

After Mayor Lightfoot unveils plan to increase policing

Video of brutal police shooting of unarmed man in Chicago train station sparks outrage

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Chicago police officers shot an unarmed Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) passenger inside a subway station at Grand Avenue and State Street in the River North neighborhood during rush hour Friday. The shooting has sparked widespread public outrage with a smartphone video taken by a witness garnering 1.8 million views and thousands of comments on Twitter.

The harrowing video shows two African-American police officers, one female and one male, forcibly restraining Ariel Roman and pinning him to the ground while repeatedly shouting, “Stop resisting!”

The cops are seen pepper spraying and tasing Roman before he breaks free from their grip, posing no physical threat to them and showing his hands, while the officers corner him and the male officer shouts, “Shoot him!” Then the female officer pulls out her gun, shooting him once. Roman flees from the assault and is followed by the cops up an escalator, and another gunshot is heard.

Roman was taken to Northwestern Memorial Hospital for surgery and is now in stable condition. His attorney, Gloria Schmidt Rodriguez, told the press that her client will likely undergo another surgery as he suffered two gunshot wounds, one to the abdomen and another to the buttocks.

American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois lawyer Rachel Murphy told press that the footage was “evidence of the lack of meaningful deescalation by Chicago police officers” in reference to a provision of the toothless Chicago Police Department (CPD) Consent Decree, which states that “CPD will require officers to deescalate potential and ongoing use of force incidents through the use of techniques, including slowing the pace of an incident, verbal warnings, and the use of trauma-informed communication.” The consent decree was approved by a federal judge at the end of January 2019 just before

former Democratic Mayor of Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel left office.

The Illinois State Attorney’s Office is working with the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) to investigate the incident for possible criminal charges against the police. The two police officers will remain on desk duty and will not be allowed in the field pending the outcome of the investigation. Like the vast majority of police brutality cases, it is likely that the officers will not be charged or will only receive light punishment for their crimes.

Roman was approached by police officers because he was allegedly walking from car to car as the train was moving, something commonly done by many homeless people and youth. Though a violation of a Chicago city ordinance, it is by no means considered a serious crime. Violations are most often petty offenses like traffic tickets and are generally only punishable by fines.

The police shooting happened on the same day that Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot and interim CPD Superintendent Charlie Beck unveiled their new safety plan with CTA President Toby Boyd at the Red Line station on Roosevelt Road. The plan will deploy an additional 50 officers to the train stations beginning March 4, bringing the total number to 250. A team of investigators outfitted with advanced surveillance tools, referred to as “smart policing” technologies, will also be deployed alongside police officers as part of the plan.

Just nine days before on February 20, CPD announced that it would deploy SWAT officers to ride the trains around the clock and to police the stations during evening rush hours. The official reason given is that there have been several violent crimes reported on the CTA since the beginning of the year. The same week, 50 cops were assigned on a full-time basis. The SWAT officers will supposedly be recalled once the new plan takes effect.

On Sunday, Beck asked Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx to drop the charges of narcotics possession and resisting arrest against Roman in an attempt to save face for the CPD and contain growing outrage over the continued use of deadly force by the police.

The widespread attention which the video received certainly spurred the quick move towards an investigation, in an effort to prevent a political disaster for Lightfoot, who touted herself as a "police reform" candidate before her election and is now overseeing a vast expansion of systematic police brutality. In response to the video, Lightfoot gave a statement on Friday night saying that the footage was "extremely disturbing" and that she promised "full transparency and accountability ... to ensure the public gains a complete picture of what happened."

The mayor's vow is empty, considering her own history of covering up police brutality and protecting criminal cops in Chicago. She was elected in 2019 in a race with a low voter turnout to replace Emanuel, beating Cook County Commissioner Toni Preckwinkle in part based on an identity politics platform. She was promoted by sections of the Democratic Party as a "progressive" candidate because she is an openly gay African American woman, characteristics which would supposedly curb police violence and growing social inequality in the city.

A former corporate lawyer and federal prosecutor, Lightfoot is a steadfast defender of the capitalist class. In 2015 she was brought in by Emanuel to serve as president of the Civilian Police Board and to head a task force aimed at damage control for the CPD and the mayor's office over the coverup of the fatal 2014 shooting of black teenager Laquan McDonald by a white cop, Jason Van Dyke, on Chicago's southwest side. During the McDonald investigation, her team produced a report that did not reveal anything other than what was already a known fact, that the CPD routinely acts with lethal violence and racism.

One of her recommendations was to replace the Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA) with the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA), essentially a new name for the same discredited organization. Lightfoot served as the head of IPRA's predecessor, the Office of Professional Standards (OPS). OPS was replaced by IPRA after it was badly discredited for failing to act against police implicated in the torture ring led by deceased CPD Commander Jon Burge.

Friday's incident stands in sharp contrast to the Democratic Party's racialist politics and the pseudoleft

organizations in its orbit, such as Black Lives Matter and Democratic Socialists of America, which portrays police brutality as a problem that stems from racism, not from the failure of capitalist system.

According to the website killedbypolice.net, which tracks police killings across the US, 151 people have been murdered by cops this year. The year 2019 saw 1,004 police murders, the highest of the past five years. These numbers do not include the police shootings in which the victim is injured but not killed. Although African American and Hispanic victims are overrepresented as victims of police murder compared to their total share of the whole population, the largest number of victims of police murder have been white. What almost all of these victims share in common is that they are working class or poor.

Workers in the city of Chicago face rising levels of social inequality, as low wages and high costs of living have left an increasing number of workers on the brink of financial insecurity and homelessness and forced others out of the city. In Chicago and countless other cities around the world, the working class is moving sharply to the left in the face of the assault on their living standards by the capitalist class, of whose interests both the Democratic and Republican parties represent.

The feverish arming of police forces and the institutionalization of police violence as standard operating procedure for even the most minor offenses in Chicago and across the United States have become a part of everyday life. The ruling class fears that it will not be able to suppress the mounting class tensions that will erupt as the working class moves into open political struggle against the state and the capitalist system as a whole.



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