

Chicago begins evicting asylum seekers from shelters

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On Sunday, the city of Chicago began evicting asylum-seekers from migrant shelters for exceeding a 60-day limit on stays in city-run shelters. The new policy, which was introduced in November by Mayor Brandon Johnson, is intended to discourage asylum-seekers as the Democratic Party openly embraces vicious anti-immigrant policies in its bid to outflank former President Donald Trump and the Republicans.

Three migrants were removed from shelters on Monday, all from one shelter on Goose Island. Although 34 had initially been identified by the city as eligible to lose their access to shelter, the other 31 were given extensions. Four were given reprieves due to health conditions such as pregnancy, disability or caring for an infant, while the remaining 27 were given extensions because they were still in the process of applying for state rental assistance.

City officials are making decisions on which migrants are given extensions on a case-by-case basis. Aside from health conditions, those in the process of obtaining housing or making plans to leave the city entirely can obtain extensions. Families with children can get 30-day extensions, which are renewable up to three times through June 10, at which point the whole family is eligible for eviction.

The policy for families with children was presented as a way to “minimize disruption” for the children, that is, of having to change schools during the school year.

Migrants removed from shelters are able to return to the city’s “landing zone” on the Near West Side, in reality a number of city buses parked close together where new arrivals are forced to sleep after they are dropped off in Chicago. There they will be allowed to reapply for shelter space if they have nowhere to go. New York City officials have said 80 percent of adults evicted from shelters do not attempt to obtain another

placement, an outcome Chicago officials are no doubt hoping will be replicated.

Those applying for another shelter placement could potentially be told to go somewhere else entirely. Evicted families with children in school would still face the possibility of having to change schools or make long commutes across the city, to say nothing of the disruption to friendships or other relationships asylum-seekers have formed with each other and other city residents.

City officials said on Friday that 244 migrants would be thrown out on March 31, with an additional 1,782 set to be expelled April 30. There are currently under 11,000 migrants in city-run shelters, a decrease of 25 percent from mid-December. Around 37,000 migrants, primarily from Venezuela, have been sent to Chicago by buses and airplanes chartered by Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott over the past 18 months.

It is estimated that only 10 percent of current shelter residents are eligible for employment, making it nearly impossible for most to afford apartments on their own, especially with a lack of affordable housing and rental costs on the rise. Around 1,300 individuals or families are going through the application process for rental assistance.

A state program that initially provided six months of rental assistance for migrants was cut back in November to only three months by Illinois’ billionaire Democratic Governor J.B. Pritzker, who said that money for the program had run out. Migrants who arrived after November 17 are not eligible at all, giving those individuals and families even fewer options for avoiding being kicked out of shelters.

Due to a measles outbreak at a shelter in the Pilsen neighborhood, fueled by the cramped, unhygienic conditions and slow response by the Chicago

Department of Public Health (CDPH), residents of that facility and five others identified as possible sites of secondary infection are exempt from eviction for now.

However, those residents will only be allowed to stay through their 21-day quarantine period, with a mere one additional “transition” week for them to find new places to live. Because those undergoing quarantine will have had little time to make preparations, they are all but being set up to be evicted when the quarantine period ends.

The Pilsen shelter has become notorious for its awful conditions and emblematic of the poor healthcare offered to asylum-seekers after five-year-old Jean Carlos Martinez Rivero died there in December after having contracted multiple infections.

The mayor’s press release outlining the shelter eviction policies boasts that the city has resettled 14,700 asylum-seekers across the metro area, and especially the 5,200 who have left through “out-migration.” It is the great hope of Johnson and the Democrats that the asylum-seekers who have arrived in the city simply leave. On March 13, Johnson claimed, “What this policy has essentially done is given us the opportunity to have real, substantive conversations with migrants to help them move on.”

Indeed, the policies limiting shelter stays introduced by Chicago, New York City and Denver, Colorado, are aimed at discouraging migrants from accepting the trip north in the first place by making the whole process as onerous and inhumane as possible while Democrats feign concern for migrants and pose as compassionate and welcoming.

Johnson’s March 15 press release states, “Our city is committed to compassion. By encouraging resettlement while also providing case-specific extensions with a focus on health and safety, we are advancing a pathway to stability and self-sufficiency.”

With his cynical invocation of stability and self-sufficiency, Johnson’s words and actions stand as a complete indictment of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and its leading Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE). Since its formation in 2008, CORE has claimed to represent an alternative to the “neoliberal” policies of the ruling class. Johnson, a CORE member, became a CTU staffer and lobbyist in 2011, and was backed to the hilt by the union and its pseudo-left allies in the Democratic Socialists of

America during his run for mayor.

Jesse Sharkey, former CTU president and leading member of the defunct pseudo-left International Socialist Organization (ISO), claimed Johnson would be “a mayor who tells us, *This is a rich city—there’s no reason it can’t provide for everybody*,” a “benefit” that “helps us break out of a cynical and demoralized view that this economically and racially segregated city will never change.”

Johnson’s anti-immigrant policies are so unpopular that the city council’s Progressive Caucus was forced to issue a statement on Monday calling for Johnson to rescind the shelter evictions, stating, “it risks contributing to the city’s unhoused population and exacerbating social and racial tension at a time when we need to unite.”

Indeed, since his election, Johnson—a Democratic Party insider with proclivities toward black nationalism and religious obscurantism—has moved further and further to the right in lockstep with the party as a whole, embracing anti-immigrant policies and dutifully carrying out the needs of the ruling class. His entire political evolution underscores the need for workers and young people to break entirely with the Democrats and turn toward a revolutionary socialist perspective.



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