

Black Lives Matter, ACLU stay lawsuits, promote Chicago police “reform”

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On March 21, Black Lives Matter (BLM), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other community groups accepted a seat at the table in a court-enforced consent decree to promote illusions in police reform in Chicago.

As part of an ongoing exercise in damage control, the City of Chicago under Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Illinois State Attorney General Lisa Madigan and various community groups including BLM entered into a 10-page Memorandum of Agreement to work out a framework of “reform” for the Chicago Police Department (CPD).

A draft of the consent decree will be released after the city of Chicago hears grievances and proposals from various community and activist groups over the next several weeks. Groups such as BLM, the ACLU, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) will be putatively involved in an advisory role in the formulation of the decree.

The involvement of groups such as BLM and the ACLU—deemed “Coalition Founders” in the agreement—in such an agreement is intended to provide further cover for the political establishment while giving middle class activists a “piece of the action.” This latest arrangement will do nothing to ease the decades-long reign of police violence overseen by the Democratic Party in the third largest city in the United States.

BLM and other pro-Democratic Party activist groups have framed the issue of police violence in purely racial terms without any regard for the fact that whites make up the largest number killed by police nationwide and that victims of police violence are overwhelmingly working class.

In April 2017, BLM reaped the benefits of misdirecting social opposition to police violence when

it was awarded a \$100 million grant from the Ford Foundation, one of the most powerful philanthropic organizations in the world, which also has intimate links to the Central Intelligence Agency.

In return for their participation in this agreement, BLM and the various community groups as well as Madigan have agreed to stay all lawsuits they have brought against the city for police violence.

The coalition of community groups have 60 days from the signing of the agreement to provide their input into the framework of a court-enforced consent decree. If a consent decree is enacted this year, the coalition of community groups which entered into this framework will be able to have quarterly meetings with a court-appointed independent monitor that will oversee the “reform” process. However, if a consent decree is not filed with the court by September 1, they can potentially resume their lawsuits.

Lawsuits were brought by Madigan and other groups in late 2017 against the Emanuel administration as part of an effort to stem a political crisis in the wake of the 2015 release of video footage of the police murder of Laquan McDonald, an African-American teenager, by police officer Jason Van Dyke. Since the release of the video, the city’s political establishment has been confronted by growing public anger over police violence and brutality in Chicago and across the country.

Various sections of the Democratic Party and the community organizations in their orbit have attempted to misdirect and defuse public outrage over the coverup of the murder of McDonald by the Emanuel administration.

In January 2017, the US Department of Justice (DoJ) under the Obama administration—which funneled military weaponry to police departments and

whitewashed the nationwide reign of police murders—released a scathing report that detailed systemic abuses and a pattern of constitutional violations throughout the CPD.

Then Attorney General Loretta Lynch recommended that the city of Chicago enter into a consent decree as part of the recommendations of the DoJ report. In reality, the proposal for a consent decree and proposals for reforms was yet another exercise in damage control. Emanuel even feigned support for such limited oversight over the police.

The incoming Trump administration, however, provided further cover for the Emanuel administration to sidestep the pretense of a court-enforced oversight of the CPD. Once the Trump administration took office, US Attorney General Jeff Sessions immediately opposed any plans that required a federal judge to monitor departments across the country, which the previous Justice report claimed was necessary to enact reforms which would supposedly reduce police violence.

With the backing of the Trump administration, Emanuel initially sought a toothless Memorandum of Agreement with federal authorities which did not require any court enforcement or independent oversight. Emanuel claimed that the CPD was carrying out reform measures on its own with its own police accountability task force and its newly formed organization of police oversight, the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA).

In fact, all previous reform measures and internal oversight bodies established over the last two decades—such as the Office of Professional Standards (OPS) and its replacement, the Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA)—functioned as adjuncts of the CPD in covering up police crimes and acts of brutality. Since the release of the McDonald video the police have continued to function as the armed bodies of the state, meting out violence and brutality on a regular basis.

A report from 2016 showed that Chicago police shoot someone every five days. Emanuel has presided over the escalation of police violence and murders in Chicago along with the arming of the police force with new heavy weaponry. Last year, Emanuel vowed to hire 1,000 new cops, mainly from minority neighborhoods in the city.

Emanuel's decision to backtrack in mid-2017 on the working out of a consent decree was met with nervousness within sections of the Democratic Party as well as opposition from groups like BLM. That Emanuel would so flagrantly oppose even the appearance of reform signaled to Madigan that the only way to defuse public anger was to sue the city of Chicago in order to force the negotiation of court-ordered initiatives.

Madigan and other groups filed the lawsuit against the city of Chicago on August 29, 2017. It cited the findings of the Department of Justice report against the CPD, including “the unconstitutional use of deadly and excessive force by officers; inadequate training on appropriate tactics, lack of supervision; a failure to adequately investigate officer misconduct and discipline officers and inadequate wellness and counseling programs to support officers.” Responding to the lawsuit, Emanuel and CPD Superintendent Eddie Johnson both tepidly voiced their willingness to work with Madigan on a consent decree.

Emanuel is seeking reelection for mayor in 2019 and no doubt calculates that the inclusion of groups such as BLM in such a fraudulent framework of police “reform” will give him a certain political cover to embellish his deeply unpopular public image.

Court-enforced consent decrees have been implemented in cities like Baltimore and Cleveland, which have had high-profile police shootings in the news since 2015. These measures, among other “reform” efforts by individual police departments, have done nothing to stop police in the US from murdering with impunity. According to killedbypolice.net, a website that tracks police killings in the US, police have killed more people during the first four months of 2018 (394) than in 2017 (365).

Ultimately the purpose of the consent decree in Chicago is to give legal and political cover to the CPD and the Democratic Party as plans are carried out to further militarize and deploy the police against the working class in the coming struggles against the state.



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