

The New York shooting and the bid to outlaw opposition to police violence

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On Monday, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio took the extraordinary step of calling for an end to ongoing protests against police violence in the city and across the country.

The move marks a capitulation by de Blasio to demands by police officials and union leaders that he repudiate any criticism of the city's police. In his run for mayor last year, De Blasio postured as an opponent of the "stop and frisk" police tactics of his predecessors, Michael Bloomberg and Rudy Giuliani, which have subjected working class and minority youth to continuous abuse and harassment.

Following Saturday's fatal shooting of two New York City cops by a psychologically troubled man, police officials seized upon the incident to indict the protests against police violence and de Blasio's tepid expressions of sympathy as being the direct causes of these killings.

On Saturday, dozens of police officers made a public show of turning their backs on the Mayor as he walked to a press conference to discuss the shootings. Patrick Lynch, the president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, said Sunday that there was "blood on the hands" of the Mayor's office, allegedly adding that the NYPD had become a "'wartime' police department."

Fueling this reactionary tirade, Police Commissioner Bill Bratton told NBC News on Monday that the shooting was a "direct spinoff of this issue of these demonstrations," and that there was an "undeniable rift" between de Blasio and the police department. Bratton went on to justify the public shunning of the mayor by city cops, declaring that it was "reflective of the anger of some of them."

Instead of firing the commissioner on the spot for insubordination and publicly rebuking the union officials for conspiring against a democratically elected

mayor, de Blasio implicitly accepted the argument that the murder of the two officers by a mentally unstable man was the logical extension of peaceful protests by calling for the demonstrations to end.

Asked in his press conference Monday what his attitude was toward protesters who called officers murderers and racists, de Blasio indicated that those who "say inappropriate things, who say hateful things," are to be reported to the police as criminals. He insisted that the way to "contribute to making things better" in a democracy is to "show respect and support for our police."

Ismaaiyl Brinsley, the alleged killer of the officers, had no connection to or participation in the protests against the killings of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the impunity granted to the cops responsible.

This did not stop right-wing politicians and media figures from using these shootings—which were of a piece with similar acts by armed and mentally disturbed individuals from Columbine, Colorado to Sandy Hook, Connecticut—to paint the demonstrations as violent and illegitimate. Former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani told Fox News that he holds de Blasio accountable for "letting those demonstrations get out of control" and "creating an atmosphere of police hatred in certain communities."

The aim of this media blitz is to paint political opposition to police killings as inciting violence, and therefore illegitimate if not criminal. This has been accompanied by trumped-up charges brought against individuals for allegedly making terroristic threats against police on social media. This week, an 18-year old New York City resident was charged with making a terroristic threat after posting a movie screenshot of a man shooting into a police car, while a Chicopee,

Massachusetts man is being charged for posting the phrase “put wings on pigs” on Instagram.

The moves to criminalize opposition to police violence go back to the Ferguson protests in August, where demonstrators protesting the killing of Michael Brown were depicted as looters by politicians and media figures in order to justify the wave of militarized police violence that was unleashed on the St. Louis suburb. Shortly before the grand jury ruling in November, the Federal Bureau of Investigations dispatched over a hundred additional agents to Ferguson and issued utterly baseless warnings that “extremists” were planning to carry out “attacks” against “critical infrastructure” in connection with the demonstrations.

What accounts for the fear and hostility with which the political establishment has responded to the overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrations against police murder? A clue to the thinking of ruling circles was provided by New York Police Commissioner Bratton in a Saturday interview. “You put that blue uniform on,” he said, “and you become part of that thin blue line between us and anarchy.”

What is the Commissioner talking about? Last year New York City posted its lowest crime rate since the 1950s. Even though the number of police officers has soared, the number of officer deaths on the job nationwide is less than half what it was in the 1970s.

Bratton is referring to a very different set of concerns. New York City is home to 103 billionaires, more than any other city in the United States, and the largest number of multi-millionaires, concentrated mostly in Manhattan—that is the “us” to whom he refers. Yet across the Harlem River, in the Bronx, half of children do not get enough to eat.

The inequality that pervades American society finds its most extreme expression in New York City, where apartments can sell for tens of millions of dollars, and the ever wealthier court circle of the super-rich, the rich, the merely affluent is constantly driving up the cost of living, making it ever-more difficult for working people to even afford rent within the five boroughs.

It is the role of the police to secure, maintain, and defend this social order. The extreme violence and brutality with which the police treat the city’s working class and minority residents is the response by the state to ever-growing social tensions. Under the pressure of a

social crisis to which it has no solution, the ruling class solidarizes itself ever more closely with the repressive apparatus of the state against the population, and ever more openly repudiates democratic forms of rule in favor of police-state measures.



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