Former tennis player James Blake criticizes NYC mayor for handling of false arrest in 2015

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Retired professional tennis player James Blake issued a statement last Wednesday denouncing New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio for failing to inform him about a second New York Police Department (NYPD) disciplinary trial of a police officer over his false arrest in 2015.

The incident, which the NYPD had labeled a case of mistaken identity, involved a plainclothes cop, James Frascatore, brutally tackling and handcuffing Blake as he waited for a taxi outside the Grand Hyatt hotel in Manhattan. Frascatore and other officers did not identify themselves or the reason for the arrest for over 10 minutes as Blake lay prone on the sidewalk.

Frascatore failed to report the incident and it was only after Blake contacted the NYPD that it came to the department's attention. A CCTV video that showed the incident was then recovered.

Frascatore was initially given a slap-on-the-wrist punishment of the loss of five vacation days for tackling Blake, but now faces another disciplinary trial this week for allegedly meddling with the investigation.

Blake expressed his outrage with the self-proclaimed progressive Democratic mayor and the NYPD, stating, "It's disappointing that the de Blasio administration and NYPD failed to notify me that James Frascatore was in a departmental trial yesterday related to the incident involving me in 2015. But the lack of real punishment for Frascatore is the bigger travesty."

He further pointed out the hypocrisy over not notifying him of the trial given the city's "claims to be improving the transparency of how its police department operates," and called on the de Blasio administration to release the findings of the trial to the public.

Blake also reiterated his previous demand that Frascatore be fired and described the cop's claims against him during the departmental trial as "baseless" and an "attempt to justify his unjustifiable and abusive use of force." Frascatore had claimed during the trial that Blake, whose father is African-American and mother British, attempted to turn the incident into a "racial issue."

Regardless of the decision in the departmental trial, the incident has further exposed the failure of the de Blasio Administration and the Democratic Party more generally to curtail even the most extreme abuses of police violence. De Blasio was elected in 2013 based on a platform of reforming the NYPD and addressing the city's massive social inequality. However, since taking office de Blasio has continuously combined apologies for the NYPD's brutal actions with moves to further militarize the police.

The mayor's initial response to Frascatore's assault of Blake was to issue a public apology. Frascatore was put on modified duty—meaning he would not participate in patrols or carry a firearm. At that time Frascatore was also the subject of at least two lawsuits and four complaints to the city's Civilian Complaint Board.

One plaintiff, Warren Diggs, claimed that Frascatore punched him in the head and continued to beat him once he was on the ground, after he could not supply an ID and attempted to enter his own home. Another plaintiff, Lerroy Cline, said that Frascatore stopped him while he was driving and punched him three times in the mouth after he asked why he had been pulled over.

Frascatore's repeated unwarranted attacks were only put to an end after he tackled Blake, likely the result of the widespread media attention due to his victim's

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celebrity status. Clearly sensing that he had the support of a section of the political establishment, Frascatore filed a defamation lawsuit in 2017 against Blake and the NYPD seeking $75,000 in damages.

Similarly, the NYPD only in July initiated administrative proceedings against officer Daniel Pantaleo for choking Eric Garner to death in 2014. If judged to have committed misconduct, Pantaleo faces penalties ranging from a warning, the loss of time off, or the loss of his job. Pantaleo, who had a long history of misconduct even before choking Garner, has been assigned to desk duty for the past four years because the NYPD delayed proceeding, claiming a federal investigation was ongoing.

De Blasio for most of his first term in office repeatedly came to the defense of the police. Following an initial critical statement of the NYPD after Garner's death. He later vowed to veto a bill that would make the police use of chokeholds a misdemeanor, despite the hold already being banned in the NYPD manual.

In 2015 he announced a plan to hire 1,300 more cops, including a 300-officer heavily-armed counterterrorism team. Soon afterwards the then-Police Commissioner William Bratton let slip plans for the counterterrorism team to be used to deal with situations such as protests against police killings.

De Blasio has made further accommodations with the NYPD in the year since police officers staged a minor revolt against him by turning their backs as he spoke at the funeral of two cops who were killed by a mentally deranged man, calling for anti-police brutality protests to end.

In April, the mayor weighed in on the police shooting of Saheed Vassell, an unarmed mentally ill black man, claiming that there was not enough time for police to know he was mentally ill and did not pose a threat. Two of the three police involved in the shooting were from the elite Special Response Group. De Blasio also defended his community policing program—which is based on cultivating police informers in working-class neighborhoods—as a means of addressing police shootings.

The brutal actions of Frascatore and his kid-glove treatment by the NYPD and de Blasio are not simply a blemish on an otherwise healthy body but reflect the conscious cultivation of ruthless individuals by police departments and by both capitalist parties to intimidate the working class. The ruling elite will turn to thugs like Frascatore and Pantaleo to suppress any movement of workers against attacks on living standards, particularly in one of the most unequal cities on the planet.

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