

New York Mayor-Elect de Blasio's appointments signal continuing assault on working class

Fred Mazelis
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The incoming administration of New York City's mayor-elect Bill de Blasio began to take shape with two major appointments announced last week, each confirming that the first Democrat to take over the mayoralty in 20 years will continue the decades-long assault on the working class.

On December 4, de Blasio introduced his choice of Anthony Shorris as his first deputy mayor, declaring that Shorris will be "the leader of our administration and the operations of our administration."

The next day, the incoming mayor was back to announce that William Bratton, a former police commissioner in the 1990s under Republican mayor Rudolph Giuliani, would be returning to the post.

The police appointment attracted the most attention. The 66-year-old Bratton served two years under Giuliani exactly 20 years ago. He later headed the Los Angeles Police Department between 2002 and 2009.

While de Blasio made his opposition to the massive stop-and-frisk program under the Bloomberg administration a mayor focus of his campaign, it was none other than Bratton who presided over the escalation of such methods in New York.

Bratton was known for his support for the "broken windows" theory of policing, arguing that crackdowns against minor "quality of life" offenses would lead to declines in more-serious crimes. This approach was enthusiastically embraced by Giuliani, the loudest voice of law-and-order demagoguery. When Bratton left New York after two years, it was not over stated policy differences with the mayor, but more because they both wanted the media limelight.

Speaking at the press conference announcing his appointment, Bratton claimed that the city had changed

drastically since his last stint as commissioner, and that his emphasis today would be on improving relations between the "community" and the police. De Blasio and his spokesmen pointed to Bratton's record in Los Angeles as evidence that he would put an end to what de Blasio called "the overuse of stop-and-frisk."

Bratton is above all a politician, someone who reportedly had hopes himself of running for mayor when he held office in New York two decades ago. He is credited with improving the image of the LAPD, reaching out to black and Hispanic politicians and various middle class community leaders. While mending fences, however, Bratton stepped up police stops in working class neighborhoods and focused attention on clearing the homeless from the streets of downtown LA.

"He gets all this credit for getting a focused goal done, but the real impact of that is really creating a permanent underclass of over-policed people," one lawyer was quoted as stating in the *New York Times*. "Given his record in LA, the question then becomes, if this is the mayor who is going to stop the stop-and-frisk era, why is he going to bring in the person who increased stops in Los Angeles," said Norman Siegel, the former head of the NY Civil Liberties Union.

Such is Bratton's reputation for law-and-order, the Tory prime minister, David Cameron, suggested that he might be the candidate to head the London police after riots in 2011.

The new mayor is utilizing the Bratton appointment as a signal to the NYPD and the ruling establishment that he will reliably defend the system despite his rhetorical complaints about inequality. Bratton's return assures Wall Street that there will be no "softness on

crime.”

Bratton has lost no time, as for mending fences, in using the same approach in New York that he carried out in Los Angeles. He made a phone call to media-anointed African-American spokesman Al Sharpton, assuaging his doubts. Other calls came from Bratton or de Blasio to Letitia James, the incoming public advocate; Brooklyn councilman Jumaane Williams; and Ruben Diaz, Jr., the Bronx borough president. All expressed appreciation for the attention.

As far as stop-and-frisk is concerned, it has dropped in recent months to an annual rate of 36,000, according to figures in one news report. Even as outgoing mayor Michael Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly have denounced the ruling by Judge Shira Scheindlin that its implementation has been unconstitutional, the authorities have concluded, in the face of opposition that has reached massive and politically dangerous proportions, that tactical adjustments are required.

In other words, de Blasio is preparing to take credit for a shift that is already occurring, while Bratton presides over a police department that projects a “kinder and gentler” face while keeping the machinery of repression ready for use at a moment’s notice. Meanwhile nothing will be done to improve the conditions of life for millions of workers and youth, and the police will announce that yesterday’s “overuse” of stop-and-frisk has now become “underuse.”

As for the new deputy mayor, the same message of reassurance to the ruling class was clearly intended and received. Shorris has a record of service to the political establishment in New York going back almost 30 years. He was deputy budget director and finance commissioner under Ed Koch in the 1980s and a deputy schools chancellor under Bloomberg. More recently, he was executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

The significance of Shorris’s appointment was highlighted by the gushing approval of Kathryn Wylde, president and chief executive of the Partnership for New York City. Ms. Wylde and her organization were somewhat unnerved by de Blasio’s campaign rhetoric. Now, however, she is quoted as stating that Shorris “has more knowledge and experience dealing with the budget and operational issues confronting city

government that anyone I can think of.”

In plain English, Shorris will translate the forthcoming crisis and budget deficits into the need to make city workers pay through attacks on wages and pensions.

Clearly the de Blasio administration, even before it takes office, is signaling that there will be no fundamental changes, but rather a change in style or image from the mayoralties of Bloomberg and Giuliani. The trade unions and their pseudo-left backers are moving at the same time to demonstrate their loyalty to the Democrats.

A rally at Foley Square in lower Manhattan on December 5 showed this very clearly. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), Hotel Trades Council, Local 32B of the Building Service Employees and other unions, along with various phony “lefts,” mobilized about 1,000 at a rally called by the New Day New York Coalition.

The purpose of this, as the name of the sponsor illustrates, is to build up the arrival of de Blasio as the return of the days of social reform. A two-faced argument is being presented. On the one hand, there is the claim that action is necessary to “hold de Blasio’s feet to the fire.” At the same time, the real purpose is to shield the Democrats. As one speaker put it, “We understand that he’s the one in the front that has to break the wind, but we are the ducks in the back, that are here to encourage him.”

There is no inconsistency in this rhetoric. The proposal to keep up the pressure on the incoming administration, the line peddled especially by the International Socialist Organization and other pseudo-left elements, is a means of channeling the growing anger of the working class into the Democratic Party. This is in opposition to the demand for a complete break with the Democrats, the representatives of the corporate and financial aristocracy, and the unions, which function as appendages of big business and are in fact an integral part of the political establishment in New York City and nationwide.



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