

March protests New York City police “stop-and-frisk” policy

Sandy English
20 June 2012

Thousands marched in Manhattan on Sunday to protest the New York Police Department’s (NYPD’s) stop-and-frisk policy, under which hundreds of thousands of youth, predominantly black and Hispanic, are stopped, searched or taken into custody each year.

By the NYPD’s admission, 90 percent have committed no crime, and of those arrested or cited, most are accused of minor infractions, including the possession of marijuana.

The march passed down Fifth Avenue from Harlem to the residence of billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg on 79th Street in Manhattan’s affluent Upper East Side.

The protest was billed as a “Silent March” and organized by the NAACP, Al Sharpton’s National Acton Network and the hospital workers’ union, SEIU 1199. The march was led by trade union leaders, several of the putative Democratic mayoral candidates and other representatives of the of the city’s political establishment, including the publisher and editor of the *Nation* magazine, Katrina vanden Heuvel.

The majority of those marching, however, were working people who had come to demonstrate their outrage at the daily violation of their rights by the NYPD and to protest a mayor who has made police harassment of the city’s youth the hallmark of his 10 years in office. Contingents of hospital workers, teachers, Muslim groups and immigrant associations and unaffiliated workers comprised the bulk of the march.

The family of Trayvon Martin, the 17-year-old who was killed in Sanford, Florida, in February by an armed member of a neighborhood watch—who was released without charges by the Sanford police—participated in the march. Also marching were relatives of of Ramarley Graham, the unarmed 18-year-old who was gunned down in February in his apartment in the Bronx by an NYPD

detective.

Many protesters carried homemade posters featuring pictures of young men, often relatives, who had been beaten by the police. There were a number of images of individuals murdered by the NYPD, including Sean Bell and Amadou Diallo.

Since Bloomberg came to office in 2002, the number of illegal stops—violations of the Constitution’s Fourth Amendment against unreasonable search and seizure—has increased by 600 percent to a total of nearly 4 million. In 2011, 637,000 people were stopped. Forty-one percent were between the ages of 14 and 24, 87 percent were black or Hispanic, and 92 percent were male.

No statistics are available on the employment status or income level of those stopped, but they would undoubtedly reveal that the vast majority were poor and low-income, and that the stop-and-frisk policy is at its core a war against the city’s working-class youth.

Several hundred Muslim youth participated in the march to draw the connection between the NYPD’s stop-and-frisk policy and its widespread surveillance and infiltration of peaceful Islamic organizations, including student associations, under the guise of the war on terror.

Nevertheless, spokespersons for the organizers of the march, as well as the media, cast the issue of stop-and-frisk almost entirely as one of race. The policy of Bloomberg and the NYPD was deliberately isolated from the ongoing attack on democratic rights, particularly by the Obama administration. Not one Democratic politician, union official, or leading “civil rights advocate” referred to Obama’s support of the National Defense Authorization Act, trials by military commission, or to his personal involvement in the selection of victims in extra-judicial killings by drone aircraft.

Also unmentioned was the social context in New York City in which this harassment goes on: mass unemployment, rising homelessness, the cutting of social

programs, and a deteriorating educational system. Omitted from any discussion of the stop-and-frisk policy was the city's vast and growing social inequality. New York is a city in which the richest 1 percent of the population received last year more than a third of the total income.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party presidential campaign of Jerry White distributed hundreds of leaflets advertising a June 24 public meeting in which White will speak on "Obama, Drones and the Crisis of American Democracy."

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to a number of people attending the march.

Devin Hoskins attends the Academy for Environmental Leadership, a high school in Bushwick. "I have experienced stop-and-frisk with two friends, who were white and Spanish. It was because one of us was playing with a broomstick in his hand. They pushed us on to the wall. They were undercover, but we saw their handcuffs and badges. They told us who they were and frisked us. I was alarmed because at first they didn't say who they were. I was ready to go on attack mode. They let us go after searching us saying 'you guys don't look like criminals.'"

Ian Carter works as a computer engineer. He told the WSWS, "I think it is a bad thing to stop and frisk people with no reason. The police don't have a justifiable reason to stop these people, in my opinion. It is just random stopping and frisking. It could be considered discrimination.

"I think this movement, including the people coming out to this march, is a movement of people against large establishments. The government oppresses people. People are looking for jobs, and that is a major source of frustration.

"As far as I am concerned, the government and corporations are just ignoring the working class. We pay taxes and get nothing in return. The rich get everything.

"People have a right to assemble and protest. This is our right under the Constitution.

"It seems like it is getting worse. I blame the large establishments. I blame the government, the corporations and the people in power. I see this happening with the Democrats and Republicans. This includes Obama. Why is he any different because he is black?

"What Obama did with the drone killing of Anwar al-Awlaki was unbelievable. There is a process under the Constitution that needs to be followed. We, the people, can't have a president who doesn't respect the will of the people or the law of the land."

Maribeth Whitehouse, a teacher from a middle school in the Bronx, explained to the WSWS why she was marching: "I'm here because a few of my students told me about being stopped and frisked by the police. I didn't know about this a couple of years ago when my students told me.

"When they told me they were being stopped, I asked them what they were being stopped for, because, naturally, I thought they were being stopped for some reason. One student then explained to me there was no reason—I was stopped because I was being black on the corner.' I am paid to be a teacher, but I do a lot of learning as well. My students taught me about this.

"However, stop-and-frisk is not an isolated incident. Look at the Olympics in London. I was thinking of going this summer, but they are arming to the teeth there. When they build up the police or military forces somewhere, they never back down from this militarization. It is a small step from protecting us from outsiders to turning it on ourselves.

"Stop-and-frisk is one more step in the abridgment of our rights. It seems like the people are going along with this willingly. The politicians and the media terrorize us with the Muslim threat, then something else. They use our fear to take our rights away from us. And they never restore them. Look at what has happened since 9/11. During the Civil War, Lincoln suspended the right of habeas corpus, but he restored it. What rights have they restored since 9/11? None.

"I think it is outrageous that they are killing American citizens with drones. What is worse is that the only reaction from any public figures was to call it a leak of security information. There is no objection from the politicians or media to one man being the judge, jury and executioner of people."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact