

New York City mayor announces plan to hire more police

Sandy English

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New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced Monday that he had dropped his opposition to the hiring of more officers for the New York City Police Department (NYPD). The city's plan to hire nearly 1,300 more cops is part of a budget deal with the city council and will add an estimated \$170 million to the 2016 fiscal year budget of \$78.5 billion.

Three people were arrested Tuesday at Gracie Mansion, the mayoral residence, at a protest against de Blasio's decision to hire additional officers.

Police Commissioner William Bratton, a de Blasio appointee, and Melissa Mark-Viverito, the Speaker of the city council and a key de Blasio ally, have both called for increasing the number of officers.

De Blasio and Bratton have presented the hiring of new officers as a part of a new "community policing" program, in which fewer specialized units in working class neighborhoods will allow time for "proactive community interaction" by officers.

"Community policing," while counterpoised by its proponents as an alternative to aggressive and militarized policing, is in fact a euphemism for stricter enforcement of "quality of life" crimes such as loitering and panhandling, used to harass and intimidate poor residents.

Three hundred of the new officers would form a special counterterrorism team. Without a doubt this is the same Strategic Response Group that Bratton proposed in January. The new unit, according to Bratton would be, "equipped with extra protective gear, long rifles and machine guns."

Bratton let slip, however, the real purpose of the new unit when he said that it will be "designed for dealing with events like our recent protests." He was referring to a series of demonstrations against police violence in the aftermath of the refusal of a Grand Jury to indict the

cop who strangled Eric Garner to death on Staten Island last year. Some of the protests included tens of thousands of workers and young people.

The real dilemma for the city's ruling elite—and a source of sharp disagreement—is how to police the most socially unequal of large American cities at a time when the city and the country have seen a growth in anger and opposition to police violence and other repressive measures.

"Broken windows" policing, in which police seek to intervene on a variety of minor crimes such as illegal sales of cigarettes or public drunkenness, was developed by Bratton and has been the official policy of the NYPD since 1992. One of its major tactics, the hated stop-and-frisk policy, in which hundreds of thousands of minority youth were stopped each year on the street and searched by police, has been curtailed for the time being following public opposition to the program.

Some elements of the state apparatus, such as the police themselves, have been unnerved by any suggestion that their authority might be questioned or curtailed. In unprecedented demonstrations at funerals for two NYPD officers killed December 20 by a mentally disturbed man, NYPD officers turned their backs in public on de Blasio to protest the mayor's admission that his son, who is biracial, might be in danger from police officers. A massive publicity campaign followed, attempting to tie the murders to the anti-police violence protests, and de Blasio called for a moratorium on protests during a mourning period.

For several weeks in December and January the NYPD held a slow-down in which officers refused to implement "broken windows" policing activity, including making arrests and issuing summonses for petty crimes.

De Blasio has consistently kowtowed to the forces of law and order. He supported a city council bill to give police new body armor and has opposed legislation that would make the use of chokeholds by the NYPD a crime.

In recent months the NYPD has stepped up its harassment of anti-police violence protesters, including the mass arrests of 140 on April 29 at a protest in Union Square over the police murder of Freddie Gray in Baltimore. De Blasio justified the arrests by saying, “We won’t tolerate illegality. We won’t tolerate disorder.”

De Blasio’s support for expanding New York City’s police department is a further exposure that the supposedly “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party that he heads, rhetoric aside, fully supports state repression and attacks on democratic rights.



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