

Democrats plan increased policing and incarceration in response to lethal violence in Chicago

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In what is on track to be a record year of deadly violence in Chicago, America's third largest city, 104 people were shot over the July 4 Independence Day holiday weekend, 19 fatally, according to local media.

The days leading up to the holiday weekend saw horrific violence, including a one-month-old infant shot in the head while sitting in her car seat, a nine-year-old girl shot in the head while sitting in a car and an eight-year-old girl shot in the arm while in her home.

On July 1, 20-year-old Max Solomon Lewis, a University of Chicago undergraduate studying economics and computer science, was shot in the neck while sitting in an elevated car on the West Side. He died three days later.

The entire month of June saw gruesome levels of gun violence. Just in the final weekend of the month, 10 people were fatally shot and 65 others were wounded. Chicago is averaging about one mass shooting per week since 2019, according to the public radio channel WBEZ.

Just halfway through 2021, highway shootings in the Chicago area have reached the total number for all of 2020.

Last month, "Good Kids-Mad City" marched to City Hall with a group of 30 youth to protest the lack of action on the part of the city government. The protesters demanded that the city call the epidemic of gun violence a public health crisis and declare a state of emergency.

Democratic leaders have responded to the rise in gun violence by demanding that the administration of Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot carry out a crackdown. Different arms of the local government are blaming one another for being insufficiently aggressive in making arrests and imposing long jail sentences.

Lightfoot directed a call for "a sense of urgency at the federal level" to President Joe Biden during his visit to Illinois last week. Lightfoot assured the media that federal assistance would be coming soon, in the form of a federal "strike force."

She told the *Sun Times* that Chicago's "specific needs" required talks with federal police agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the Drug

Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the US Marshals Service. Lightfoot's efforts to bolster the operations of the Chicago police with federal law enforcement agencies began last year under President Trump and are expanding under Biden.

In mid-June, an online webinar was conducted by the United States Conference of Mayors. Mayors from Austin (Steve Adler), Houston (Sylvester Turner), Chicago (Lightfoot), Savannah (Van Johnson) and San Jose (Sam Liccardo) united in a call for increased federal intervention. One week later, President Biden, speaking from the White House, announced new executive and legislative measures to deal with what he called a "crime wave" and "epidemic of gun violence" in American cities.

Ahead of the July 4 holiday weekend, Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown was questioned for six hours by City Council members about police plans for the weekend. Last year, in the wake of mass protests opposing police violence that were accompanied by some looting, Brown announced a plan for preemptive arrests of youth ahead of the holiday.

Brown has appeared on CNN to boast of the city's "progress" in ending violent foot pursuits after police shot and killed 13-year-old Adam Toledo and 22-year-old Anthony Alvarez in a late-night chase last March.

During a recent City Council meeting, Brown blamed modest changes made at the state level, including the elimination of cash bail, for the increase in shootings. He also complained that Cook County judges were handing down lenient sentences.

The Cook County State's Attorney's office responded to these accusations with equally reactionary rhetoric, blaming the police for being slow to make arrests. State's Attorney Kim Foxx tweeted: "Finger-pointing instead of talking honestly about the violence plaguing our city doesn't help bring solutions that make our communities safer. It starts with apprehending those who pull the trigger; police must make an arrest before a case reaches the courthouse door."

Far South Side Alderman Anthony Beale raised the demand for National Guard troops to be deployed to protect the wealthiest area of the city so that local police can return to

occupying impoverished neighborhoods. He said, “We need to bring in the National Guard to secure the perimeter of downtown and to work along with the police to free up more officers to come from downtown back into the communities, where we can help flood the communities where resources have been taken out of.”

The Chicago City Council itself is populated with criminals. Alderman Carrie Austin, the second-longest-serving ward boss, is only the latest elected official to be arrested and charged with bribery. Earlier this year, Patrick Daley Thompson was named in a seven-count indictment for filing false tax returns and lying to insurance officials about \$219,000 in loans and other payments he’d received.

In January 2019, the city’s longest-serving alderman, Ed Burke, was arrested and charged with attempted extortion. In the course of the investigation, Burke, a former Chicago cop, was ordered to remove 23 handguns and rifles from his City Hall and ward offices and turn them over to US Marshals. He currently awaits trial on federal racketeering charges.

None of this comes as a surprise, given the right-wing record of the Democratic Party, exemplified by both Biden and Lightfoot. Lori Lightfoot was the head of the Chicago Police Board, the Chicago Police Department Office of Professional Standards, and the Civilian Office of Police Accountability, where she represented the CPD in the lawsuits brought against it.

Biden, then a US senator, was an architect of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Enforcement Act, also known as the Biden Crime Law. It established mandatory sentencing, which contributed to an explosion in the incarceration rate of poor and minority workers and youth. The United States as of 2020 had more than 2.2 million people locked up in state and federal prisons and local jails.

While calls by elected officials for the deployment of National Guard troops in Chicago have taken on a somewhat routine character over the years, the social crisis has dramatically intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers and youth must take the threat seriously and organize political opposition to the bipartisan policy of police repression.

The pandemic has brought to crisis levels the malignant social inequality in cities all over the US, and opposition to intolerable conditions is growing, indicated most clearly by the strikes currently taking place in major industries. Striking Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia were joined by their brothers and sisters in Ghent, Belgium, who carried out a wildcat walkout last week. Hundreds of Frito-Lay workers have walked out in Kansas City, and 2,500 Cook County health care and janitorial staff are now in the second week of a strike against the exploitative conditions imposed by the county, led by Democratic Party Chairwoman Toni Preckwinkle.

Biden, Lightfoot and other mayors of both big business parties speak for a political establishment that anticipates and fears growing political radicalization and social opposition to

the exploitation and misery for the majority of the population at the hands of a capitalist class getting richer with each passing month.

The bipartisan policy in every city and state in the US is to bolster the police, the first-line repressive tool of the state, on behalf of the interests of the capitalist class. Through its representatives in the Democratic Party, the ruling class insists on a social policy thoroughly hostile to the most basic interests of the great majority of Chicago’s population, battered by decades of low wages, slashed services and rising household debt.

The strikes by manufacturing and health care workers, and the memory of last year’s anti-police violence protests, terrify the wealthy and upper-middle classes. Instead of providing any form of social relief, the Democrats promote sectarian racist politics aimed at confusing and dividing the massive and powerful multiracial and multiethnic working class against itself.

There are two Chicagos, as there are two cities in every major city: one for the wealthy and one for everyone else. A report by University of Illinois at Chicago’s Great Cities Institute analyzing data from the 2017 American Community Survey found that approximately 45 percent of young black men in Chicago, ages 20–24, were neither working nor in school. Almost 20 percent of Latino men in the same age group were neither working nor in school that same year.

The disinvestment and abandonment of the working class and poor neighborhoods of the south and west sides of Chicago have created the social distress that fuels the “everyone for himself” mentality and lack of hope for a better future that feed gang activity and recruitment.

The horrific social conditions in Chicago are a direct consequence of decades of Democratic Party rule in the service of the financial aristocracy. The working class must name its true enemy, the capitalist class, represented by both ruling parties.

The striking workers of Volvo, Frito-Lay and Stroger Hospital point to the solution to violence, unemployment and mass inequality: it must come about through the working class’s united struggle for socialism. Billions must be appropriated from the banks and corporations. Resources need to be diverted from the military and police to provide jobs, health care and education for unemployed working class youth.



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