

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel announces he will not seek reelection

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On September 4, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced that he would not seek a third term in office. Emanuel was first elected in February 2011, having left the White House Chief of Staff position under President Barack Obama.

A former investment banker and leading figure in the Democratic Party nationally, Emanuel, who is now in his late 50s, has been in and out of official politics for the last three decades, working as a fundraiser for Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley before raising funds for the Clintons' campaigns.

Emanuel cited the pressures of the job and the wishes of his family as reasons for his retirement. He made it clear in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* that in his view none of the thirteen candidates currently declared for the February, 2019 mayoral election are capable of filling the position.

The social crisis in Chicago created problems for Emanuel. There are really two Chicagos: the plush upper-middle-class and wealthy areas, and the large swaths of economic and social devastation in working-class and poor neighborhoods.

Ten days ago, a house burned down, killing ten children aged 3 months to 16 years in the immigrant neighborhood of Little Village, a ward led by George Cardenas, one of Emanuel's campaign fundraisers. Since Emanuel's announcement, the tragedy in Little Village and the conditions that produced it have all but disappeared from media reports. Former President Barack Obama was recently in the city to visit the site of his "presidential center" and said nothing about the fire.

Emanuel's announcement came just one day before the start of the trial of Jason Van Dyke, the Chicago police officer who killed 17-year-old Laquan McDonald in 2014, shooting him 16 times at close

range. Working with the Cook County state's attorney, the Chicago Police Department and the City Council, Emanuel oversaw a cover-up of the teen's murder that included the suppression of video evidence of the killing and the payment of \$5 million to the victim's family. When video of the killing was finally released in November 2015, the city erupted in protest and demands were made for Emanuel's resignation, as well as that of top police and state's attorney officials.

Emanuel would eventually go on to fire his appointed police superintendent, Garry McCarthy, who is himself running a law-and-order campaign in the 2019 mayoral race. Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez lost her recent bid for reelection. But Emanuel and the members of the City Council, who voted to pay the family, remained in office.

In making his announcement just before the trial, Emanuel is aiming to protect his political future. His decision not to pursue a third term was a virtual acknowledgement of the contempt and hatred for him felt by the vast majority of workers and young people in Chicago.

The mayor was polling in the range of 35 percent of the vote—not enough to avoid another runoff election. In 2015, he was forced into a runoff against Cook County Commissioner Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, a Democratic machine figure (currently running for US Congress) who was backed by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) in the wake of the political crisis created by the cover-up of McDonald's murder.

Police violence has been a defining feature of his tenure. In the fall of 2015, shortly before the release of the video of McDonald's murder, the Chicago Police Department was revealed to be operating an unofficial detention center, or "black site," in Homan Square, in which thousands of citizens have been held illegally

without arrest. Detailed reports emerged of abuse and torture. At least one man died as a result of his injuries. Well over half of the roughly 7,000 detained there were held during Emanuel's time in office.

Under Emanuel, Chicago police began maintaining a secret "watch list" with 400,000 names. He also oversaw the police repression of the 2012 anti-NATO protests in Chicago, which involved the police entrapment of three protesters and their conviction and imprisonment on federal charges.

The mayor's tenure was beset by the crises his party's policies have provoked, primarily due to the massive increase in social inequality they created, including through corporate tax giveaways and the destruction of public schools and social services. His first term, from 2010 to 2015, was defined by the fight he picked with Chicago Public Schools teachers and the working families of Chicago in making an aggressive attack on public education. This was part of the Obama administration's "reform" plan, titled "Race to the Top," itself a continuation of the Bush government's "No Child Left Behind" attack on public schools.

After the powerful 2012 strike by Chicago teachers was shut down and betrayed by the Chicago Teachers Union, Emanuel closed an unprecedented 50 elementary schools in 2013. This inaugurated a period of mass layoffs of teachers, as the attack on public education and social services was advanced under the cover of a budget crisis, again with the help of the CTU, which claimed the budget crisis necessitated cuts and givebacks. The union's vice president (now president), Jesse Sharkey, is a member of the pseudo-left International Socialist Organization.

Emanuel's second term was dominated by the cover-up of the McDonald murder. The release of the suppressed video of the teen's death came amid a protracted state and municipal budget crisis and the height of a bipartisan effort to cut state costs, including public-sector wages, health care, pensions, staff and essential services. The CTU worked to stabilize the city administration, suppressing the struggles of teachers for better pay, health coverage and teaching conditions (see: "Chicago Teachers Union holds mock strike vote as it prepares to back massive cuts")

The Illinois Democratic Party is the pro-austerity, pro-war apparatus that produced Emanuel and Barack

Obama. It is running a billionaire, JB Pritzker, for governor against the Republican incumbent, former hedge fund head Bruce Rauner. Sharkey and the CTU have steadfastly worked to channel the anger of teachers, parents and students behind this big-business party.

They are now declaring Emanuel's decision not to run again a victory for the working class. This is a fraud. Insofar as he will be replaced by some other Democratic Party politician, his resignation will mark no advance for the working class.

The critical lesson to be learned from the Emanuel experience is the necessity for a political break from the Democratic Party and its trade union appendages and the building of an independent socialist movement of the working class to fight for full funding of schools and social services, through the expropriation of the financial elite and public ownership of the corporations and banks.



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