

Scores arrested in three days of protests over Missouri police shooting

Shannon Jones
13 August 2014

Three days of protests over the police shooting of an unarmed teenager in Ferguson, Missouri have been met with a violent police crackdown, with more than 50 people arrested. Fifteen more were taken into custody overnight Monday, as heavily armed police met continued protests by firing rubber bullets and tear gas.

In one incident police fired tear gas at protestors standing in their own backyards. A pregnant woman said she was thrown on the ground, maced and held at gunpoint by police Sunday night.

Protests erupted following the police killing of Michael Brown, age 18, who, according to eyewitnesses, had his hands raised in the air when he was shot between seven and ten times by a police officer. After the killing, the black youth's body was left bleeding on the ground for several hours.

On Tuesday, President Obama issued a statement expressing condolences to the family of Brown, reflecting the concern in the ruling elite over the anger generated by the killing. Obama's remarks were completely hypocritical. His administration has given a green light to the militarization of the police and overseen a wave of police killings from coast to coast.

According to reports, the Federal Aviation Administration has restricted flights in the air space over Ferguson "to provide a safe environment for law enforcement activities." During the week, only certain flights under the direction of the St. Louis County Police Department are to be allowed. The ban affects TV news helicopters.

A rally Tuesday targeted the office of the St. Louis County prosecutor in Clayton, Missouri. About 150 people joined the protest, waving signs and raising their arms over their heads in symbolic protest over the killing of the unarmed youth.

On Monday evening, protestors marched with their

hands in the air shouting, "don't shoot," and "we are Michael Brown." About 100 police were on the scene, shining bright lights into the faces of the crowd.

Police said they used tear gas and beanbag rounds after they heard a shot fired. Even journalists were reportedly threatened with arrest if they did not leave the area. Expressing the anger felt by workers and young people over the shooting, one person yelled, "What are you going to do, kill all of us?"

The same night, a community forum sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) drew more than 1,000 people. Rather than condemning the police provocations, however, NAACP President Cornell Williams Brooks laid the blame for violence on workers and young people in the community. He expressed confidence in the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of the case.

The wanton killing of the teenager has ignited simmering social tensions in Ferguson, a working class community located in suburban St. Louis with a population that is two-thirds African-American. The region suffers an unemployment rate above the national average and 90,000 jobs have left the St. Louis metropolitan area since 2008. About a quarter of the residents of Ferguson live below the federal poverty level.

The family of the slain young man is demanding that the officer, who has not yet been identified, be fired from the police department and prosecuted on murder charges. The victim's family has hired attorney Benjamin Crump, who represented the family of Trayvon Martin, the black teenager killed by a vigilante last year in Florida. The family is asking anyone who may have taken video of the killing to come forward.

At a news conference Tuesday, Crump attacked the decision by Ferguson police not to release the name of

the policeman who carried out the shooting. Local officials had earlier indicated the name would be made public, but later changed their mind, citing alleged safety concerns. The police officer has been placed on paid administrative leave.

Brown's mother, Lesley McSpadden, said her son had been set to start college Monday. "He was so excited to be setting an example for his younger siblings," she said. "We can't even celebrate," she continued. "We've got to plan a funeral."

Also speaking at the press conference was the Reverend Al Sharpton. He called for prayers and calm, blaming the shooting on racism. Sharpton, however, said nothing about the massive assault on democratic rights being carried out by the Obama administration.

Eyewitnesses to the killing agreed that the shooting of Brown was unprovoked. Phillip Walker was on a balcony overlooking the street when he said he saw a white officer with Brown on the street.

Brown, he said, "was giving up in the sense of raising his arms and being subdued." The cop, said Walker "had his gun raised and started shooting the individual in the chest multiple times." The policeman then shot Brown again after he fell wounded.

Brown's friend, Dorian Johnson, told a similar story. They were told by a cop to stop walking in the street and get on the sidewalk. In a confrontation that ensued, the police officer fired a shot, at which point the boys started to run away. After the officer fired again, Brown turned and raised his hands, "But the officer still approached with his weapon drawn and fired several more shots."

In an effort to deflect anger, US Attorney General Eric Holder said the Justice Department would conduct an investigation into the shooting of Brown. On Monday, the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a civil rights inquiry into the case.

The police killing of Brown has struck a deep chord among workers and young people across the United States. Commentators on Twitter are coordinating a series of vigils called the National Moment of Silence to commemorate victims of police brutality, to be held on Thursday.

The police murder of Brown is the latest in a wave of police killings. Last week, 22-year-old John Crawford was shot and killed by police at a Walmart outside of Dayton, Ohio. Crawford was carrying an air rifle at the

time, which he had taken off the shelf.

On July 17, New York City police choked Eric Garner to death. They had accosted him for allegedly selling cigarettes illegally. The chokehold used by the police is prohibited by the department's guidelines. The killing, which has sparked widespread protests, has now been ruled a homicide.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact