

New York police continue counteroffensive with arrests of protesters and work slowdown

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Police arrested anti-police violence protesters in Grand Central Station for alleged threats to officers on Tuesday and have banned “die-ins” from the station. A further crackdown on protests in New York City against killings by cops is inevitable given the continuing New York Police Department (NYPD) counteroffensive, which includes a work slowdown and a public campaign of right-wing vitriol against the city’s Democratic Party Mayor Bill de Blasio, in the aftermath of the December 20 slaying of two cops in Brooklyn by a mentally disturbed man.

On Wednesday The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) police, which have jurisdiction over Grand Central Station, a transit junction and shopping area in mid-Manhattan that serves subway and commuter rail lines, began removing placards on the floor of the central dais of the station, each of which bore the name of a victim of police violence. Police arrested demonstration leader Billy Talen, known in protest circles as “the Reverend Billy,” for obstructing governmental administration, a catch-all charge routinely used against those targeted by the police who have committed no crime.

An MTA spokesman, Adam Lisberg, said that Talen and another protester were arrested “for physically trying to block police officers from doing their lawful duties.” Repeating the canard that anti-police violence protesters are violent or encourage violence, Lisberg told Rupert Murdoch’s *New York Post*, “Two separate protesters got physical with police commanders. We had to make the first arrests since the protests began. We can’t and won’t tolerate attacks on our police.”

Witnesses to the arrests said that neither of the protesters offered resistance to the police. The MTA has now banned people from lying on the floor in die-ins on the premises of the station.

The die-ins in Grand Central Station have occurred almost every night in the nearly five weeks since a grand jury refused to indict NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo for the chokehold death of Staten island resident Eric Garner on July 17, which was video-recorded by a bystander.

Police union leaders, including Patrick Lynch, the president of the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association (PBA), and right-wing politicians have attempted to smear the protesters by linking them to the murder of police. Mayor de Blasio also implicitly connected the protesters to the cop killings by calling for a moratorium on protests during a mourning period for the two officers.

The arrests at Grand Central station follow the arrest last week of Jarrod Shanahan for an altercation with police on the Brooklyn Bridge during the mass demonstration against police violence on December 13. Shanahan faces charges of assault on a police officer, resisting arrest, obstructing government administration and rioting.

A number of protesters have been the target of a manhunt since the altercation, during which a police lieutenant had his nose broken. Five others have been arrested in addition to Shanahan, who was apprehended on the basis of DNA taken from a hat that was left behind on the bridge. Over 20 people have been arrested for alleged verbal or online threats against the police.

The NYPD, meanwhile, continues the third week of its own protest against civilian authority by refusing to issue summonses and make arrests for minor violations. For the week from December 28 to January 4, criminal summonses issued by the police have dropped to 347 compared to 4,077 during the same period last year. Statistics show that precincts in some neighborhoods

have not issued a single parking ticket or traffic summons in this period.

On Wednesday Police Commissioner William Bratton met with heads of police unions to discuss the slowdown. One person present at the meeting reported that Bratton told the police unions that the numbers for citations must come back up. In a press conference, Patrick Lynch denied once more that the police were engaged in a slowdown. Lynch continued to blame de Blasio for the animosity of the police, saying, “We wish there was a leader in City Hall.” Another police union official has proposed that former President Bill Clinton act as mediator between de Blasio and the police unions.

The PBA has taken out full-page ads in the *Daily News* and other media outlets that featured photographs of Rafel Ramos and Wenjian Liu, the two officers killed on December 20, with the caption, “This is what it’s all about.”

De Blasio received another affront when the media widely reported that NYPD Officer Andrew Dossi reportedly did not want de Blasio to visit him in the hospital after he was wounded when he and his partner, who was also wounded, responded to an attempted robbery in the Bronx this week.

Last Sunday police staged a protest by turning their backs on the mayor during the funeral of Wenjian Liu, in spite of a request by Bratton that they not do so. This was the third such action, following thousands of police turning their backs on de Blasio at the funeral of Rafael Ramos on December 27, and a smaller number during his press conference immediately after the killings on December 20.

In another sign of revolt by the law enforcement apparatus, Dennis Quirk, president of the New York State Court Officers Association, publicly criticized de Blasio last week for reappointing Brooklyn Criminal Court Judge Laura Johnson. Pro-police elements had previously criticized Johnson for freeing without bail Devon Coley, 18, who is charged with posting a photo on Facebook of a gunman firing into an NYPD vehicle shortly after Ismaaiyl Brinsley shot and killed Ramos and Liu. Police were also upset with Johnson because she released another man in Brooklyn who threatened police officers who arrested him on December 20.

Police violence continues apace in the city. The media have reported the case of off-duty cop Mirjan

Lolja, who assaulted a transit worker in a Bronx subway station. Lolja was apparently angry about a long wait for a train shortly before Christmas. On Wednesday, police shot and wounded a man in Brooklyn who was wielding a knife.



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