

Mayor announces bulletproof vests for New York City cops

Fred Mazelis
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In the latest sign of his eagerness to put charges that he is “anti-police” behind him, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio held a news conference at an upper Manhattan police precinct last Friday to announce that \$7.3 million was being budgeted for 13,000 new bulletproof vests for the city’s cops.

The mayor was joined at the microphones by Police Commissioner Bill Bratton and City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. The budget announcement came just two weeks after a letter demanding the vests, which was delivered to the mayor by the Policemen’s Benevolent Association.

This is the same organization whose president, Patrick Lynch, declared, following the killing of two police officers in Brooklyn on December 20 by a deranged gunman, that de Blasio had “blood on his hands,” because he had allegedly encouraged protests against police brutality. Lynch has never retracted his incendiary claim, but de Blasio, in agreement with the ruling elite that he serves, is perfectly prepared to move on.

The vests will be handed out beginning in May. “Two weeks after the issue was raised by the unions, the mayor and the Council responded, “crowded Bratton. “When in government does anything happen that quickly? Not in my recollection.”

The media buildup for the bulletproof vests is part of the nonstop campaign to change the subject from police violence—such as the chokehold murder of Eric Garner on Staten Island last July and the exoneration two months ago of the cop responsible for it—to the issue of police “heroes” who are entrusted with maintaining capitalist law and order.

The media campaign following the deaths of the officers, and the funerals attended by Vice President Joe Biden and other dignitaries, were only the

beginning. De Blasio loudly announced he would veto a proposed legal ban on chokeholds by the police, even though the practice had supposedly been banned by the New York Police Department more than 20 years ago. The mayor also held a friendly closed door meeting last month with the head of the Sergeants Benevolent Association.

The most significant of the recent moves was Bratton’s announcement in late January that a new 350-member unit, the Strategic Response Group, was being created to respond both to terrorism and to “events like our recent protests.” This comment was perhaps deemed too provocative. He later amended it, claiming that the terrorism and protest functions would be handled by separate groups within the department, but the intent remained clear. Protest is to be criminalized. Arrests have been made over comments that have been posted online. Isolated incidents have been magnified and utilized to slander and intimidate those who are outraged over police brutality.

In an episode closely related to the criminalization of protest and attacks on the First Amendment, two lawyers who were part of Bronx Defenders, a legal aid group that provides services to 35,000 poor residents of the Bronx annually, were forced to resign after appearing in a rap video that appeared one day after the grand jury voted not to indict the officer responsible for the killing of Eric Garner, and suggested violent retribution.

The two lawyers, Kumar Rao and Ryan Napoli, were forced out even though they explained that they were trying to help, and expected to view and edit the video before it appeared. “This wasn’t some sort of nefarious project,” Rao said. “This was designed to be fully about raising awareness in the community about the kinds of legal services that an office like ours could

provide for people affected by this issue.”

Last week Bratton also demanded that the charge of resisting arrest, currently a misdemeanor, be raised to a felony. “We need to get around this idea that you can resist arrest,” said Bratton. “You can’t. You just can’t do it. It results in potential injuries to the officer, to the suspect. And we need to change that, and the way to change that is to start penalties for it.”

This claim echoes those who blamed Eric Garner for his own death last summer, because he objected to the constant harassment by the police on the charge of selling loose cigarettes. What Bratton, de Blasio, and the entire political establishment seek to reinforce is the demand for unquestioning obedience as police-state measures are put in place.

De Blasio did his part to place the police on an entirely different level from their victims. Speaking of the new police equipment, he declared, “These new vests will make a big difference. A single vest can save a life and make sure a family doesn’t have to go through the unspeakable pain of losing a loved one.” He said nothing about the families of Eric Garner, Akai Gurley and others who have lost their lives to police violence.

Crime in New York is at historic lows, but police abuse and harassment continue. The police union belligerently opposes any infringement on its prerogatives, and it is backed up by major sections of the ruling class, who are fearful that the growing class tensions and anger over inequality and worsening living conditions will take the form of a mass movement of the working class.



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