

A Political Mobilization of the American Police

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The funeral Saturday for New York policeman Rafael Ramos, attended by an estimated 25,000 police from all over the United States, was a carefully orchestrated political event. With a list of speakers that included not only New York Governor Andrew Cuomo but also Vice President Joseph Biden, its purpose was to exploit the December 20 killing of two New York City patrolmen to mount a counteroffensive against the upsurge of popular anger over police brutality and murder. It provided an opportunity for a display of force aimed at intimidating and delegitimizing opposition to the wave of lethal police violence.

Prior to last week's killing of the two New York City policemen, the police were on the political defensive. December began with coast-to-coast demonstrations against the rigged grand jury proceedings that allowed policemen in Ferguson, Missouri and New York's Staten Island to go scot-free after killing unarmed black men. The whitewash of Officer Darren Wilson November 22, and the similar result for Officer Daniel Pantaleo December 3, underscored the reality that policemen kill with impunity in the United States.

These two cases resonated in the context of daily police violence, including the November 20 killing of Akai Gurley, 28, in the stairwell of a Brooklyn housing project by a cop who claimed his gun went off "accidentally," and the November 22 execution-style killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, shot from a police car one second after it rolled up to the playground where he was playing with a toy gun.

Angered by these events, tens of thousands, including many youth and students, took part in protests demanding action. Many raised chants such as "Hands up! Don't Shoot!" and "I can't breathe," alluding to the last action of 18-year-old Michael Brown Jr. and the last words of 45-year-old Eric Garner, the victims in the Ferguson and Staten Island police killings.

The initial response to these protests by the political establishment was an attempt to co-opt them. Political agents of the Democratic Party such as Al Sharpton were assigned to give the protests a racial orientation, presenting the problem purely as one of white cops and black victims and thus disguising the deeper issue: the systematic buildup of state violence against all sections of the working class and the steady dismantling of democratic rights and constitutional procedures in the United States.

President Obama mouthed words of sympathy and appointed a commission to study police-community relations (packed with policemen and Democratic Party operatives). At the same time, he declared his support for the continued militarization of the police, keeping in place the Pentagon program that supplies local police departments with armored cars, machine guns and other advanced weaponry for urban warfare.

The demonstrations grew, with 25,000 turning out in Manhattan and at least 10,000 more in

Washington DC on December 13.

The December 20 killing of New York patrolmen Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu provided an opportunity for the defenders and apologists for police brutality to push back. The two were gunned down by Ismaaiyl Brinsley, a mentally disturbed Baltimore man who first shot his ex-girlfriend, then posted threats against police on the Internet demanding vengeance for the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, and finally took a bus to New York City and shot the two policemen as they sat in their patrol car in Brooklyn.

There was no connection between Brinsley's deranged action and the mass protests against police violence of the preceding weeks and months. But this did not stop fascist-minded cops and politicians, from the appropriately named police union leader Patrick Lynch to former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, from declaring that all those who publicly opposed police violence had "blood on their hands."

Perhaps the most politically significant statement of this slander came from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, in his address to the funeral service Saturday. "I frankly was amazed at the discipline and professionalism that the NYPD demonstrated," he said. "The NYPD protected the right of freedom of speech even though they themselves were the target of false and abusive chants and tirades by some."

Cuomo's statement exemplifies the extent to which a thoroughly fascist and police-state mentality pervades the ruling elite. The governor expresses his amazement that the police deigned to tolerate protests against its violent attacks on the civilian population. Apparently, Cuomo would have understood and sympathized with a bloody police crackdown on protesters.

The real attitude of the NYPD to constitutional rights was on display outside the church, where hundreds of police turned their backs when Mayor Bill de Blasio took the podium to deliver a eulogy. This action was a demonstration against de Blasio's public posture of sympathy with the demonstrators against police brutality, and especially to his statement that he had counseled his biracial son to be cautious and avoid any possible provocation in encounters with the police.

The demonstration of contempt for de Blasio has a more far-reaching significance, however. It reveals the attitude of the police-military apparatus at every level to the civilian officials who nominally hold authority over them. From the cop on the beat to the CIA torturers and the military brass, those who carry out the dirty work of violence on behalf of the financial aristocracy are resentful of the restraints of legality and outraged when called to account for outright crimes.

The corporate-controlled media promotes this contempt for civilian authority. The New York tabloids have had one screaming headline after another aimed at glorifying the police and whipping de Blasio into line—quite successfully, as his meek performance of the past week has demonstrated.

No police department is less deserving of such praise than the NYPD, which has a filthy history of corruption and violence. As far back as the Knapp Commission (1970-71), triggered by the whistleblowing of detective Frank Serpico, the NYPD has been a watchword for bribe taking, shakedowns, and the virtual police takeover of criminal enterprises such as drug dealing. The names of victims of NYPD violence—from Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, and

Abner Louima to Eric Garner and Akai Gurley—mark its endless and ongoing brutality.

Democratic politicians like Vice President Biden, Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio can be counted on to toe the line in defense of the police. But these efforts only expose the extent to which even the formal trappings of democracy are being eroded and the Bill of Rights trampled upon.

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