

After another police riot, Chicago mayor rises to national prominence as law-and-order figure

By Kristina Betinis
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At a peaceful protest demanding the defunding of the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and the abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on Saturday, demonstrators were beaten, pepper sprayed, kettled, detained, searched and photographed before they were released from the downtown area. CPD claims 17 officers were injured with “bumps and bruises,” and one hand injury.

Twenty-four people were arrested and four have reportedly been charged with felonies. Activist Berto Aguayo of Increase the Peace demanded a public apology after being beaten and spat on by CPD officers, “Before anything else happens... We would like to see an apology from the mayor’s office and the Chicago Police Department for the violence they used to attack Chicago residents.”

The central business district of the third largest US city is becoming an occupied zone in response to weeks of regular protests against police violence and racism. As if to announce this “new normal”, the Office of Emergency Management tweeted Sunday night, after a week of an overnight lockdown in the Loop that restricted traffic and public transit: “All streets, bridges and CTA stops downtown will be accessible overnight until further notice.”

For those days, part of Lake Shore Drive was shut down, expressway ramps were blocked, bridges lifted and transit rerouted around the Loop. Those who could prove they lived or worked there could use a few remaining routes, monitored by police. Overnight workers dependent on public transit had their commute times as much as doubled and traffic was snarled.

In a press conference Friday, Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced a plan to tighten police control of the city, increase surveillance and further limit access to the downtown.

The immediate pretext for this massive mobilization and integration of police agencies and social media surveillance was to prevent looting, but the developments in Chicago

represent a new stage in the class war in which the Democratic Party is seeking to establish itself as the preferred political instrument of the financial aristocracy in the 2020 elections.

The new plan links up the mayor’s office, CPD (which has about 12,000 uniformed officers), Cook County Sheriff and Illinois State Police, operationalizing quick deployment of large numbers of police. State police will be deployed to shut down access to certain areas of Chicago and county sheriffs will be sent into neighborhoods and barriers to movement through the “hardening the city” are to be established.

At a weekend press conference, Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown said he would not “share how many officers were deployed,” but confirmed “large deployments” were placed downtown and a “large footprint in the neighborhoods.” Chicago has long been known for having the largest, most sophisticated police surveillance network of any western city outside of London and it is increasingly monitoring social media.

Large contingents of police were deployed on Saturday to protect commercial properties. Brown confirmed to media in the aftermath of the events that police were filming protesters’ faces with the intention of leveling charges.

Brown stated, “An officer was beat in the head with a skateboard repeatedly.” Protesters complained the police—who were wearing protective gear, including helmets—provoked the crowd and beat the youth first.

At least two journalists, including a *Chicago Tribune* reporter, were kettled and detained. Paige Fry reported “Things just got really violent really quick when police rushed the protester line.” She posted video showing police rushing on protesters at multiple locations.

Both Lightfoot and Brown defended the police’s actions, declaring officers remained calm, even as videos circulated on social media showing police officers rioting and beating teens.

“I want to recognize our officers for maintaining professionalism and composure. I stood shoulder-to-shoulder on the ground with the men and women in blue witnessing the verbal abuse and dodging bottles and other street debris,” Brown said, who was on the scene on Saturday.

Lightfoot praised the police for working “fairly quickly” in dispersing the protests.

CPD sought to assert control over the media narrative of events, releasing edited video of events in an effort to substantiate the view that the protesters, not the hundreds of armed men and women in riot gear and with firearms, were the source of the violence. CPD’s Twitter account later posted photos and arrest records of protesters which include the full names, addresses and photographs of those arrested in an effort to intimidate and shame protesters, who are innocent of any alleged crimes until proven guilty in court.

The official narrative advanced by the mayor’s office and Chicago Police Department Democratic is that the protests are being “hijacked” by those who want to attack police.

But from the earliest days of the anti-police violence protests, it has been abundantly clear through thousands of videos that the protests are peaceful and that it is the police who initiate confrontations and escalate violence, snatching objects away from protesters, breaking up groups, physically shoving and threatening, and further escalating to beating, macing, tear-gassing, firing projectile rounds and arresting people.

Jacquelyn Hamilton of the Chicago Freedom School told *Block Club Chicago*, “I had to argue with police to get young people, who were trying to leave the area, out past the police line. People were consistently trying to leave and being held inside and then being attacked.”

Precisely because she has struck an aggressive law and order stance, defending police brutality and violence against anti-police violence protesters, Lightfoot is playing a prominent role in this week’s Democratic National Convention (DNC).

Interviewed on “Face the Nation”, the television news program, Lightfoot spoke on the ongoing anti-police violence protests and on her role as a Biden surrogate.

Brennan began by questioning Lightfoot about the previous weekend’s looting which took place after the shooting of Latrell Allen in Englewood and a confrontation between more than 140 officers, according to media reports, many outfitted with rifles and riot gear. Brennan asked, “You called that, last Sunday, a planned attack. Is that what happened this time?”

Lightfoot responded, “No, look, unfortunately, what we’ve seen in cities all across the country, not just Chicago, is a continuing wave of protests. The vast majority of these

have been peaceful. But what we’ve also seen is people who have embedded themselves in these seemingly peaceful protests and come for a fight.”

A former prosecutor and her predecessor Rahm Emanuel’s “cleaner” in the wake of the police murder of teenager Laquan McDonald, Lightfoot’s statements on the protests have underlined her hostility to any organized opposition to police violence. She has publicly rejected the demand to defund the Chicago Police Department, which has a \$1.7 billion budget, and in June ridiculed the demand as a “nice hashtag.”

On Monday, Lightfoot led a panel at the DNC titled, “The Path Forward”: A Conversation with Vice President Biden on Racial Justice” with diversity consultant Jamira Burley, Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo, NAACP President Derrick Johnson and Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner who was murdered by New York City police.

In moments of boundless hypocrisy, Lightfoot emphasized “economic empowerment,” declaring, “Because if people are lifted out of poverty and they are given an opportunity to feel a stake in their own future, that goes a long way.”

She added Chicago “challenges corporate and community-based institutions to think about how they can end systemic racism” and ensure they are “uplifting the quality of life in communities.” One would ask if among these institutions is the Chicago Police Department, which routinely humiliates, beats and kills the city’s working class residents.

As Democrats in Chicago and nationwide claim there is no money for public health, public education, housing and social services, there are endless resources available for state repression and war.

Lightfoot’s role in the DNC underscores the right-wing and anti-democratic character of the Democratic Party, which seeks to demonstrate it will be better than Trump in securing the class interests of the financial aristocracy.

That the need for violent repression rides high among the Democratic Party’s priorities in this election must be taken as a serious warning by the working class.

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