city officially

purchasing the warehouse in 1995, data of arrests prior to 2004 were not disclosed as Chicago police claim the internal records for those years are not in a digital format and are “burdensome” to produce.

Many have been detained at the center without being charged, suggesting that hundreds, if not thousands, more have been illegally detained at the facility. Nearly 75 percent of those charged were arrested for non-violent or drug-related charges. Those detained were not allowed to make necessary phone calls to family, friends or attorneys within the first few hours of detention, prior to being interrogated.

Indeed, no official public booking records exist for those detained at Homan Square, nor does any phone number exist for the detention warehouse. Less than one percent of the predominantly working poor and minority detainees were given access to an attorney. This corresponds to CPD’s official police practice of not granting arrestees access to lawyers even in the earliest stages of interrogation. According to the First Defense Legal Aid, a mere 0.3 percent of those arrested at declared police stations were given access to a lawyer within the first few hours of interrogation—denying those arrested their Constitutional and democratic rights against self-incrimination.

The CPD continues to claim that the facility in Homan Square is little more than a low-level narcotics outpost. Mayor Rahm Emanuel has come to the defense of his police force—stating they “follow all the rules” at the secret prison. However, far from following the rules, multiple detainees have alleged that the police function above the law by physically abusing and harassing them. In some cases, detainees have been coerced into participating in petty drug stings or to serving as informants.

According to David Graeber, an attorney whose client was taken to the facility on drug charges, “That place was and is scary. It’s a scary place. There’s nothing about it that resembles a police station. It comes from a Bond movie or something.”

Multiple Chicago attorneys have also stated that they have been routinely turned away from the facility or prevented access to their clients. Given that there are no official booking records for the facility, family and attorneys often have no access whatsoever to those individuals being held inside. According to Graeber, “If you’re laboring under the assumption that your client is at Homan, there really isn’t much you can do as a lawyer. You’re shut out. It’s guarded like a military installation.”

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers and youth in the neighborhood to ask them what they thought about the most recent revelations at Homan Square as well as the reports of torture.

A mother of three responded to the revelations saying, “It makes sense that they would try to hide such things. I heard about it and I really don’t know what to say about this right now. Everybody that’s been involved in it definitely needs to be punished—including the mayor.”

Alexis and Joseph, two students in the area, responded with shock. Joseph asked, “They do that for real? I’m speechless.” Alexis added, “Yes, I heard about it. The police are taking people and putting them in a warehouse like it’s a secret thing. It’s sick and I can’t imagine what they’re doing. What are they going to do about it? Are they going to let it go on? It’s against the law. How do you allow the law to break the law? Mayor Emanuel needs to get out of office for this.”

Speaking on the rise in police violence around the country, Alexis told reporters how her family was personally affected. “My cousin got murdered by a police officer in 2006,” she said. “It took six years to settle, because the police officer claimed he had a gun on the scene. It makes you hate the law. My family got a settlement but there’s no money that can settle what they did.”

Queenetta, a daycare worker, spoke about the use of torture and illegal detention, noting that “most people don’t really have a voice in this system. The courts don’t do anything to protect you either. It’s messed up.

Everybody comes to the United States for ‘freedom.’ The politicians that are above the police are also responsible. It’s like a mob and people are afraid to speak out. The politicians...they’re the mob themselves. I hate mayor Emanuel.”

Speaking on the devastation of social conditions throughout Illinois, she added, “And the new governor Rauner is destroying childcare [for working parents]. You have to make under \$10 an hour to afford daycare. It’s sad for me to turn away so many single moms because their children don’t qualify for daycare. And what are these children going to be left with? Neglect of children. It’s terrible. And then we have torture in places here. So, what’s going to be done about all this?”

Pointing at the Homan Square detention center, a former veteran asked, “They’ve been using that as a detainee center? As an ex-military man, that doesn’t surprise.”

Noting the silence of the media, he added, “Why hasn’t the *Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* reported on this or made a big deal about this? I think if it’s illegal, it’s illegal. But in this country, a lot of things are illegal and nothing’s done about it. The politicians ignore what people have to say even though the people are the most important constituency. All the crooks and criminals run office and that’s why you have a place like this.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact