

Hundreds protesting Gaza genocide barricaded by Chicago police, as Mayor Johnson prepares crackdown on DNC protests

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On Monday, April 15, as part of a nationwide protest against the genocide in Gaza, hundreds gathered in downtown Chicago to show their support for the Palestinian people and call for an immediate end to Israel's genocide in Gaza. The Chicago Police Department (CPD) responded with a major provocation by barricading the demonstration, preventing protesters from marching.

The gathering in Chicago came amid a number of high-profile protests throughout the country earlier in the day when demonstrators blocked major highways. In San Francisco, opponents of genocide blocked the Golden Gate Bridge for several hours. In Chicago Monday morning, protesters blocked the highway leading to O'Hare Airport.

These demonstrations were called on April 15, "Tax Day," to protest US taxpayer dollars funding Israel's genocide. In addition to the blocked highways there were walkouts in high schools and on college campuses in cities throughout the United States.

When protesters arrived in Chicago's Federal Plaza, they were met with hundreds of cops who attempted to surround the demonstration, limit its size, and intimidate others from joining. After a rally in the plaza, the protesters attempted to march through the streets of downtown Chicago. These marches have become commonplace since protests against the genocide began six months ago.

The march was eventually blockaded in between two buildings, with lines of cops at each exit preventing the march from going forward. Between the protest at O'Hare airport and the demonstration in the Loop, Chicago police arrested over 50 people on Monday. Some protesters may even be charged with felonies.

Despite the police provocation the crowd was not deterred from continuing their demonstration. While the American ruling class and the mass media have attempted to normalize genocide, masses of youth and workers refuse to support the

war policy of the Biden administration.

Monday's police crackdown in Chicago was a testing ground for the plans being made to block protests during the Democratic National Convention this August. Chicago mayor Brandon Johnson is working closely with the Biden administration to erect a massive police state during the convention to stop any demonstrations from disrupting the convention's warmongering.

Earlier this year, the Johnson administration denied permit applications for groups seeking to march and protest during the convention. On Wednesday, the Chicago City Council approved plans to erect a "security zone" around the sites of the DNC.

The convention security operation is expected to resemble a military occupation. The plan includes blocking off whole neighborhoods surrounding the sites of the convention. The areas near the United Center and McCormick Place will be subject to police checkpoints and searches.

Areas where protests are expected will be blocked off with barbed wire fences. Ald. Brian Hopkins, chair of the public safety committee, told the press, "It isn't just to stop people from impeding traffic the way they recently did, stopping people from getting to O'Hare. That's to prevent any kind of violence targeting the United Center or people that are going to and from the United Center."

Over the weekend, a conference comprised of various protest organizations naming itself the "Coalition to March on the DNC" met to discuss plans for protests during the convention. The conference was led primarily by the United States Palestinian Community Network (USPCN) which has organized many marches calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Other groups at the conference included the Minnesota Anti-War Committee and the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression.

Hatem Abudayyeh, national chair of USPCN, said at the

conference, “We’ll be marching with or without permits. This DNC is the most important one since 1968, also in Chicago when Vietnam War protesters and the black liberation movement organized mass demonstrations that were violently repressed.” He added that he expects “The march on the DNC will be the largest mobilization for Palestine in the history of the city.”

While the “March on the DNC” conference undoubtedly drew out many looking to fight against imperialist war, it is clear that the political leaders of USPCN and the other groups involved are leading them into a dead-end. The character of the discussions focused purely on making appeals to “Genocide Joe” Biden and providing political cover to Brandon Johnson.

After the city denied the permit applications to protest at the United Center, the Anti-War Committee Chicago, Students for a Democratic Society at UIC, and the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression filed a federal lawsuit in hopes of reversing the decision.

Of Johnson, who is responsible for denying the permits, Abudayyeh said, “we know that he’s a community organizer and he came from the movement. So, we’re asking him and his administration directly to intercede here and to make sure that we get the permits to march within sight and sound of the United Center.”

He continued, “And because he’s a community organizer, he knows that he can also be a target of ours. A respectful target of ours, but we will ask him and we will continue to ask him and we will continue to press him and his office to make sure that they facilitate these marches and protests as well.”

Johnson, who is backed by the Democratic Socialists of America and other pseudo-left groups, is a close political ally of the Biden White House. Exactly one week before the police barricaded the pro-Palestinian protest downtown, Johnson met with Biden while the president was in the city for a campaign fundraiser event with the city’s wealthiest individuals.

The two undoubtedly discussed plans for the DNC and how Johnson’s CPD would be mobilized to suppress popular opposition to the President and the Democratic Party.

At the same time that protest groups are begging for Johnson’s ear, it has become apparent that his office is engaged in a coverup of the murder of Dexter Reed by Chicago police officers in late March. Body camera footage revealed that CPD officers fired nearly 100 rounds at the 26-year-old in a broad daylight execution.

On Wednesday, Johnson held a press conference with Police Superintendent Larry Snelling where it was revealed that the police unit that killed Reed had nearly 40 complaints

filed against it but no action was taken to remove or discipline the officers. Snelling told reporters that the city has a system for tracking complaints against officers but that it would not be made available to the public or journalists.

Snelling told the press that “just because officers have complaints filed against them it does not make them bad officers.” He then railed against the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) for issuing a statement that made clear the officers had no reason to stop Reed’s car since he was not suspected of any crime. Snelling called COPA “irresponsible” for challenging the police cover-up narrative.

Lessons must be drawn from these experiences. During the mayoral election Johnson was promoted by the DSA and “progressive” groups as being a figure who would transform Chicago politics and usher in a new era of social reforms.

What has transpired since is nothing of the sort. At every turn Johnson has lined up with the right-wing business interests, covered up police murder, mobilized the CPD against opponents of genocide, and forced asylum seekers into disease-ridden shelters.

A new political strategy and orientation is needed. The Democratic Party—a party of big business and war—is fundamentally hostile to the interests of the working class. It cannot be pushed or pressured into changing its fundamental class interests, which include its policy of unlimited funds for genocide in Gaza and war against Russia.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is putting forward an entirely different form of politics. On April 27, the SEP’s candidate for US president, Joseph Kishore, will travel to Chicago to speak at the Chicago Public Library’s West Loop Branch on the pressing need to build a socialist movement in the working class. Only such a movement, the mobilization of the working class on a mass scale, can stop the genocide in Gaza, prevent a third world war, bring down the capitalist system and set about its replacement with a rational distribution of the world’s resources.



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