Chicago mayor's choice to head police oversaw crackdown on anti-NATO protesters

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8 April 2016

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel last week announced the appointment of veteran officer Eddie Johnson as interim head of the Chicago Police Department. Emanuel's endorsement of Johnson is part of an effort to make the police force a more effective instrument for suppressing political and social opposition.

Johnson's chief accomplishment in the police department was the major role he played in the crackdown of anti-NATO protestors in 2012. Three protestors were arrested in the aftermath on trumped-up charges of "terrorism."

After entering the Chicago Police Department (CPD) more than 27 years ago, Johnson rose the ranks from a beat patrolman to become a deputy chief of patrol in 2012. According to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Johnson has been offered a $260,044 salary in his interim role as the police superintendent.

Emanuel awarded the interim superintendent position to Johnson after the mayor rejected the Chicago Police Board's initial suggestions for candidates. Johnson, a veteran of the police force, was advanced to head the CPD partly as an effort to placate African-American aldermen. The appointment has also been used to appease civil rights establishment figures such as Jesse Jackson, layers of the pseudo-left, and groups like Black Lives Matter that have been leading the protests against police brutality.

"I believe Eddie Johnson has everything that the city needs," Emanuel said in a press conference at police headquarters. The mayor noted that Johnson would help rebuild officer morale and be uniquely positioned to help build a "bridge to the community." Emanuel touted Johnson as leading an effort to "reform" the CPD in the public eye.

Far from ushering in a new era of "reform" or an end to police brutality, Johnson has a record that entirely explodes Emanuel's pretenses of reforming the police. According to a police department statement, "Chief Johnson has significant experience managing large-scale special events and was instrumental in the operational planning and response of the 2012 NATO Summit" that was held in Chicago.

During those protests, the Chicago police, then headed by Garry McCarthy, injured over 25 people, including reporters, and arrested numerous others. The CPD engaged in widespread surveillance and infiltration of activist groups. Three young men were arrested and jailed on trumped-up charges of "terrorism" as part of the mobilization of state resources against protest and dissent.

Brian Church, Brent Betterly and Jared Chase were arrested on "domestic terrorism" charges during the NATO protests. The three anarchists were accused of making crude Molotov cocktails in the lead-up to the NATO Summit. Cook County prosecutors sought to sentence the three protesters to 14 years in prison. The defense argued that they were entrapped by police officers working undercover.

In April 2014, after a three-week trial, a jury acquitted all three of the terrorism charges, but they were convicted of felony counts of possessing incendiary devices and promoting mob action. Judge Thaddeus Williams sentenced them to between five to eight years in prison.

The acquittal on terrorism charges was a blow to the former State's Attorney Anita Alvarez, who alleged that the three men had plotted attacks on police stations, President Obama's campaign headquarters and the home of Mayor Emanuel.

The crackdown on the NATO protests in Chicago was a significant attack on democratic rights. It marked a milestone in the utilization of enhanced police powers

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that were implemented after 9/11. By identifying the NATO protesters with "terrorism," the ruling class took a major step in criminalizing political opposition to its policies in the name of the "war on terror."

Johnson's leading role in the crackdown of NATO protestors refutes any notion that his role will be to "reform" the police. Following his appointment as interim superintendent, Johnson told CBS News that he'd never witnessed police brutality in his career with the CPD. "I've actually never encountered police misconduct," he said, "because you've got to understand, officers that commit misconduct don't do it in front of people that they think are going to hold them accountable for it." Such a statement flies in the face of widespread revelations of police brutality by Chicago police spanning decades.

Last fall, a court ordered that the Emanuel administration release the video of the police murder of Laquan McDonald by officer Jason Van Dyke. The video, suppressed by the Emanuel administration and the CPD for over a year, showed officer Van Dyke shooting the unarmed McDonald 16 times, including multiple shots as the youth lay on the ground.

With the release of the video, Emanuel faced protests and widespread calls for his resignation. The murder of McDonald implicated all layers of the political establishment. Emails from 2014 to 2015 that were released by the Emanuel administration revealed the depth of collaboration between the mayor's office, police officials, the Independent Police Review Association, political leaders in the city and others who were responsible for handling the information on McDonald's death.

The first attempt at damage control by Emanuel was to fire Police Commissioner Garry McCarthy. He had played a leading role in the cover-up directed by the Emanuel administration, but ended up the fall guy. After firing McCarthy, Emanuel proclaimed that he would usher in an era of "transparency" and police "reform" with the aid of the federal Justice Department.

In reality, the Justice Department and the Obama administration have shielded killer cops and have done nothing to stop the tide of police murders, from Ferguson to Baltimore and all over the country. Police killings in the United States continue unabated this year, on top of the approximately 1,200 killed by police in 2015.

Far from ushering an era of "transparency," the Emanuel administration has also been blocking further Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests on cases of police brutality. The Better Government Association (BGA) has filed a lawsuit against the CPD for failing to turn over videos of fatal police shootings.

In a press release, the BGA notes, "Mayor Rahm Emanuel has said he supports a new policy requiring that videos of fatal shootings by Chicago police be publicly released relatively soon after the incidents.

"But the Emanuel administration is stonewalling a Better Government Association request for footage from the past five years, so the BGA is suing the Chicago Police Department—again.

"Under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act—the state law known as FOIA that guarantees public access to public records within no more than 10 business days—the BGA asked the police department for copies of records and videos of officer-involved fatal shootings since 2011."

The BGA states, the "CPD's FOIA practices with regard to shooting videos have not materially changed following the release of the Laquan McDonald shooting video."

The mayor's office and the CPD have repeatedly blocked FOIA requests by organizations like the BGA, the *Chicago Tribune* and independent journalists. According to an Associated Press report, the city of Chicago has racked up over $662 million in legal costs. Lawsuits include multiple claims by people who have been tortured or physically assaulted and made to give false confessions in homicide cases.

Even as Emanuel claims to be ushering an era of police "reform," the mayor and his police department continue to operate a secret black site at Homan Square where thousands have been illegally detained, interrogated, tortured and sexually assaulted. There has been near total silence by the entire political establishment and the media on the secret interrogation center.

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