

New York City police commissioner Bratton resigns

By Philip Guelpa and Fred Mazelis
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Last week's announcement of the resignation of New York City Police Commissioner Bill Bratton comes at a time of growing protests against police violence, as well as a counteroffensive aimed at building up support for police repression of the working class.

Bratton's career spans 45 years. He is best known for his tenure at the head of the New York Police Department (NYPD), as well as the Los Angeles Police Department, and is perhaps the most recognizable local police official in the US. He is most closely associated with the "broken windows" strategy of policing, focusing on petty violations in the name of preventing more serious crimes.

"Broken windows" grew to encompass the notorious "stop and frisk" policy, in which working class youth, disproportionately black and Hispanic in New York City, have been harassed in huge numbers.

Stop-and-frisk targeted nearly 700,000 workers and youth in 2011. It was declared unconstitutional in 2013, a decision that was later overturned but remains in court for final adjudication. In the meantime, however, enormous anger in working class communities has led to a drastic reduction in these stops, with the police trying other techniques aimed at defending the regime of unprecedented and ever-rising social inequality in the city.

It is notable that, despite the reduction of the number of stops, there has been no increase in crime, thus demonstrating that stop-and-frisk was never about crime but rather about intimidation and harassment.

Bratton's first tour as police commissioner in the US' largest city came with the election of Republican Rudolph Giuliani as mayor. He served from 1994-96, but left in a dispute with Giuliani that seemed to have more to do with personality than policy. Bratton, exhibiting a political dexterity for which he has become

known, returned in 2014 after the election of Democrat Bill de Blasio, supposedly the liberal opposite of the right-wing Giuliani.

De Blasio, the first Democrat to serve as mayor of New York City in more than 20 years, no doubt calculated that Bratton would shore up his law-and-order credentials. And in the past two-and-a-half years, the police commissioner has given right-wing editorialists such as those of Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* much reason for satisfaction. He presided over a growth in the department to 36,000, with 1,300 new officers added in 2015 alone. He also oversaw a substantial militarization of the NYPD, including the addition of assault rifles and body armor.

During Bratton's most recent tenure the city has figured prominently in the growing wave of police killings, with the chokehold death of Eric Garner on Staten Island in July 2014 and the shooting death of Akai Gurley in Brooklyn later that same year.

The immediate reason for Bratton's resignation, to take place in mid-September, is unclear. Only a few weeks ago he suggested that he would be around for most or all of the remaining 17 months of de Blasio's first term before his expected bid for re-election.

It is possible that the 68-year-old Bratton decided to "cash in" on his decades of service to the ruling elite, as nearly all past elected and appointed officials at his level have done. He will be joining a private corporate consulting firm, Teneo Holdings, at an undisclosed salary. The firm was founded by two highly-placed Democrats, one of whom served in the administration of President Bill Clinton, and the other under Hillary Clinton when she was Secretary of State.

It should also be noted that Bratton leaves during an ongoing federal investigation of corruption within the

NYPD, in which several high-ranking officers have already been charged.

For most of the past 25 years, the NYPD has been led by two men, Bratton and Raymond Kelly (1992-94 and 2002-13). Perhaps with this in mind, de Blasio spoke of “continuity” at the news conference at which Bratton’s departure was announced and his successor, James P. O’Neill, was introduced.

O’Neill, who has known Bratton for about 25 years and was reportedly the outgoing commissioner’s choice for the post, told the news conference, “We never stop trying to drive down crime and quell disorder...” In the context of rapidly widening economic inequality and economic stagnation in the years following the 2008 crash, the promise to “quell disorder” is a clear warning that the interests of the city’s elite will be protected by the full force of the NYPD.

De Blasio and Bratton also touted so-called “neighborhood policing,” which the mayor said would “change everything.” Similar words have been uttered before, only to be followed by more of the same police harassment and abuse. This time around, in the name of better police-community relations, “neighborhood coordinating officers” will, among other things, pass out their cell phone numbers. This is, in effect, an attempt to create a network of informers to forewarn police of impending “disorder.”

The changing of the guard at the NYPD must be seen in the context of the growing anger reflected in the primary contests of both major capitalist parties in the 2016 election. In the case of the Democrats, the ruling elite pivoted from the massive support for Bernie Sanders in the primaries to a convention that emphasized support for the military and the police.

A law-and-order counteroffensive has been mounted in response to the mass protests of the last several years. New York City’s new police commissioner will be expected to carry a big stick against an increasingly angry working class.

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