New York Mayor Bill de Blasio defends police violence against protesters

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Over the weekend and into Monday night, mass protests against police brutality engulfed New York City and the wider region. Despite New York City emerging as the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US, with at least 16,410 deaths, popular anger over the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis was so great that tens of thousands of protestors took to the streets. Across the city's five boroughs, the demonstrations were met by bands of heavily armed police who attacked protesters, injuring hundreds.

At the time of this writing on Monday evening, thousands had reconvened in Manhattan's Union Square, with hundreds of heavily armed cops already deployed in the area.

As of Monday afternoon, at least 600 individuals had been arrested in New York City, with around 200 of those occurring overnight Sunday. On Sunday morning, the New York Police Department (NYPD) reported that 33 police officers had been injured and 47 police vehicles damaged.

On Monday afternoon, the Democratic governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, announced that the city would be placed under curfew from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. He also announced that the NYPD's overnight presence would be increased from 4,000 to 8,000 officers.

As has been the case across the US, videos of NYPD police violently attacking peaceful protesters have been uploaded online and viewed millions of times. A woman walking along a Brooklyn street was violently pushed to the ground by officers clad in body armor. The head trauma she suffered in the impact caused her to have a seizure.

Another video shows a protestor at Union Square being repeatedly kicked by an officer despite being restrained on the ground by four other cops. Another video showing an NYPD officer pointing a gun at protesters on 12th Street near Union Square on Sunday night has also gone viral. A now infamous video shows cops intentionally ramming protesters with a squad car in Flatbush, Brooklyn on Saturday evening.

In a news conference later Saturday night, Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio defended the officers in control of the vehicle, stating, "If those protesters had just gotten out of the way… we would not be talking about this situation." He added, "The protesters in that video did the wrong thing to surround that police car, period."

In response to these statements, #DeBlasioResign was trending on Twitter all day Sunday.

On Monday morning, de Blasio stated that "overall our officers showed restraint." He continued, "An overall peaceful protest was handled the way we wanted it to be handled."

Echoing Democratic mayors across the country and President Donald Trump, de Blasio made use of the "outside agitators" canard to shift the focus from the police murder of Floyd and police violence against protesters to alleged mass looting and violence by the demonstrators. He blamed scattered incidents of window-smashing, attacks on police vehicles and looting on "folks who are not from our community."

De Blasio sought somewhat to walk back his categorical defense of the police who plowed their cruisers into peaceful protesters on Saturday, saying, "There is no situation where a police vehicle should drive at a crowd of protesters. It is dangerous. It is unacceptable." But he immediately qualified this timid criticism of the police by adding, "This was an extremely aberrant situation and there were extenuating circumstances."

The mayor called merely for a "review" of those

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caught on video brutalizing peaceful protesters and said the cops involved in the ramming incident should be removed from the NYPD. There was no suggestion of a criminal investigation and prosecution of the homicidal officers.

De Blasio, who won his first mayoral election in 2013 by presenting himself as a "progressive," has long since revealed himself to be a loyal servant of Wall Street, like all other Democratic politicians. During his two terms, the city has seen inequality, poverty and homelessness rise to record levels.

Nevertheless, de Blasio mounted a campaign for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination in competition with his fellow would-be "progressives" Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. After this bid failed miserably, de Blasio pulled out of the race and endorsed Sanders in February.

From the outset of his first term as mayor in 2014, de Blasio's relations with the NYPD have been highly strained. Large sections of the police force and the leadership of the police unions have never forgiven de Blasio for ending the so-called "stop and frisk" policy, which was a green light for harassment and arbitrary arrest of working class youth, particularly minority working class youth.

De Blasio's criticisms of the police involved in the 2014 murder of Eric Garner compounded the hatred of many cops for the mayor. In December 2014, NYPD officers turned their back to the mayor at a cop's funeral to protest the criticism. De Blasio's response was to seek to conciliate with his fascistic opponents within the NYPD.

Now, in the aftermath of the murder of Floyd and the nationwide outpouring of protest against police brutality, under conditions where Trump is inciting police violence against demonstrators, de Blasio's control over the police force has become tenuous at best.

Contrary to de Blasio's claims, the NYPD does not "serve and protect" anyone but Wall Street and the capitalist class. It is a highly militarized wing of the capitalist state, with an annual budget of nearly $6 billion. It has brutalized the working class in New York City for decades.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic it made a spate of violent arrests. While the department's operations are nominally subordinated to New York City's elected officials, in response to the protests, the NYPD are increasingly acting as an independent occupying force in the city.

In an effort to intimidate de Blasio, the twitter account of the Sergeants Benevolent Association, the second largest police union in the city, published the internal arrest report on Chiara de Blasio, the Mayor's daughter. The mayor's daughter was arrested near the Union Square protest on Saturday night.

The tweet included private information including her height, weight, address, date of birth and driver's license. It was later deleted for violating the site's privacy regulations. The post questioned how the police could protect New Yorkers from "rioting anarchists" when "the mayor's object-throwing daughter is one of them."

Speaking later, Ed Mullins, the head of the union, addressed the mayor directly, saying, "Is that why you're tying our hands, because your daughter is out there?" The mayor's only response to this threat to his family was to call the act "unconscionable."

The lesson that must be drawn from de Blasio's tenure as mayor, including his impotence and complicity in police brutality, as well as the criminal response of his administration to the COVID-19 pandemic, is the futility of all attempts to reform the capitalist Democratic Party along "progressive" lines.

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