

Democratic Party operatives seek to stifle opposition, facilitate police crackdown in Ferguson, Missouri

Eric London
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Democratic Party-affiliated organizations led by Al Sharpton held a meeting Sunday at Greater Grace Church outside Ferguson, Missouri in an effort to diffuse opposition to the August 9 police murder of unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown.

Over 700 people attended the meeting, a reflection of the mass anger in Ferguson over the killing of Brown and the militarized crackdown on protests that has followed. From start to finish, however, the meeting bore all the trademarks of a carefully planned Democratic Party operation, orchestrated by Sharpton's National Action Network in close collaboration with the police, the local Democratic machine and the Obama administration.

Aside from Sharpton, who gave the keynote address, the line-up included Democratic Congressman William Clay, Martin Luther King III, attorney Benjamin Crump, and Missouri Highway Patrol Captain Ron Johnson. Jesse Jackson was also present but did not speak.

The message issued by all the major speakers was clear: go home, register to vote and pray.

Religious paeans set the tone of the meeting, which unfolded as an exercise in obfuscation. Bishop L.O. Jones introduced the speakers by announcing his support for Johnson, who was appointed last Thursday by Democratic Governor Jay Nixon to oversee the antidemocratic crackdown that has swept the city. Nixon has declared a "state of emergency" to facilitate police repression.

The night after the event, police under Johnson's direction fired tear gas and deployed armored vehicles against peaceful protesters, well before the midnight curfew, which has now been extended indefinitely.

"Captain Johnson has been doing a very fine job," Jones said. "He is a fine man, he is working very hard, and may he be in our prayers."

Johnson has played a central role in the ruling class's efforts to divert opposition to widespread police brutality. As an African-American man from Ferguson, the political establishment felt he was well qualified to play the role of "good cop," while giving them room to intensify the attack.

With consummate hypocrisy, Johnson told the audience: "I will protect your right to protest." He then added that he hoped the events would teach him "to be a better black father."

"This is my neighborhood," he claimed. "You are my family, you are my friends. I am you."

Johnson's cynicism was outdone only by Sharpton himself, who expressly encouraged those in attendance to appeal to the most right-wing elements of the ruling class. Naming Florida's Republican Governor Jeb Bush and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton by name, Sharpton shouted demagogically: "Nobody can go to the White House until they stop by *our* house."

Sharpton went on to proclaim, "We're not anti-police, we're not anti-sitting down and solving the problem."

He then denounced the residents of the town for not voting for the Democratic Party in recent elections: "Some of y'all that are mad now weren't mad three weeks ago for election day," he said. "We've got to vote. Twelve percent [election turnout] is an insult to your children."

He went on to insult those who stayed out to demonstrate at night: "There is a difference between an activist and a thug," he said. He concluded his remarks

by calling for a voter registration drive and for young people to join his personal political machine, the NAN.

The biggest applause from the audience came when Sharpton made a brief reference to the immense social and economic crisis in Ferguson and similar cities throughout the country, saying that if the government had money to militarize the police, it had money to spend on jobs programs to put people to work. This point was greeted with a standing ovation.

Sharpton and all the main speakers at the event, however, are Democratic Party politicians and strong supporters of the Obama administration. Under Obama, vast resources have been handed out to the banks and Wall Street, while the ruling class has waged war against the jobs and living standards of the working class. Obama has also presided over an immense increase in the militarization of the police as part of a broader assault on basic democratic rights.

Several speakers made direct appeals to Obama. When Congressman Clay said, “I want to give a big shout out to the president and Attorney General Holder for stepping it up,” the applause was subdued. After Clay’s comment, a majority of the audience began engaging in side conversations. The parents of Michael Brown found their way off the stage.

The hollow refrain issued by the speakers stood in stark contrast to the explosive tensions that hung over the suburban city of 20,000 as the meeting took place. Several hours after the conclusion of the meeting, thousands of demonstrators gathered along West Florissant Street before dusk fell. The mood was a mix of elation and apprehension as the curfew approached.

Alongside the imposition of a curfew, Nixon has asserted for himself the powers available to him during a “state of emergency.”

According to Missouri law, a state of emergency may be called during a “man-made disaster of major proportions.”

Such a disaster allows the governor “to assume all direct operational control of all emergency [i.e. armed] forces and volunteers in the state” and to “seize, take, or requisition to the extent necessary to bring about the most effective protection of the public” any transportation, housing, or energy sources in the area.

The meeting called yesterday only confirms that the entire political establishment—including the likes of Sharpton and Jackson—are united in their determination

to suppress and if necessary violently repress with all the powers of the state the popular opposition that has erupted over the police murder of Michael Brown.



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