Chicago police chief fired as anger mounts over cover-up of police killings

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Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel fired Garry McCarthy, the Chicago police superintendent, on Tuesday in an effort to appease mounting popular anger over police violence and the cover-up of the killing of Laquan McDonald.

A police dash-cam video was made public last week showing the deliberate and unprovoked murder of McDonald by policeman Jason Van Dyke, who fired 16 shots into the 17-year-old youth. McCarthy, Emanuel and the entire Chicago Democratic Party establishment have been discredited by their 13-month campaign to prevent the release of the video, which clearly shows that Van Dyke is guilty of an execution-style slaying.

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) lied about the circumstances of the killing from the beginning, claiming that McDonald was moving towards the police with a knife. Actually, as the video demonstrates, the youth was moving away from the police at the time and posed no threat. None of the other five cops on the scene fired their weapons.

The Emanuel administration tried to suppress the video, blocking its release during the mayor's reelection campaign, in the course of which he was forced into a runoff that he won only narrowly. Eight days after his reelection, Emanuel pushed through a $5 million settlement with McDonald's family that included a provision that the video be kept from the public.

The cover-up was exploded only by the efforts of two freelance journalists. One of them obtained the coroner's report documenting the 16 shots fired into McDonald. The other filed the Freedom of Information lawsuit that ultimately forced the CPD to release the video last week—and also forced State's Attorney Anita Alvarez to have Van Dyke arrested and charged with first-degree murder.

McCarthy was apparently unprepared for his firing. He gave radio interviews Tuesday morning in which he adamantly defended the Chicago police and presented himself as the instrument of whatever "reforms" might be necessary. A few hours later, he was out of a job.

Emanuel announced the dismissal of McCarthy at a press conference that quickly became contentious, as reporters noted that his explanation of why McCarthy had to go—that he had lost "public trust" as a result of the McDonald case—applied with equal or greater force to the mayor himself.

Emanuel stonewalled questions about a link between the suppression of the video and his own reelection campaign and flatly denied any intention to step down, as demanded by hundreds of protesters angered by the McDonald video and its cover-up.

McCarthy is the second chief of a major police department to be fired this year in the wake of the exposure of a police killing. Baltimore Police Commissioner Anthony Batts was fired in July after the disturbances that followed the police murder of Freddie Gray. The trial of the first of six police implicated in that killing began in Baltimore on Monday.

While Emanuel now sheds crocodile tears over the murder of Laquan McDonald, his attitude up to the time of the release of the video was to demand even harsher police repression. At a meeting in October of municipal officials and police in Washington, Emanuel complained that his department had turned "fetal" because of protests against police violence.

By Tuesday, however, it was evident that McCarthy had to be sacrificed to preserve Emanuel's own position. The *Chicago Sun-Times* published an editorial that morning calling for McCarthy to go, saying he had "lost the trust and support of much of Chicago." The black caucus of the Board of Aldermen had called for

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McCarthy's ouster, and a group of Latino Democrats called for the resignation of Alvarez, the Cook County prosecutor.

Besides firing McCarthy, Emanuel announced the creation of a five-member task force on police accountability, to report back in March 2016. The task force is to be directed by former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, a leading African-American Democratic Party politician. This is a typical stalling measure aimed at making a gesture to popular anger while the police terror continues unabated.

Signaling the latter is the appointment of a 29-year veteran of the CPD, First Deputy Superintendent John Escalante, as interim superintendent while a replacement for McCarthy is found. Escalante can be relied on to maintain the status quo in what even the *Chicago Tribune* described as a "department long known for a culture of corruption, torture, wrongful convictions and lax discipline." The city of Chicago has paid out more than $500 million in settlements for police abuse of citizens since 2004.

It is significant that the black caucus of the Board of Aldermen had been calling for McCarthy's ouster because of rising rates of violent crime in their wards. They were demanding more police repression of their own constituents, not less, until the McDonald video changed the political atmosphere. Most of these aldermen had backed Emanuel for reelection.

Emanuel appointed McCarthy shortly after first taking office in 2011, and the police chief's $260,000 a year salary made him the highest-paid city employee. Emanuel praised the police superintendent's prominent role in the repression of anti-NATO demonstrators in 2012.

A former congressman and chief of staff in the Obama White House, Emanuel has overseen sweeping attacks on the social conditions of workers and youth in Chicago, including the closure of scores of schools. He maintains the closest connections to Chicago's financial elite and the top levels of the federal government. He will rely on those connections to maintain his position as mayor, which depends on his being able to divert and ultimately dissipate popular outrage over police violence and corruption, along with the broader anger over declining living standards and deteriorating public services in the third-largest US city.

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