Chicago police keep nearly 400,000 on a secret watch list

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24 May 2017

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) keeps nearly 400,000 people on a secret watch list, according to a recent *Chicago Sun Times* report and analysis. While Chicago police admitted to having a substantially smaller watch list last year, the actual number of those being targeted for surveillance is far greater than anything reported before.

Nearly 15 percent of Chicago's population is now considered "targets" as part of the "Strategic Subject List" (SSL) that the CPD maintains. The list is being utilized as surveillance and monitoring tool to crackdown on large sections of the working class in Chicago, particularly in the neighborhoods wracked by poverty, violence and social breakdown.

Last year, Chicago police superintendent Eddie Johnson claimed that 1,400 were on a "target list" for causing increased levels of gun violence in the city. After an extended legal fight, the *Sun-Times* was able to uncover a far more extensive surveillance list of more than 398,000 people—the majority of whom have not been charged with a violent crime or illegal gun possession.

The massive database includes all those who have been previously arrested and fingerprinted for minor crimes since 2013. Disputing the CPD's claims that those at the top of the list are the most likely to commit gun violence, the report showed that more than half of those at the top of the list have never been arrested for any illegal possession of guns.

Johnson defended the use of the massive surveillance list last Friday, stating that it was part of an effort to track those likely to get caught up in a "lifestyle" of violence. Previously, he claimed that the much smaller list was used for "enforcement." He has since backed down from the claim that the 400,000 list is an enforcement tool, stating that "it is not a target list" and that "we [the CPD] don't use the list for any enforcement actions."

According to the department, the SSL database is programmatically generated by an algorithm — developed by the Illinois Institute of Technology — to classify various sections of the population according to their "risk" factor to commit violence. The criteria reportedly include such things as whether they had been previously identified as a gang member or if they have been arrested for a crime, including non-violent offenses.

Police spokesperson Anthony Guglielmi compared the scores generated to a "credit score" and added that the list was used to determine how police forces would be deployed to different neighborhoods. He suggested that the list would not be used to target and arrest anyone without a reason, a claim contradicted by the data from the report itself.

Johnson also claimed last year that the list was a response to the rise in gun violence in 2016 in Chicago. While violence increased last year, these levels were in large part driven by systemic poverty, gang fragmentation, school closures, decades of deindustrialization and the increasing lack of any future for youth in terms of jobs or decent living standards.

Working-class youth unemployment and underemployment in Chicago remains pervasive and the nationwide fragmentation of gangs is the only social fabric left for many. A reflection of this breakdown is the increasing use of assault weapons by gangs in recent years.

While immense wealth is accumulated at the heights of American society—Chicago alone is home to seventeen billionaires with a combined net worth of $45 billion—the best hopes of working-class youth are frequently extinguished. As recently as 2013, nearly a half of those killed by gun violence were under 25.

In short, the violence in Chicago is an acute reflection of ever growing levels of social inequality amidst the complete failure of the capitalist system.

The response of Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel to

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the social crisis and the outbreak of violence has been to increase the presence and powers of the police forces—while schools have been closed, teachers laid off and social programs axed. None of the root causes of such social violence are being addressed in the slightest.

Moreover, the Chicago police have a long and sordid history of violence against the poorest sections of the population, with the full sanction of the Democratic Party and the entire political establishment for more than a century.

The drawing up of the SSL database echoes the operations of the CPD's notorious Red Squad, which surveilled, infiltrated and disrupted a wide array of political organizations beginning in the late 1880s and continuing throughout much of the 20th century, with the express aim of intimidating working class organizations and thwarting any socialist or anarchist influence.

Earlier in January, following protests over the police murder of LaQuan McDonald in 2015, the Department of Justice (DOJ) produced a damning report of systemic and unconstitutional practices by the CPD in recent years.

While the DOJ report issued toothless proposals, including the negotiation of a court-enforced consent decree to enforce so-called "reforms," this has since been scaled back under the Trump administration. Consent decrees, which have routinely failed to implement any long-lasting "reforms" of police violence, are used by the Justice Department and the police establishment to cover up the crimes of the police.

The killing of McDonald in 2015 created widespread public outrage across the country and around the world. His murder and the release of the video—after pressure by an independent journalist—was followed by nearly two years of cover-up and false claims by police "reform" and oversight agencies. Everything was done to stem the crisis for Emanuel politically. Opposition to police murders was frequently met with a military-style response by the Obama administration and local police as in cities like Ferguson, Missouri.

Jeff Sessions, the Trump administration's attorney general, has made it clear that he is opposed to any restraint on the CPD through a consent decree. Despite this, Emanuel has been fraudulently claiming that he is still committed to enacting reform of the police.

Earlier this year, Johnson proposed a modification of the CPD's "use of force" policies which scaled back some earlier proposals, adding in that police officers could use deadly force if it was "reasonable and proportional." The most recent draft produced in May claims also to respect the "sanctity of life." Whatever the actual content of these departmental policies, the long history of violence by the CPD indicates that these measures will be largely cosmetic.

Having previously met with Emanuel, the Trump administration has for its part emboldened the most fascistic layers in the Chicago Fraternal Order of Police (FOP). The new FOP president, Kevin Graham, has been cited as wanting to fight against any police reform efforts of any kind. All criticism of the police is effectively being treated as an act of war. Despite systemic media complicity in covering up police violence in the past, Graham stated, "We will no longer be victimized by a biased anti-Police media."

The vice president of the FOP, Martin Preib, has also made similar claims that any criticism of the police is merely left-wing propaganda. Preib is a also defender of the most notorious police commander in the history of Chicago Police Department—Jon Burge—who was in charge of systemic torture as well as the extraction of false murder confessions from individuals who were later proven to be innocent.

Meanwhile, police violence and brutality have continued unabated.

In February, 55-year-old Michelle Robey was shot and killed by the Chicago police in the middle of a busy traffic intersection on the North Side. All indications were that Robey had severe mental illness. In April, 48-year-old Shawn Brider was found dead in a Chicago police station. Police claimed he had a cardiac arrest while family have questioned why he was arrested in the first place.

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