Attorney General William Barr boosts Trump campaign for police repression

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As gun violence in the city of Chicago reached the highest level in at least four years this summer, President Donald Trump has taken aim at the city as part of his law-and-order and openly anti-communist re-election campaign.

Touting the success of the federal policing effort dubbed "Operation Legend," Attorney General William Barr spoke at the Dirksen Federal Building in Chicago on Tuesday.

Barr announced more than 500 people had been arrested in Chicago and 124 charged with federal crimes, including weapons possession. ABC 7 reported 300 arrests September 1.

In introducing Barr, US attorney for northern Illinois John Lausch trumpeted the success of the Trump administration's intervention: "Very clearly Operation Legend helped… You've seen the data. May, June, July, it was getting out of control. And it dropped in August."

Barr said, "I do think it's a correlation and we're seeing it across all our cities right now… The results of those actions speak for themselves. Over the first five weeks of Operation Legend in Chicago, murders dropped by 50 percent over the previous five weeks."

The Chicago *Sun Times* reported the murder rate fell by 40 percent from July to August, although the figure was still 35 percent higher than the rate of August 2019.

According to Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot, a former federal prosecutor, Barr later toured strategic Chicago police facilities. ABC 7 reported Barr also toured parts of the city being targeted by police, accompanied by Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown.

Operation Legend was launched by the Trump administration's Department of Justice, sending 1,000 federal law enforcement agents to Albuquerque, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Memphis, Milwaukee and St Louis.

Media reports indicate 400 federal agents were sent to Chicago this summer as Mayor Lightfoot announced a major organizational and tactical overhaul of Chicago, Cook County and Illinois State Police forces' coordination and rapid response. This is in preparation for growing social opposition to the bipartisan consensus of austerity amid the unfolding social disaster triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Attorney General Barr's appearance in Chicago was aimed at boosting Trump's campaign for police repression, analysts at the University of Chicago Crime Lab and a Northwestern University political scientist stated the facts do not support the claims made by Barr at his press conference.

Northwestern University's Wesley Skogan told Chicago Public Radio, "It's impossible in a short period of time in a summer with many, many things happening at the same time to parse out the effects of the federal intervention versus the local intervention versus the non-profit street-worker intervention."

In a press conference this week, Lightfoot said of Barr's announcement, "It's factually inaccurate… The first federal agents from Operation Legend didn't even get here 'til August 3 and that was a trickle. And I'm not even certain we've gotten a full complement of officers that were promised because I think some were sent to other parts of the country.

Lightfoot then hastened to laud the Trump administration's intervention: "Now to be clear we value our partnership with federal agents that have been in this jurisdiction literally for decades—FBI, ATF, DEA U.S. Marshals.

"The police department works hand in glove with

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them and those additional resources have definitely made an impact on longstanding investigations. We've seen an uptick in federal prosecutions… Let me thank John Lausch. But no one should be taking a victory lap."

Lightfoot also held out hope for increases along the lines of Barr's plan: "The cause and effect Attorney General Barr tried to make today, the facts just don't bear that out, not yet. I'm hopeful these relationships and additional resources will really bear fruit."

The mayor's comments underscore the politically explosive situation in Chicago.

Lightfoot, the Chicago Police Department, state and county police and myriad federal agencies are undertaking increasingly intensive collaboration and aggressive intervention into a highly unstable social situation in Chicago.

In a city that was already defined by extreme inequality and generations of violence and abuse at the hands of the police and their Democratic Party leaders, the COVID-19 pandemic has produced a new wave of catastrophe for a majority of Chicago households.

In a recent survey of major cities in the US conducted by National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard Chan School of Public Health, half of Chicago households reported facing serious financial problems during the coronavirus pandemic, as did 59 percent of households with yearly incomes below $100,000.

More than one in three (35 percent) reported using up all or most of their savings. Nearly three in ten (28 percent) reported serious problems paying their credit card bills, loans or other debt. One in four (25 percent) reported serious problems paying their mortgage or rent and more than one in five (23 percent) reported serious problems paying for their utilities.

On Tuesday, Lightfoot also announced that she would carry out mass layoffs of city workers to make up for a 2021 budget shortfall of $1.25 billion. Although no numbers were stated, she said negotiations were underway with trade and public sector unions on cuts and concessions. Without federal revenue supporting cities and towns whose tax bases have been hollowed out by the pandemic and economic fallout, the mayor stated that both substantial cuts and tax increases are necessary.

The aggressive policing under Lightfoot is being undertaken in preparation for explosive social conflicts.

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