

# Chicago mayor plans to boost size of police force in response to social crisis

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Chicago's Democratic mayor Rahm Emanuel recently announced plans to hire hundreds of police officers for the Chicago Police Department (CPD). Emanuel's proposal follows the calls of other local Democrats to respond to the rise of violence in the city with an escalation of policing and a law-and-order crackdown on the poorest residents.

The city of Chicago has seen a spike in violence in recent months. Over 92 homicides were reported in August alone, making it one of the most violent months since 1993. Nearly 500 homicides have been recorded so far this year. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, close to 7,916 people have been killed in Chicago since September 11, 2001, more than the total casualties of American troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The violence in Chicago has also overtaken the number of homicides in New York and Los Angeles combined. According to estimates, the city is on pace to reach over 600 homicides, a level not seen since 2003. The 1990s were the worst years for homicides in Chicago, averaging 700 homicides a year, largely due to gang violence and the crack-cocaine epidemic that ravaged many parts of the city.

Various Democratic aldermen have criticized Emanuel for insufficiently dealing with the outbreak of violence. Members of City Council's Black Caucus have been calling for over 500 police officers to be hired to the tune of over \$50 million.

Hysterical calls for an increase in policing are also emerging in newspaper editorials and various sections of the political establishment. A recent editorial in *Crain's*, the city's business press, set the tone of the response of the ruling elite with the title, "Wake up, Emanuel, before the crisis engulfs us all."

The editorial largely lambasts Emanuel for not mobilizing greater numbers of police. It calls for an

increase of police officers, and not merely an increase of police working overtime, to tackle the rising violence in the city. The editorial also calls for a diverting of Tax Increment Funding (TIF) from education and the Chicago Public School (CPS) system and putting it toward the hiring of more police officers.

Notably, Reverend Michael Pfleger, a community activist with close ties to the Democratic Party and various layers of the pseudo-left, has joined the call for increasing the police force and escalating the response of the state. He has demanded that a state of emergency be declared in Chicago and the National Guard be deployed by Republican Governor Bruce Rauner.

The call for the National Guard to be brought in to Chicago has emerged from such layers repeatedly over the past decade. It is fundamentally a law-and-order response that does not in any way deal with deeper roots of the social crisis. Rauner, for his part, has publicly rejected the call to deploy the National Guard, saying it "wouldn't make sense" at present. He is fully aware that doing so could spark greater social unrest among the city's working class population.

While the levels of violence and homicides in Chicago have escalated significantly in the past few months, the overall levels of homicides are still far lower than the highest points of the 1990s, when over 943 people were killed in 1992 and 931 were killed in 1994. In general, there has been a relative decline of homicides and violent crime compared to two decades ago. Despite this, the media at every level has resorted to sensationalism, trying to create an atmosphere of social panic, while leaving the underlying causes of violence largely unexamined.

The root causes of the recent outbreak of violence can only be understood in the context of the broader social and economic crisis that has devastated large parts of

the city. Chicago was once a major center of industry, including meatpacking, steel and railroads, but workers there have seen their living standards sharply deteriorate over the last three decades.

Much like other large cities, Chicago has seen waves of deindustrialization and the loss of good-paying jobs since the 1970s. More than 22 percent of manufacturing jobs in the city were lost in the decade of the 2000s alone. Neighborhoods that today experience high levels of violence—whether from internecine gang warfare or from police violence—are deeply impoverished and economically devastated.

Thousands of working class youth have few worthwhile job opportunities or prospects and their best hopes are squandered daily. More than 14 percent of the Chicago metropolitan area population lives in poverty, or close to 1.3 million people. By contrast, the financial aristocracy and sections of the upper middle class have seen their wealth grow immensely in the same period through attacks on the working class. While many neighborhoods bear the stamp of social distress, downtown Chicago teems with a glittering skyline, housing the offices of numerous Fortune 500 companies and thousands of millionaires.

The city is also home to multiple billionaires, including Ken Griffin, the hedge fund manager and CEO of global investment firm Citadel, with more than \$7.5 billion of net worth to his name. Billions of dollars have been siphoned from the working class and funneled to the top most layers of the financial aristocracy. The wealth of these layers alone could more than offset the financial shortfalls of the city and state of Illinois, as well as dramatically improve the living standards of the vast majority.

The conditions prevailing in the city are an indictment of the entire capitalist system and its political representatives, chiefly the Democratic Party, which has controlled Chicago since the 1930s. Their policies have contributed to a dramatic attack on the living standards of the working class of all races, with the rise of high poverty in neighborhoods throughout the city.

Emanuel, a former chief of staff in the Obama administration, came to office in his first term with little public support and plans to implement an austerity program on behalf of the financial aristocracy. Thousands of teachers were laid off, more than 50

schools were closed and more than six city-run mental health facilities were closed down.

Meanwhile, the Emanuel administration and the political establishment have faced growing public outrage against the revelations of police violence and ongoing cover-ups. They have attempted to deflect outrage with cosmetic changes to the police apparatus, even as recent reports show that Chicago cops shoot at a person every five days. Far from carrying out any kind of “reform,” police murders and brutality continue unabated.

The call for greater policing and an escalation of law-and-order measures comes on the heels of growing public disaffection with the entire political establishment and a growing sense of combativeness in the working class. Even as Emanuel and the Democrats repeatedly claim that there is no money for education or social safety nets for the impoverished and vulnerable, they are responding to the growing social and economic crisis by strengthening the police forces and the repressive apparatus of the state, in preparation for the social upheavals to come.



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