

Following “law and order” election

First 100 days of Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson's administration focused on policing

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In the first hundred days of Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson's administration, the crisis in the city has intensified. Recent weeks have seen an 11-day strike by Loretto Hospital staff, several days of wildfire-related air quality emergencies with no meaningful response from the city, and the expiration of the contract for 7,500 school staffers in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system.

Migrant families continue to be bussed in by the fascist Republican governors of Texas and Florida, leaving more than 1,600 migrant men, women and children to sleep on the floors of Chicago police stations and at O'Hare Airport, according to Chicago Public Television station WTTW. Thousands of others are being housed in makeshift shelters in the city, forced to rely on charity organizations to provide food and clothing.

As the school year began last week, extreme heat exacerbated the lack of air conditioning and ventilation in many school buildings, under conditions of an upsurge in the COVID-19 pandemic and the spread of new and more infectious variants. Once again, the indifference of the ruling class and the Democratic as well as the Republican Party to life-threatening dangers to the health of both students and staff was on display.

Some thousands of CPS students, the exact figure has not been revealed, are without school bus service. Students as young as eight, usually from areas where neighborhood schools are severely underfunded, are being encouraged to use public transit to travel across the city to attend magnet and “selective enrollment” schools.

Johnson, a former Cook County commissioner and

Chicago Teachers Union legislative representative, took office in May after defeating right-wing Democrat Paul Vallas in an election marked by an aggressive emphasis on crime and “public safety.” With the Democrats' right-wing political agenda clearly on display early on in the election campaign, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the supposed “progressive” Johnson, if elected, would carry out a reactionary “law-and-order” policy, already indicated by his slogan of a “better, stronger, safer Chicago.”

Speaking recently to the local CBS affiliate about his first 100 days in office, Johnson said, “As you know, public safety is top of mind for everyone.”

During his first weeks in office, Johnson selected a candidate for Chicago Police Department superintendent. According to *In These Times*, a publication closely aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the trade union apparatus, he held joint meetings of anti-police violence activists and cops.

Since taking office, Johnson has gone out of his way to ingratiate himself with the Chicago Police Department (CPD). The CPD's Fraternal Order of Police backed his opponent in the election, and the fascist FOP president, John Catanzara, warned that there would be mass resignations of police and “blood in the streets” if Johnson were elected. The mass resignations have to date not taken place.

The official demands for more aggressive policing are aimed above all at countering growing working class militancy. During the mayoral election campaign, Johnson never once challenged the demands for “law and order” by other Democrats as well as the media.

Instead, he effusively disavowed his previous calls for “defunding” the police.

As recently as December 2020, Johnson called defunding the police “an actual real political goal.” At a March 2023 mayoral forum, he demurred: “I said it was a political goal. I never said it was mine.” Johnson went on to pledge that he “wouldn’t reduce the CPD budget by one penny.” In 2022, the city allotted \$1.9 billion for the CPD, considerably more money than budgeted for the Chicago Housing Authority (\$1.2 billion), which, according to official figures, provides housing for 63,000 families.

On May 3, Johnson named Fred Waller as interim police superintendent, replacing former superintendent David Brown. Johnson’s pick drew praise from right-wing alderman Ray Lopez, who backed Johnson’s opponent, Paul Vallas, in the election.

Lopez said, “Waller will be a great pick. He understands the department, he understands Chicago, he understands neighborhoods, and I think he will hit the ground running, which is exactly what we need as we enter the summer months.”

Waller, who retired in 2020 as the CPD’s third in command, was a close associate of Ronald Watts, a CPD officer convicted on corruption charges in 2012 for running an extortion racket at the Ida B. Wells housing project. Waller worked alongside Watts in the CPD Public Housing Section, and then became commander of the police district in which Watts and his team of gangsters worked from 2010 to 2013. Watts demanded “protection” money from residents, and at least 220 people were sentenced to prison on bogus charges due to the machinations of Watts and his gang.

At the press conference announcing Waller’s appointment, Johnson refused to answer questions about Waller’s association with Watts, saying only, “I am confident that Chief Fred Waller is the best person to serve as the interim police superintendent.”

The search for police superintendent was led by Anthony Driver Jr., executive director of the SEIU (Service Employees International Union) Illinois State Council, appointed by Johnson to lead the Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability.

For the post of permanent police superintendent, Johnson has nominated CPD veteran Larry Snelling. Starting out as an officer in Englewood and Morgan Park in 1992, Snelling was involved for a time in

tactical and gang squads. Since October 2022, he has been chief of the Bureau of Counterterrorism, which oversees gang and narcotics investigations as well as the CPD’s notorious SWAT teams. He has been named in 21 complaints over the years.

From 2000 to 2019, Snelling taught courses on the use of force at the department’s police academy, including physical holds, firearms use and report writing. His “expertise” in the use of force has led to Snelling being called as an expert witness in dozens of civil and criminal trials of police officers, including several cops who were tried for the police murder of Laquan McDonald in 2014.

In the McDonald case, the actions of the officers involved were so flagrantly illegal that Snelling was forced to admit in court that the 17-year-old’s shooting was not justified, saying, “If there was a movement in furtherance toward the officer that you could actually see in the video, then it would rise to the level of deadly force, but I can’t see it in the video.”

Upon naming Snelling to become permanent police superintendent, Johnson said, “Today, a new chapter begins in our journey to create a better, stronger and safer Chicago...”

Snelling’s appointment was immediately hailed by Fraternal Order of Police President Catanzara, who said, “Congratulations to Chief Larry Snelling on his recommendation to be the new superintendent. Hopefully, City Council does the right thing September 13.”

In These Times signaled the support of pseudo-left factions within the Democratic Party such as the DSA, uncritically quoting Johnson as saying: “We’ve laid a real clear foundation that we’re going to need in order to build a better, stronger, safer Chicago, and we’ve done that in the collaborative spirit which we promised we would do.”



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