

New police unit in New York: The ruling elite prepares for class struggle

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2 February 2015

Last week's announcement of the formation of a new 350-member Strategic Response Group in the New York Police Department is one of the clearest demonstrations to date of the nature and role of the administration of Democratic Party Mayor Bill de Blasio. As class tensions mount in New York City and throughout the US, the ruling class and its political representatives are preparing for even greater levels of violence and repression.

According to de Blasio's Police Commissioner, William Bratton, the new force will be "designed for dealing with events like our recent protests [against police brutality] or incidents like Mumbai or what just happened in Paris."

The unit will be "equipped and trained in ways our normal patrol officers are not," said Bratton in a speech to the Police Foundation last week. They will have "extra protective gear, the long rifles, machine guns, as is unfortunately necessary sometimes in these instances."

Bratton's spokesman tried to claim after his speech that the unit was not directed against protests, but little attempt was made to explain why, in that case, the commissioner had specifically insisted, "The officers will have the dedicated mission of protecting locations (and) being able to assist us in dealing with demonstrations." He added that the new unit would be used for "disorder control."

Bratton, a highly-connected police official with decades of experience including a stint in New York itself two decades ago, is not losing his way with words. He meant what he said, even if he now wants to reformulate the policy in the wake of a public backlash.

The commissioner attempted to camouflage the new step toward militarization of the NYPD by combining it with a proposal to increase the number of officers in

local precincts, where they will "have a chance to really have time to build relationships, to work on the problems in these distressed neighborhoods."

Both the mayor and the liberal *New York Times* tried to emphasize this side of Bratton's plan, with the *Times* headlining its story, in almost Orwellian language, "Bratton envisions a friendlier force, and a new unit to respond to big events."

De Blasio at first said nothing about the blatant targeting of peaceful protests. He later sent a statement through his press secretary on Friday morning saying that he supports Bratton. The statement referred vaguely to "more effective law enforcement strategies and a closer relationship between police and the communities that they serve," adding that, "the changes outlined by the Commissioner bring us closer to fulfilling that promise."

De Blasio's new unit is entirely in line with the Obama administration's efforts to combine "community policing" with a continued, and indeed expanded, militarization of police forces throughout the country.

Last year, the White House appointed a "Task Force on 21st Century Policing," headed by Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey, who has a long history of attacking democratic rights. At the same time, the Obama administration has approved the continuation of Pentagon programs to transfer equipment to local forces, calling for measures to regularize this relationship and provide greater training in the use of military gear. (See: "Obama 'task force' on policing: A cover for militarization")

Crime continues to fall to record low levels, even as the living conditions facing millions of working people show little sign of improving. There have been virtually no instances of terrorism in New York in more than a

decade, but there have been growing protests against inequality and police violence, as in the case of Eric Garner last year. Behind these protests, there is growing anger over continuing unemployment and poverty amidst surging wealth for the banks and Wall Street speculators that run the city.

This latest announcement is a further exposure of the class character of the de Blasio administration. The mayor, hailed by those organizations that make it their purpose to provide a “left” cover for the Democratic Party, is no less a representative of the corporate and financial elite than his predecessors, including Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg.

The eruption of protest following the murder of Eric Garner last summer and then the exoneration of police officer Daniel Pantaleo in December has thoroughly exposed the mayor. The killing of two New York City police officers by a deranged gunman on December 20 was used to launch a vicious counterattack against the protesters. When the police union leadership blamed the incident on the mayor himself, de Blasio kept his mouth shut.

Sections of the extreme right along with the leadership of the police union demanded an apology from the mayor. What they got in the following weeks was not a formal apology, but a number of steps that showed de Blasio’s loyalty to the forces of “law and order.”

The mayor announced that he would veto proposed legislation to formally outlaw the chokehold technique that killed Eric Garner. He promised \$7.3 million for new bulletproof vests for the police. The mayor also held a private meeting with Ed Mullins, president of the sergeants’ union in the NYPD, after which Mullins pronounced de Blasio to be a “gentleman.”



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