

In bid to quash anger, Chicago cops face firing over Laquan McDonald murder

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Following the release of a city inspector general's report, Chicago police superintendent Eddie Johnson has recommended that the city fire seven cops for their role in conspiring to cover up the 2014 murder of Laquan McDonald, a 17-year-old unarmed teenager shot down by Officer Jason Van Dyke. The move is part of the ongoing damage control effort by Democratic mayor Rahm Emanuel aimed at defusing social anger while shielding killer cops from any meaningful legal consequences.

The city has so far refused to name the seven officers until their cases are sent to the Chicago Police Board, which makes the final decision over whether individual police officers are terminated. The *Chicago Tribune* reported, however, that Van Dyke's partner, Joseph Walsh, was among the seven.

The rest of the cops are thought to be mostly patrol officers who wrote false reports of the incident, particularly in regard to backing Van Dyke's assertion that McDonald lunged at him with a knife. This lie was shattered by the release of a police dashboard camera video showing the unarmed teenager attempting to back away from officers before Van Dyke fired 16 bullets into McDonald, most which hit the youth's limp body after he crumpled to the ground.

While the Independent Police Review Authority usually handles such cases, the body has been widely discredited for refusing to investigate cops over shootings and other instances of misconduct. The new head of the IPRA, Sharon Fairley, was forced to hand the high-profile McDonald case to the inspector general's office following the November 2015 release of the dashcam video and protests that followed.

City Inspector General Joseph Ferguson reportedly recommended that 10 officers be fired. Two higher-ranking cops under investigation for their role in

whitewashing the murder and signing off on the falsified reports have recently retired and left the force.

David McNaughton, at the time a deputy chief at CPD, wrote in his report of the McDonald shooting, "Based upon information available at the time of this report it is the preliminary determination of the undersigned that Officer Van Dyke fired his weapon in compliance with Department policy." He added, "Officer Van Dyke fired his weapon in fear of his life when the offender while armed with a knife continued to approach and refused all verbal direction."

McNaughton announced his retirement just days after the release of the inspector general's report.

The other ranking officer thought to be named in the inspector general's report is Anthony Wojcik, a lieutenant involved in the investigation of the McDonald shooting. Wojcik retired in May.

Another high-ranking cop at CPD, apparently not among the 10, but certainly implicated in the investigation, first deputy superintendent John Escalante, also recently announced he would be leaving CPD. At the time of the McDonald shooting and investigation, Escalante was chief of detectives, and would have had overall responsibility for the detectives and supervisors who investigated the McDonald shooting. He even served briefly as interim superintendent after the firing of Garry McCarthy by Emanuel in December 2015.

It is expected that the Police Board will receive the seven cases in several weeks. According to the executive director of the Police Board, Max A. Caproni, the median time for a decision from that point on is four months. However, they can often take longer, and the board is notorious for reversing even those rare recommendations to fire by the police superintendent. Decisions of the board can also be challenged in court,

and often are, providing yet another opportunity for police to escape prosecution.

Although it has been nearly two years since the McDonald murder, the Emanuel administration remains in crisis over the wave of police killings and the official cover-up by every section of the Democratic Party machine in Chicago. In an effort to dissipate anger, the Democrats have followed a well-worn path of reshuffling of personnel, investigative whitewashes and legal settlements. This has been combined with outright obstruction and delay as with the efforts to withhold the dashcam video from public scrutiny for more than a year.

In this particular case, the behavior of the police was so egregious that in April 2015, before the McDonald video was even released and his family formally filed a lawsuit, the city approved a \$5 million dollar settlement.

Eventually, following a rise in protests and anger when the video was released, Emanuel fired McCarthy, then announced the formation of a Police Accountability Task Force. Since then, the head of that task force, Lori Lightfoot, a former police officer and federal prosecutor, has been named President of the Police Board. Among the recommendations produced by Lightfoot's task force was that the discredited IPRA be replaced by another body. Lightfoot once headed CPD's Office of Professional Standards, a body that was replaced by IPRA following OPS's failure to act against cops implicated in torture headed up by police commander Jon Burge.

Cook County state's attorney Anita Alvarez was also picked for replacement, as the Cook County Democratic Party moved to back her primary challenger, Kim Foxx, who ended up defeating Alvarez in the primary. Alvarez had worked closely with Emanuel to delay the release of the McDonald footage and was replaced because she was seen to be too close to the police department. Foxx said of her campaign, "I ran for this office to make sure that we had a criminal justice system people can believe in. That's my duty."

Even with these personnel changes, in some cases at high levels, the violence perpetrated by the police against the working population has continued to escalate, as with the recent killing of 18-year-old Paul O'Neal and the apparent nonfatal shooting of a 15-year-old by the Illinois State Police in Chicago on August

20.

Just like the rest of the country, the daily police violence is the consequence of the immense social inequality in the city and the desire on the part of the wealthy elite to protect their property from an increasingly restive working-class population. Chicago's wealthy elite comprises 15 billionaires, 134,000 millionaires, and 827 multimillionaires (those with over \$30 million in assets).

While sections of the Democratic Party and its pseudo-left supporters, including Black Lives Matter, seek to blame police violence solely on racism, the fact is the police murder workers and youth of all races. Moreover, in many cases those perpetuating these crimes—from local cops to police chiefs, mayors and the US president himself—are African American. What unites all of the victims of killer cops, however, is that they are working class and poor.



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