

Anger follows New York grand jury's failure to indict cop who killed Eric Garner

Sandy English
4 December 2014

Workers and youth reacted with outrage to the news that a grand jury in the New York City borough of Staten Island had decided not to indict New York Police Department officer Daniel Pantaleo in the chokehold death of Eric Garner.

The killing of Garner, which happened in July, was captured on a cellphone video seen by millions of people around the world.

This is the second failure to indict a cop for a high-profile killing of an unarmed African-American man in less than two weeks. On November 24, St. Louis County prosecutor Robert McCulloch announced that there would be no charges against Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson for the shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown.

On Wednesday evening, hundreds of protesters in New York City assembled in Union Square and Times Square in Manhattan and marched to Rockefeller Center. Dozens of people were arrested.

The grand jury proceedings in Staten Island were highly manipulated to produce the desired result. Richmond County (Staten Island) District Attorney Daniel Donovan impaneled the 23-person grand jury on August 19, and the deliberations were dragged out for many weeks. Donovan, like McCulloch in Missouri, allowed the killer cop to give his side of the story without any cross-examination of the sort that he would face at trial.

Grand juries almost always return indictments sought by prosecutors. As in the case of Brown's killer, the prosecutor who brought the case has close ties to the police and worked to ensure that no charges would be filed.

The decision not to indict Pantaleo—even on the lesser charges of manslaughter and reckless endangerment—is another declaration by the ruling class that the police

can and will act with impunity, and that they can kill without consequence.

There will be no trial in the killing of Garner despite clear evidence that a crime was committed. Garner was harassed by police on the afternoon of July 17 in Tompkinsville, a largely African-American neighborhood in Staten Island, for allegedly selling untaxed cigarettes.

As seen on the video, police then wrestled Garner to the ground while Pantaleo applied an illegal chokehold. Garner can be heard on the video telling the cops repeatedly that he cannot breathe.

Yesterday evening Jonathan Moore, the Garner family's attorney, told the media that he was "astonished" by the decision not to indict. Esaw Garner, Garner's wife said, "The grand jury kept interviewing witnesses, but you didn't need witnesses. You can be a witness for yourself."

Ben Garner, the victim's father, told the *Staten Island Advance*, "Who can control the Police Department? We had a damn video tape."

The anger over the decision to exonerate Pantaleo is connected to the long history of abuse and outright murder by New York City police.

One only has to recount the names of Amadou Diallo (shot 41 times after reaching for his wallet on February 4, 1999), Sean Bell (shot on his wedding night November 25, 2006), and Ramarley Graham (shot in his apartment on February 2, 2012). Abner Louima was beaten and sodomized by cops on August 9, 1997. Last month, unarmed Akai Gurley was shot by an officer in the unlit stairway of a Brooklyn housing project. Of these, only the assailants of Louima received any punishment.

The decision in Staten Island makes clear that both police violence and the determination of the ruling

class to prevent any accountability for this violence are not confined to Ferguson, Missouri. Throughout the country, the police, increasingly armed with advanced military equipment, treat the population as a hostile force.

Democratic Party politicians moved quickly on Wednesday in an attempt to contain popular anger with empty phrases, while covering up their own culpability for the outcome. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio declared at a press conference on Staten Island, “Our history requires us to say that black lives matter.” He added that his son, who is black, could be the object of police violence.

De Blasio went on to praise New York City Police Commissioner Bill Bratton. “The department will act aggressively to ensure that any officer who is not meant to be in this work no longer is.”

De Blasio’s assurances mean nothing. He promised to supply body cameras for New York’s police officers, but failed to explain how this would make any difference, when even graphic video evidence of the role of the police in the death of Eric Garner was not enough to secure an indictment.

On Wednesday evening, US Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the Obama administration would convene a federal civil rights inquiry into Garner’s death.

In a statement, President Barack Obama declared, with consummate hypocrisy, “When anybody in this country is not being treated equally under the law, that’s a problem.” He added that he hoped a recently appointed national task force would help ensure that “everybody has confidence in the system.”

The real attitude of the Obama administration, however, was made clear earlier this week, when the president gave his full backing to programs that transfer military equipment to police forces. A White House review of these programs concluded that that “have been valuable and have provided state and local law enforcement with needed assistance as they carry out their critical missions in helping to keep the American people safe.”

As police killing follows police killing, the true nature of the “critical missions” alluded to by Obama become more and more clear. The massive police apparatus, expanded under the Obama administration and increasingly integrated with the military, is seen as

a critical force for repression of growing popular anger. The “war on terror” is aimed ever more directly at the population within the United States.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact