

Chicago mayor locks down business district after police shooting sparks looting

By Kristina Betinis
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Access bridges over the Chicago River were raised again Monday night, cutting off the business district, known as the Loop, from the rest of the city, as social tensions continue to rise after the police shooting of a young black man Sunday afternoon.

The police shooting and tense confrontation with residents in the Englewood neighborhood on the city's south side led to looting overnight at several downtown stores, including in the upscale Magnificent Mile retail area. According to media reports, two people were shot, more than 100 were arrested and 13 police officers injured. Additional police have been deployed and an indefinite lockdown of the Loop resumed Monday evening.

The incident began when police shot a 20-year-old youth in Englewood, who, they claimed, had fled after being stopped and fired on officers before they shot him. The young man, whose name has not been released because he has not yet been charged with a crime, is reported to be in stable condition at University of Chicago Hospital.

In comments to the *Sun Times*, Earl Allen, the victim's brother, contradicted the police version of events. Allen said he and his brother were in Moran Park when his brother got in an altercation before both left the park with a group of people. Allen said someone in the group made a comment to officers in a police vehicle, which prompted the police pursuit.

Allen said he was walking to his home after the group dispersed when he heard 8 or 9 shots ring out but did not see shooters. Shortly after he said he saw his brother wounded and running into their home. Allen also denied the weapon that police claim was found at the scene belonged to his brother.

About 100 youth gathered at Cook County Jail Monday night to demand police body camera footage

from the Sunday shooting.

Shortly after the shooting on Sunday, residents gathered to confront a growing number of police, some in helmets and armed with rifles. Tensions mounted as hundreds of cops formed a line and residents implored young people to get inside, fearing that they would be severely beaten or killed by police.

By midnight on Sunday evening, 400 police officers were deployed in response to hundreds of people reportedly entering the Magnificent Mile and near West Side shopping districts where smashing and looting went on into the early morning. The Illinois state police blocked off ramps from expressways and the bridges across the Chicago River were raised, except for the one on LaSalle Street for police and emergency vehicles.

Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot responded by deploying more police, threatening more aggressive prosecutions and cutting off nighttime access to the Loop. From 8 PM to 6 AM, street and train transit is cut off except at certain points until further notice.

Lightfoot also announced the deployment of "infrastructure assets," ie., more security forces, directed by Chicago Police Department, to protect commercial properties.

Lightfoot and Chicago Police Supt. David Brown held a press conference Monday morning to denounce the looting and announce a massive police crackdown. "This is not legitimate First Amendment-protected speech," Lightfoot said. "These were not poor people engaging in petty theft to feed themselves and their families. This was straight-up felony, criminal conduct." She said police would use camera footage to track down suspects, adding, "We are coming for you."

Brown said the looting had been "fueled by misinformation" about the age of the police shooting

victim and the conduct of the policy.

Both the mayor and the police chief blamed Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx for not being aggressive enough in prosecuting scattered instances of looting that occurred during the massive anti-police violence protests over George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis. "Criminals took to the streets with the confidence that there would be no consequences for their actions," Brown said.

In fact, thousands of youth were arrested, beaten and teargassed from May into July. Many face trial and severe punishment this month.

The Democratic political establishment is using the looting incidents to escalate police repression against an increasingly restive population. Last month, Lightfoot announced that she had reached an agreement with the Trump administration to send a "surge" of 200 federal agents to Chicago, allegedly to fight crime.

Chicago, America's third largest city, is a social tinderbox, the result of a four-decade-long class war overseen by the Democratic Party. Once thriving working-class neighborhoods have been reduced to poverty and destitution by the shutdown of factories and decades of budget cuts, which led to the closure of public schools, recreation centers, public housing buildings and health clinics.

As thousands of low-rent homes were demolished, Democratic mayors handed over billions in tax cuts and incentives to Boeing and other corporations to set up their headquarters in downtown. As powerful financial and real estate interests made a killing, rising rents drove out working-class and lower middle-class residents and homelessness exploded.

Well aware that social tensions were reaching a breaking point, Lightfoot's predecessor, Rahm Emanuel, the Obama White House's first chief of staff who was also known as the "Mayor One Percent," beefed up the police forces. Lightfoot, who repeatedly claims there is no money for schools and teachers, has followed suit, adding \$100 million to the budget line of the Chicago Police Department (CPD) last year, a seven percent increase over the previous year.

The social crisis has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic catastrophe it has triggered. Twenty-five thousand Illinoisans filed for unemployment August 1 and 33,000 filed the week before that. Along with jobless workers across the

country, these laid off workers have now had their \$600 a week federal supplement taken from them.

Unemployment on the South Side is estimated to be double Chicago's official unemployment rate of 15.6 percent for June. In working class and poor neighborhoods, the devastation is similar to that seen in wartime. The suicide rate among African Americans in Chicago in 2020 has already surpassed the figure for 2019. This year, there have been 58 suicide deaths and of that total, 80 percent were men and 40 percent were under 30 years old.

At the same time, Illinois is the home to at least 18 billionaires, including the state's Democratic governor and Hyatt hotel magnate JB Pritzker. The relentless police violence is aimed at defending the wealth and power of the corporate and financial oligarchy against an increasingly radicalized working class.

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