

Trump administration, Democrats announce local-federal partnership to expand Chicago police force

By Kristina Betinis
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On Friday, federal law enforcement officials and the Chicago Police Department (CPD) announced a new policing initiative, Chicago Crime Gun Strike Force. The “strike force,” aided by longer-standing federal law enforcement collaboration and new state legislation, is part of a bipartisan effort by Illinois Democrats and state and federal Republicans to expand police powers under the pretext of cracking down on gun violence.

The announcement from city officials came after an early Friday morning tweet from President Donald Trump: “Crime and killings in Chicago have reached such epidemic proportions that I am sending in Federal help.” Trump referenced violence in Chicago numerous times during his 2016 campaign, citing it as part of a justification for his aim of further removing any restraints on police violence.

Adam Collins, spokesman for Democratic Mayor and former Obama chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, issued a statement welcoming Trump’s policing support: “Six months ago we made it clear that we would welcome additional federal support, and six months later we appreciate the twenty new ATF agents that are now arriving.”

Emanuel, who has presided over and actively covered up police murders in Chicago, has met several times with Trump administration officials since the November 2016 elections.

The twenty additional Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents are reportedly to work with city and state police. They join existing federal forces currently reported to be working in Chicago on gang violence, including the FBI and deputized US Marshals.

Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson said that the team will be using the “big data” technology already in place that targets people who police anticipate may become involved in shootings. This effort has placed just under 400,000 on a police watchlist, or about fifteen percent of the city’s population. The list includes all those who have been previously arrested and fingerprinted for minor crimes since 2013.

Last week, Republican Governor of Illinois Bruce Rauner signed a bill into law requiring harsher sentences for those repeatedly involved in shootings. The bill, which was pushed by Emanuel and seen through the legislative process by Chicago Democrat Kwame Raoul, raises the minimum sentence for repeat gun offenses from three to seven years. It also establishes an Illinois State police violent crime task force and expands probation options for first-time drug offenses.

None of these measures will reduce gun violence in Chicago, which has become a serious problem and is rooted in the immense social inequality and poverty that plague the city. Instead, they are aimed at expanding the powers of the police in anticipation of growing social unrest, as local and federal officials intensify policies of austerity and social arson.

While the reported numbers of shootings have fallen compared with last year, more than 1,750 have been shot and more than 300 killed so far in 2017. Most of the shootings are concentrated in just a few neighborhoods which have been subjected to a series of social crimes over decades of Democratic Party rule.

Wage destruction through deindustrialization; extremely high levels of unemployment among working class youth, exacerbated by cycles of

incarceration; housing costs and property tax rises; school closures; and dramatic cuts to basic social services have concentrated poverty and social distress in the south and west side neighborhoods of Chicago, which are predominantly African American and Latino. These factors, combined with the deepening political crisis in Chicago and the US more broadly, have fueled a growing sense of hopelessness that has created easy conditions for gang recruitment and drug addiction.

The neighborhoods worst affected by shootings are also subjected to epidemic levels of police violence, and cops are broadly viewed by residents as an occupying army.

In an already tense social atmosphere, the announcement of the “strike force” is intended to embolden police just before the Independence Day holiday.

Emanuel recently reneged on his stated intention to have CPD enter into court-ordered oversight, which came after a year-long Justice Department civil rights investigation following the cover-up of the murder of teenager Laquan McDonald by Chicago police. The Justice Department report revealed that the department is rife with misconduct and violence against civilians.

Just last week, three police officers were indicted by a special prosecutor for the coverup of McDonald’s murder, but the prosecutors’ efforts stopped well short of those involved on Emanuel’s staff, including Emanuel himself, and failed to hold accountable the city aldermen, who voted unanimously to pay the family several million dollars for the boy’s murder as officials continued efforts to suppress video evidence.

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