

New York police attack protesting New School students

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In a display of brutality, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) arrested 22 students who had occupied the premises of the New School in Manhattan's Greenwich Village last Friday. Students were struck by police without provocation and thrown to the ground, and others were pepper-sprayed.

Approximately 60 students occupied a New School building on Friday morning. The students were demanding the resignation of New School president Bob Kerrey, the former Nebraska governor and senator, and a Vietnam war criminal, as well as the school's autocratic executive vice president, James Murtha.

More than 20 police, wearing helmets, carrying plastic handcuffs, and wielding batons and pepper-spray, appeared at the school as the occupation began at about 5:30 a.m. Police presence increased throughout morning, as the police put up barriers and crime-scene tape to seal off the area.

Police vans and a truck from the Emergency Service Unit, the police unit that manages high-powered weapons and special siege and anti-riot tactics, appeared within a few hours. Soon, scores of police had surrounded the school building.

Emergency medical personnel and the Fire Department were also on hand. According to the *New York Times*, by 11:00 a.m. there were more than 100 police vehicles present and several mounted officers. Police helicopters circled overhead.

At about 11:30, police used bolt cutters to remove the chains used by the students to lock the doors and entered the building. They told the students to kneel on the ground and remove their backpacks. They were handcuffed one at a time.

As some of the students tried to exit by a side door in the building, police pepper-sprayed them and forced them back inside. Police chased down protesters on sidewalks near the school, striking some and throwing them to the ground, as videos by independent photographers have documented.

An NYPD spokesman, Paul J. Browne, denied pepper-

spray or mace was used in the arrests, although, when later confronted with video evidence, he admitted that this had happened. Speaking of the unprovoked assault by one cop in attacking a protester, also caught on video, Browne told the media, "He pushed him and he fell down."

Students arrested face charges of burglary, riot and criminal mischief, and have been suspended from the New School pending administrative review. As the action was going on, President Kerrey announced that he no longer considered the protesters students.

On Friday evening, more than 200 people, most of them students, assembled at nearby Union Square to protest the police behavior. The group spontaneously began to march toward Kerrey's residence on 11th Street, but was turned back by police who arrested at least two of the demonstrators.

Donna Lieberman, executive director for the New York Civil Liberties Union, noted after viewing the video:

"What appears on the video is someone yelling at the cops and getting punched in the face for it and thrown to the ground and arrested. The Police Department has no authority to use physical force on somebody in this situation and they have no authority to arrest people for yelling at them; that is a violation of civil rights plain and simple."

The faculty union, ACT-UAW Local 7902, which represents more than 4,000 part-time and adjunct faculty at the New School and at nearby New York University, issued a statement that said in part that it "is gravely concerned with the Kerrey administration's harsh response to the New School students who recently occupied 65 Fifth Avenue, including a massive show of police force."

Bob Kerrey has been a highly controversial figure since his installation as the New School's president in 2001 because of his role in the Thanh Phong Massacre in Vietnam in February 1969.

That such a man could become the head of the New School, historically a left-leaning institution, whose faculty has included John Dewey, W.E.B. Dubois, James Baldwin and Hannah Arendt, was rightly seen by many students and

faculty at the time as a travesty.

At the time, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted that Kerrey's appointment "testifies to the protracted decay of liberalism in the generation which has passed since conflicts over the Vietnam War rocked every college campus in America."

Kerrey's appointment as president of the New School reflected the debased political environment that would allow the US government to again embark on a mass killing in another small country in a few years time, this time in Iraq—a war that enjoyed Kerrey's vocal political support.

Kerrey's undemocratic methods of administration have made him an increasingly unpopular figure at the New School. In December, the New School Faculty senate passed a resolution of no confidence in him in a vote of 74-2.

Approximately 75 students occupied the building in December for 30 hours, also demanding the resignation of Kerrey, a greater say in the administration of the school and full disclosure of the school's investments. That occupation ended peacefully.

In a move typical of the Kerrey-Murtha administration, earlier this month 12 artists who teach part-time at the New School's Parsons School of Design were abruptly laid off without explanation via an e-mail message.

Most noteworthy in Friday's events was the excessive reaction and use of force by the NYPD against a small, peaceful occupation by the students. There can be no question that a decision was taken by the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the NYPD, in consultation with Bob Kerrey, to mobilize the police in a show of force totally disproportionate to the ostensible objective of removing a relative handful of students from a school building.

Behind this lies more than the organic hostility of New York's billionaire mayor and the former war criminal and establishment politician turned university president to the democratic rights of protesting students.

The deteriorating social conditions of the working class in New York City—a doubling of unemployment in a year, increased homelessness and use of food banks, evictions and foreclosures, together with employer demands for concessions and wage cuts—have created a volatile situation in which mass dissent by millions of workers could become the defining political feature in the city in the next few years.

The response of the city government has been to increase state-police methods of surveillance and repression. Already, the NYPD's notorious stop-and-frisks increased from 468,932 in 2007 to 531,159 last year. The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) noted that more than 80 percent of those stopped are Latino or black. It is no secret that the

vast majority of these are working class youth.

The CCR observed, "The remarkably low rates of NYPD initiated stops-and-frisks that result in arrests, summons, weapons and/or contraband yielded make evident the ineffectiveness of this unconstitutional practice."

NYPD behavior at demonstrations has become more violent and provocative in recent months, while the department has unveiled preparations for increasingly repressive measures.

At one of the January protests against the Israeli invasion of Gaza, police pepper-sprayed and beat protesters without provocation.

In February, the NYPD announced that it had begun training 130 additional cops in the use of semi-automatic rifles and "close quarter combat" at a training site in the Bronx that includes mock urban streets and buildings.

In March, the NYPD announced plans for a vast network of surveillance cameras in Midtown Manhattan. The system would collect data such as license plate numbers of vehicles and video of pedestrians, and would duplicate the security system already being installed in Lower Manhattan.

According to the *New York Times*, the so-called Lower Manhattan Security Initiative would include "mobile teams of heavily armed officers as well as closed-circuit television cameras, license plate readers and explosive trace detection systems." More than 3,000 network cameras would be used.

The NYPD has also proposed a program known as Operation Sentinel in which every vehicle entering Manhattan would have its license plate photographed and scanned.

The author also recommends:

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