

City of Chicago announces plan for mass arrest and detention of youth over holiday weekend

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On Monday, Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown announced a plan to arrest teenagers police find suspicious and keep them in jail at least until after the July 4th weekend. The move is a massive attack on Chicago's poor and working class youth and flies in the face of the Constitution and democratic rights.

In a press conference Brown told reporters that the Chicago Police Department would seek to round up teenagers who are hanging around what he called "Drug Corners." To carry out the arrests, an additional 1,200 officers will be deployed to the poorest sections of the city on Chicago's south and west sides. As is now well-known, every police encounter is also potentially fatal.

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot responded to critics of the plan Tuesday, including American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois and the Chicago Community Bond Fund, saying, "You need to have your attitude adjusted."

Lightfoot said teens are paid to carry guns while standing in open-air drug markets and due to their age they do not spend a significant amount of time in jail. "The status quo is obviously not working," she said.

Brown claims that the measure is an attempt to prevent a predicted upsurge of gun violence over the July 4th weekend. He stated, "We have to have a different outcome when we make a [gun] arrest or an open-air drug market arrest, because these two types of arrests are the precursors to violence in Chicago, and right now there's zero consequence to those arrests."

Brown cynically asserted these arrests are made on behalf of the safety of youth, saying, "If we make an arrest Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, we're pleading [for them to be held] through the weekend, at

least," he continued, "Let's protect these young people, who are a victim of their circumstances in many cases. They have no other opportunity." The "opportunity" Brown proposes to give these teens is a jail sentence.

Working class and poor youth who are arrested will be sent to Chicago's Cook County Jail, which has become a major COVID-19 hotspot. At least seven inmates at the jail have died from coronavirus. It is nearly guaranteed that large numbers of arrested youth will be infected with the virus and potentially die or spread the disease through their communities after being released. In recent weeks, researchers were able to identify 15.9 percent of all COVID-19 cases in Chicago and 15.7 percent of those in Illinois in the month of April were associated with the jail.

The announcement comes as the Lightfoot administration has ramped up its law-and-order strategy following a sharp rise in shootings over the past two weekends and the large demonstrations against police violence. In her statement on the George Floyd protests at the end of May, Lightfoot expressed that there would be no tolerance for demonstrations against police, saying, "I will not let criminals take over our city."

The extrajudicial jailing of teenagers is also an appeal to the Trump administration, which recently sent a letter to Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker and Mayor Lightfoot urging them to take decisive action against gun violence. The letter called for unrelenting support for the police and the establishment of "law and order" in Chicago. In other words, martial law. Despite her empty statements of opposition to the president, Lightfoot is more than willing to oblige.

Trump's letter and the statements from Lightfoot and Brown offer nothing but crocodile tears for the victims

of shooting deaths. Brown went as far as to say violence is simply the result of “evil murdering bastards.” They offer no answers to the social cause of violence, which is above all inequality produced by capitalism.

The crackdown on the youth is political retribution against the poorest sections of the working class for their opposition to police violence. It is not a coincidence that this massively anti-democratic measure is being enforced on youth following their large and continuing demonstrations against the police and social inequality.

Lightfoot, who has been portrayed by the trade unions and pseudo-left around the Democratic Party as a “progressive mayor,” has pursued law-and-order policies from the start of the pandemic, threatening to arrest and jail those who violated the early lockdown orders.

According to a report by the Great Cities Institute of the University of Illinois at Chicago, in Chicago over 8 percent of youth aged 16–19 are unemployed and over 20 percent aged 20–24 are out of work. Among Chicago’s black residents, who are overwhelmingly working class, the number jumps to an unemployment rate of 38 percent for the 20–24 age group.

In addition to unemployment, these young people struggle with homelessness, food insecurity and drug addiction. They now face indiscriminate arrest, imprisonment and infection from COVID-19.

A statement from the Chicago Community Bond Fund condemned the decision, stating, “There is no correlation between gun violence and the significantly lower number of people in jail” and that “If criminalization and incarceration made communities safer, the United States would be the safest country in the world.”

Since the recent wave of coronavirus and its economic effects, including mass unemployment, has swept through working class and poor areas of the city battered by decades of neglect and abuse, new police tools are being brought online funded directly by the ruling class.

The *Sun Times* has recently reported a new mass surveillance tool in the wake of the anti-police violence protests, the Strategic Decision Support Center, focused on the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) system and working 24 hours a day. The center is funded directly

through a donation from hedge fund billionaire Ken Griffin, CEO of Citadel Capital.

The new system connects more than 32,000 surveillance cameras on CTA to 30,000 cameras elsewhere, some of which include the ability to read license plates, with 4,000 additional cameras added to the network. Historically, Chicago has been and remains the most heavily surveilled US city.

The social conditions in Chicago are a direct consequence of decades of Democratic Party rule in the service of the financial aristocracy, who have shuttered industrial jobs, created widespread poverty, slashed education funding and closed schools. The youth are not to blame for the social devastation they face. Instead the working class must name its true enemy, the capitalist class organized in both ruling parties.

The solution to violence, unemployment and mass inequality can only come about through a struggle for socialism. Billions must be appropriated from the banks, corporations and the police. Resources need to be diverted to providing jobs, health care and education to unemployed working class youth.

Young workers and students must develop their fight against police violence and inequality into an explicit struggle for socialism. We urge all young people interested in building this movement to take up the fight themselves and to join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality today.



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