

New York police officers caught running prostitution ring

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On September 13, seven New York Police Department (NYPD) officers were arrested for running prostitution rings and illegal gambling operations in Brooklyn and Queens. The result of a three-year investigation, the officers are charged with promoting prostitution, bribery, enterprise corruption, and misconduct.

Those arrested include three sergeants and two detectives. They all are accused of providing the brothels protection from the police in one way or another.

The charges were brought following a three-year inquiry in which dozens of undercover police officers were sent to several locations where the prostitution racket was thought to operate. In the course of the investigation more than 300 hours of video surveillance was recorded and evidence was obtained through court-approved wiretaps of the suspected cops.

The leader of the illegal operation, former Detective Ludwig Paz, ran brothels in Brooklyn, Queens, and Hempstead, New York. As a former vice detective, Paz exploited his extensive knowledge of NYPD Vice Unit procedures to avoid detection. He ran the illegal enterprise with his wife, Arelis Peralta, and his stepdaughters Jarelis Guzman and Arisbel Guzman.

The officers involved were paid to tip off Paz to investigations of his rackets. One defendant in the case, Detective Rene Samaniego, gave Paz physical descriptions of undercover cops assigned to visit prostitutes. Sometimes Samaniego relayed this information from the station house and other times from outside the brothel itself while wearing a badge. Samaniego was paid \$500 a week for his services. Aiming to keep his cover, Detective Samaniego arrested a woman in 2017 for offering sex for money, while he was engaged in aiding Paz.

Other officers, such as brothers Cliff and Steven Nieves, worked as doormen for the brothels run by Paz. Officer Steven Nieves was videotaped accepting “large sums of cash” according to Christine Oliveri, the Queens assistant District Attorney. His brother Cliff also worked at the same location setting prices for sex with the prostitutes.

With their aid, Paz was able to operate for thirteen months before his arrest. In return for their services, the cops received discounted sex and cash payments. In total, the brothels operated by the former detective produced more than \$2 million in profit.

Although “the evidence in this case is overwhelming” according to Bradley Chain, the Queens senior assistant District Attorney on the case, all seven police officers pleaded not guilty. In a striking instance of juridical inequality, all seven of the officers were released without any bail being posted.

In addition to their activities abetting Paz’s prostitution ring, the accused officers “have a stack of wrongful-arrest and excessive force complaints and lawsuits over the years” according to the *New York Times*.

At a news conference last Thursday, NYPD Police Commissioner James P. O’Neill said that the illegal conduct of the seven charged officers “validates those who harbor distrust of their police” and that “although it’s a step backward, it’s an episode that our city and the NYPD will rebound from together.”

Corruption among the police in New York is endemic and has deep historical roots. Statements from Queens councilman Rory Lancman about the scandal reflected the systemic nature of illegal police conduct in America’s biggest city. The councilman noted that one of the accused officers served in the 109th Precinct in Flushing, a precinct that saw a similar police protection

case in 2015. He wondered out loud, “how is it possible that a cop in the 1-0-9 would think they could engage in corruption after seeing their colleagues hauled off in handcuffs within the last couple of years?”

It is also significant that several of the officers have faced accusations of brutality in the past. The thug-like character of the NYPD is underscored by the fact that some of its personnel are guilty of both wanton violence against, and brutal exploitation of, the most vulnerable sections of society. Despite the arrest of these officers, which is not much more than a public relations event to restore the credibility of the police force, NYPD cops operate under a law of their own.

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When police officers are called to account for their unlawful actions they can depend on the legal arm of the NYPD to come to their aid. In New York a team of lawyers in the City’s Law Department, named the Special Federal Litigation Division, aggressively defends police officers when they are accused of misconduct.

“Special Fed” has been accused of obstructionist behavior by six federal judges and myriad civil-rights organizations. In one case, a federal judge said the group had “blown off” his instructions and that its actions were “outrageous.” In another instance, the unit never fulfilled its obligation to investigate an excessive force complaint and then did not respond to 14 orders to produce discovery evidence. This conduct was called “egregious” by a second federal judge.

In a third case, Special Fed took more than a year to give a man who had sued the police a recording of his questioning from the day of his arrest. This behavior was deemed as “negligent, if not grossly negligent” by a third federal judge.

According to attorney Joel B. Rudin, who has faced the unit in court several times on behalf of victims of police misconduct, “They will use every trick in the book to prolong a case and wear down the plaintiff and the plaintiff’s lawyers, delaying discovery and basically making fights over nothing.”

The decision was made in 2011, under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, that Special Fed was to assume a more aggressive posture in defending police officers, under the name the Trial Initiative. This anti-democratic attack on the working class has been

deepened under Bloomberg’s successor, the supposed progressive Democrat Bill de Blasio. The mayor labelled the creation of a 40-person legal team inside the Police Department in 2015 as “a practical response ... [to the] cynical reality of lawyers trying to scam the system.”

Last year Special Fed won 88 percent of the 44 cases brought against NYPD officers for misconduct.



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