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Hundreds arrested in US protests against Ferguson whitewash

By Jerry White
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Police arrested more than 400 protesters in Ferguson, Missouri, Los Angeles and other cities over the last few nights during demonstrations against the exoneration of the policeman who murdered unarmed black teenager Michael Brown.

On Wednesday night, 2,200 Missouri National Guard troops, along with hundreds of police and FBI agents maintained their occupation of the St. Louis suburb of 21,000 residents. The police and soldiers, using tear gas, “responded swiftly” to protests, according to local news reports, which showed Humvees and other military vehicles in the streets and protesters being thrown to the ground and dragged off by police.

More than 100 protesters have been arrested in Ferguson—61 Monday and 45 Tuesday—since the St. Louis County prosecutor announced that there would be no charges against officer Darren Wilson, the policeman who fired twelve shots at Brown, hitting him at least six times.

One protest organizer told the media that police arbitrarily stopped his car and threatened the occupants with guns pointed at their heads. After he spent hours in custody, a police officer acknowledged that his car had been under observation for days since he was known as a leader of the protests.

In nearby St. Louis on Wednesday, police arrested at least five protesters at City Hall. Hundreds of people demonstrated in front of the municipal building, shouting “Shame! Shame!” When some allegedly entered the building, police carrying riot shields quickly arrested them.

Denouncing protesters for “lawlessness” and “destruction,” Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, a Democrat, more than tripled the number of National Guard soldiers in the city Tuesday. Last week, Nixon announced a preemptive “state of emergency,” activating the National Guard to suppress protests.

Police and soldiers basically stood down Monday night as several stores were burned and looted, allowing the media to gather the video footage necessary to slander the protests as violent rioting incited by “criminal elements,” before the authorities launched a full-scale crackdown.

Public officials, from President Obama on down, have denounced the “destructive violence,” and the media is buying for more troops and repression in Ferguson. But tens of thousands of university and high school students and working people of all races participated in demonstrations across the US to express their solidarity with the residents of the besieged city and to denounce the rigged grand jury decision.

On Tuesday and Wednesday protests erupted in at least 130 cities across the United States, with the largest demonstrations in New York City, Los Angeles and Washington, DC. A massive mobilization of state forces was carried out in response, and there were mass arrests in several cities.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), notorious for its own brutality and criminality, arrested nearly 200 protesters late Tuesday evening and early Wednesday morning. LA police chief Charlie Beck said, “When you see folks looting and fires and police cars being vandalized and the extreme degree of tension that we all saw, it does remind me of 1992,” referring to the riots that erupted after the exoneration of the cops that beat black motorist Rodney King.

On Tuesday, riot-equipped policemen outside of the LAPD headquarters used crowd-control methods to box in protesters and carry out mass arrests in the downtown area. Others were arrested by California Highway Patrol officers when they attempted to block traffic on the Hollywood Freeway (US 101).

The LAPD said 167 arrests were for disturbing the peace, one for felony assault on a police officer and 15 for curfew violations. Those arrested have been jailed in the Metropolitan Detention Center.

Police in Boston said on Wednesday that 45 people were arrested in protests overnight that drew more than a thousand demonstrators, according to the Reuters news agency. In Dallas, seven were arrested for blocking traffic on Interstate 35, a major north-south US roadway.

In New York City police used pepper spray against protesters and arrested at least ten people after they tried to block the Lincoln Tunnel and Triborough Bridge.

The police repression took place as new information emerged about the whitewash of the police murder of Michael Brown. A day after ABC News broadcast an uncritical interview with Wilson, with anchorman George Stephanopoulos allowing the well-coached cop's claims that he killed Brown in self-defense to go unchallenged, it was revealed that police who arrived on the scene of the August 9 murder immediately began a cover-up.

According to transcripts of the grand jury proceedings, Wilson was allowed to keep his gun and wash the blood off his hands before any testing, and only later in the day did he turn in his police pistol as evidence. The policeman who took Wilson's initial statement at the shooting scene did not take notes or use a recorder, and investigators from the St. Louis Medical Examiner's Office never took photos or any distance measurements at the scene.

The grand jury proceedings were no more legitimate than the "investigation" by the police and medical examiner. According to data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, of the more than 162,500 cases presented by US prosecutors from 2009 to 2010, grand juries voted not to return an indictment in only 11—i.e., one in 14,759 cases, or 0.0068 percent.

The grand jury in the Michael Brown murder brought back no charges precisely because St. Louis County Prosecutor Robert McCulloch and the political forces behind him did not want a prosecution.

The police have been given a license to kill and unleash military repression against the American people by the entire political establishment, from the Obama administration and the Justice Department, down to the state and local level. Determined to impose deeply unpopular policies of austerity, poverty-level wages and war, the American ruling elite is increasingly resorting to authoritarian methods: militarized police, mass arrests, domestic spying and state-sanctioned murder.

The United States regularly denounces regimes for suppressing "their own people" and violating human rights if these governments happen to come into conflict with US foreign policy. Endless imperialist-backed "color revolutions," including in Iran and Ukraine, have employed this method to destabilize and overturn regimes in pursuit of US geopolitical interests. Meanwhile, the capitalist state in the US employs violent repression in an effort to terrorize and suppress social opposition to unprecedented levels of social inequality.