

“You can’t treat human beings this way”

New York residents speak out against police violence

A WSWS reporting team
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The killing of Staten Island resident Eric Garner by New York City police officers a week and a half ago has once again exposed the brutality regularly unleashed on the city’s working people by the police.

Far from an aberration, the police barbarism expressed in Garner’s killing is a common experience for masses of working class New Yorkers, which has continued unrelentingly under Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with workers and youth in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, last weekend about Garner’s killing and their own experiences with police violence. East Flatbush is a working class, central Brooklyn neighborhood of about 80,000 residents, primarily African-American, with a large population of Caribbean immigrants. The neighborhood has been the site of multiple police killings, including that of 16 year-old Kimani Gray last year. Outraged residents protesting Gray’s killing were violently dispersed by the police, who arrested dozens and laid siege on the neighborhood in the aftermath.

As in other working class neighborhoods across the city, police continue to harass and brutalize workers and youth in East Flatbush on a daily basis.

Greg Johnson, a worker at Catholic Charities, was riding a bus in Staten Island at the time of a rally protesting Eric Garner’s murder. “We went by the area where he was shot, it changed the whole vibe. The whole conversation on the bus changed. Everyone was talking about it.

“This happens all the time and we’re tired of it. I can walk down the street and cops will harass me now. Garner was selling cigarettes. It’s going to make us – what’s the word – rebel. It’s going to be like that

Martin Luther King stuff all over again.

“I think police use force depending on race. We get harassed so much. I’m not doing anything, but they want to use all that force, and for what? Selling some Newports. It’s a crazy situation. Rest in peace to that guy.”

“It’s an emotional thing,” he continued. “I’ve had so many experiences with cops. When you’re constantly being harassed, asked questions: where you going, where’s your ID. I’m not doing anything, there’s no problem. But the cop has a problem with it.

“I’ve yet to watch the whole video of Garner’s killing. I’m starting to cry thinking about it. Now imagine, eight million people feeling the same way.”

Lionel Cassetana, a Tattoo artist and formalwear salesman, said, “Police are out of control. They get a badge and a gun and it is like they can do whatever they want.

“On January 4th, the police raided my house and kicked everyone out. The only charge was unlawful possession of ammo, no one even had a gun. They just found a shotgun shell, and the judge heard this and threw out the case.

“When they did the raid it was not ordinary police, they came in with helmets and shields at 5:30 in the morning. They threatened my dogs with guns, and I was on the ground just asking to get up to put the dogs away. They dragged everyone out of the house. My brother was there and he was not even allowed to put on clothes. This happened in January and it was freezing outside. The police did not even present me with a search warrant until after the raid.

Lionel said the police raided his home for a second time last month. “The detective leading these raids is an

African-American guy. He is just going to keep doing this to my house. I am jumpy now especially at night. If it is between 5 and 5:30AM and I hear a noise, or one of my dogs starts barking I get out of bed. I look out the window, sometimes I get dressed as if I am going out, just in case a raid happens. This is a mental thing, and no one should be doing this to us.

"If everyone got together we are more people than the cops are. They know this, which is why the police use military grade weapons," he added.

Marquis Mack said, "I think the police have to go after the real criminals, not people who are involved in petty crime. They want to fill up the jails so the state makes money."

"Personally, I hold Obama responsible. He's changed the laws. You can get locked up if you speak your mind. He's got drones that can bomb you if he says so. But we have to protest, to speak out. They want to make it like China or Russia, but we can't be afraid to speak."

Isaiah, a student and retail worker, said, "It is like the world is full of gangs, and the police are just the biggest gang. What they do is an abuse of power, and since they don't get punished for it they just keep doing it again and again.

"During the Civil Rights movement we had leaders who fought for us. Now what do we have, Al Sharpton? He just shows up and makes a spectacle. He turns it into a big show, and he gets paid and he is fine with that."

Shane, a hotel worker, said, "It's sad to see Eric Garner's murder, it's really sad. It could have been me or any one of us. I work late shifts, sometimes till 11:30 or 12:30. The police will come up to you for just walking down the street. Some justice needs to be done, it's not right. You can't treat human beings this way."

Asked what he thought can be done about police violence, Shane responded, "All we can do is voice our opinion. Cops aren't there to protect us; they end up killing us. Everybody is scared."

As the discussion turned to the connection between police violence and social inequality, Shane added, "The wealthy are not going to give up their riches, they're going to fight to get more. They're never satisfied. You go to work and all management talks about is work ethic, but we get no raise. Prices are always going up. Subway tickets are going up, food is

going up. But I got a 25 cent raise this year. This is New York, how can we live? Come on."



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