

New York City police in open revolt against Mayor de Blasio

By Philip Guelpa
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Using the pretext of a pair of attacks on police officers by a single individual, now in custody, Edward Mullins, the head of the Sergeants Benevolent Association, the union representing New York City police sergeants, announced that the police were “declaring war” on the city’s mayor, Democrat Bill de Blasio. Mullins went on to say, “De Blasio is to blame for this... We have sent the message that it is OK to jump turnstiles... it is OK to resist arrest. We’re emboldening criminals.”

These sentiments of police as victims were echoed by Detectives Endowment Association Vice-President Paul DiGiacamo. “It sends a terrible message onto the community. It promotes criminal activity with no consequences,” DiGiacamo said. “The people who suffer... are the people out there enforcing the law.”

This coordinated response by the police is part of a right-wing backlash against a new state law eliminating cash bail for non-violent offences, a policy which had targeted the working class, many of whom languished in jail for months or years before going to trial because they didn’t have the thousands of dollars required to be set free.

Wild and unsubstantiated claims have been made by the police that since the beginning of the year, when the new law took effect, the crime rate in the city has shot up by 16.9 percent year over year due to dangerous criminals being let loose. This while statistics indicate that murders are down by six percentage points and rapes have also declined. Overall, the city has experienced the lowest crime rates in decades.

Nevertheless, in an effort to foment a climate of fear and hysteria, as a justification for increased police violence and repression against the working class, the police union head accused the mayor of selling out the New York City Police Department (NYPD) to “vile

creatures, the 1 percent who hate cops but vote for you.” These “vile creatures” which draw the ire of the police are in fact poor, working class individuals who have the democratic right to be considered innocent until and unless proven guilty at trial. According to the NYPD, however, the poor have no such rights.

This campaign toward establishing a police state atmosphere received the enthusiastic backing of President Donald Trump, who tweeted that the New York police were “under assault,” blaming the mayor and the state’s governor, Andrew Cuomo, also a Democrat, for weak leadership. Trump’s constant promotion of the police and military is part of his efforts to build a fascistic movement against the working class. In response, the head of the sergeants’ union stated that Trump should “send in the feds.” In effect, raising a call for martial law in the United States’ largest city. US Attorney General William Barr stated, “I want them to know that they have the full support of this administration and this Department of Justice.”

Both de Blasio and Cuomo reacted with vapid statements decrying what amounts to an open threat against civilian control of the police force. De Blasio whined that it is dangerous for Mullins to “foment hatred and division.” The mayor attempted to solidarize himself with the police after the shooting incidents, saying, “Anyone who spews hatred at our officers is aiding and abetting this kind of atmosphere.”

The response of NYPD Police Commissioner Dermot Shea was even more tepid, characterizing Mullins’ statements as “inappropriate.” It was in fact Shea who first claimed that the supposed spike in crime during January was the result of the curtailment of cash bail.

Cuomo commented that relations between the police and the community are “dangerously frayed.” This

follows demonstrations against the increased use of police in the New York subways, prompted by the governor's call for an additional 500 police to patrol the transit system.

In an expression of their true class positions, both de Blasio and Cuomo, who had previously supported the legislation eliminating cash bail for non-violent offenses, have since backpedaled, calling for adjustments to be made.

What amounts to a police revolt in New York City, supposedly provoked over two incidents against police carried out by a single individual, must be seen in its proper context. Over one thousand people were shot and killed by police in the US last year. The total so far for 2020 is at least 90. The growing class struggle around the world has been met by increased ruling class violence and repression, from police attacks on demonstrators in France to the establishment of concentration camps for immigrants on the US southern border.

New York is one of the most unequal cities in the world. Over 60,000 of the city's residents are homeless. While the city's elite amass ever greater amounts of wealth, the income gap between them and the majority of the population continues to widen. As of last year, New York was home to 103 billionaires. The top one percent of the population accounted for 40 percent of total income. Twenty percent of New Yorkers are officially considered poor, nearly twice the rate in 1970. Under such circumstances, a social explosion is inevitable, and the ruling class is preparing to respond.

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