

# National Guard, police tighten grip on Ferguson, Missouri

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Police launched several rounds of tear gas and what appeared to be crowd-control percussion devices late Monday night to clear the streets of the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri after a tense half-hour confrontation between several hundred protesters and a wall of law enforcement officers 60 wide and five deep.

Police in riot gear had formed a barricade, donning gas masks and some sat with guns pointed atop armored vehicles. As an armored vehicle began moving toward the crowd, and as clergymen and other community leaders locked arms to hold the protesters back, people appeared to retreat at about 10 p.m., local time. But tensions later intensified again, with police ordering protesters over bullhorns to keep moving or face being arrested.

The first contingent of the Missouri National Guard ordered into Ferguson by Governor Jay Nixon arrived Monday afternoon and began taking up positions in a local shopping center. The unit, consisting of military police, was not to be immediately deployed on streets of the city.

Instead, the MPs were to guard the strip mall, which includes a Target store, now being used as the operations center for the multitude of police forces engaged in suppressing protests over the police killing of an eighteen-year-old unarmed black youth, Michael Brown, on August 9.

Police officials claimed that their headquarters had come under “organized attack” on Sunday night—one of the countless lies pumped out by the authorities and rebroadcast by the local and national media.

Governor Nixon repeated these claims of “deliberate, coordinated and intensifying violent acts” in his official statement ordering the National Guard into Ferguson. He declared that peaceful protests were “marred by the violent criminal acts of an organized and growing

number of individuals, many from outside the community and state, whose actions are putting the residents and businesses of Ferguson at risk.”

The cries against “outside agitators” and a “violent minority” were taken up by virtually every politician and police official in the course of Monday, right up to President Obama, who warned against “carrying guns and attacking police,” although no such incidents have taken place anywhere in Ferguson over the past nine days.

Captain Ron Johnson of the Missouri State Police, brought in last Thursday to put an African American face on the police crackdown, told a press conference in the early hours of Monday morning that the police operations center had come under organized attack by hundreds of people, some of whom threw Molotov cocktails, and that at least eight people were seen carrying guns.

“I had no alternative than to elevate the level of our response,” he said, referring to police charges with truncheons, tear gas and rubber bullets. Since then, not a shred of evidence has been produced to support this dubious claim. On the contrary, local residents described the sudden police mobilization Sunday night as completely unprovoked, a deliberate escalation of violence by the local and state authorities.

The official picture of Ferguson as a city in the throes of an armed uprising aimed at the police and local businesses may give expression to the fears of the US ruling class and its police defenders. More ominously, it may foreshadow an attempt to frame up individuals, particularly those most active in the protests over Michael Brown’s death.

There is no resemblance between this gross fabrication and the actual conditions facing the residents of the city, who are being stripped of their

democratic rights.

The main commercial street in the area where Michael Brown was killed, West Florissant Avenue, is effectively closed to vehicle traffic for several miles, clogged with police vehicles and barricades. Other barricades have been set up at major intersections throughout the small city, forcing residents to identify themselves at police checkpoints.

Protests against the police killing of Brown are still permitted, but only in the form of demonstrations on the sidewalk, in which protesters must keep moving continually. If demonstrators stop or gather together, they are warned not to congregate, then dispersed by police or arrested if they resist.

Governor Nixon, a Democrat, announced he was lifting the midnight to 5 a.m. curfew imposed on Saturday and Sunday nights, but he made it clear that this was not a relaxation of the repressive measures. It was more an assertion that a complete ban on movement after midnight was no longer needed because police were in full control of the streets.

There is also the possibility that the lifting of the curfew is aimed at encouraging isolated incidences of vandalism so as to create a pretext for mobilizing the National Guard directly against the protesters.

Throughout Monday, police escalated their clampdown on both protests and any independent media reporting of their actions. Just before noon, local and state police who had removed their badges and name tags so they could not be identified began ordering members of the press, including a *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team, to disperse or face arrest.

The reporters had gathered at the QuikTrip convenience store parking lot adjacent to the scene of Brown's killing, but were moved out of the area by officers who descended on the parking lot with dozens of police vehicles, advancing in groups on reporters and residents and demanding that they vacate the premises.

When asked by a WSWS reporter why members of the press were being asked to leave, one officer responded that it was "for your own safety." When asked if the police were planning on making arrests at the scene, the officer said, "I don't know."

Officers holding assault rifles were positioned out of sight on the periphery of the parking lot, where dozens had gathered earlier in the day and where multiple

media outlets had set up their equipment. WSWS reporters saw officers with assault weapons positioned in the parking lots of nearby apartment complexes.

Later in the afternoon, Scott Olson of Getty Images was arrested without provocation and booked at a local jail.

A researcher in Washington DC posted a report Monday on the social conditions in Ferguson, which she described as "emblematic of growing suburban poverty." Elizabeth Kneebone of the Brookings Institution is co-author of a study "Confronting Suburban Poverty in America," which was released last year.

She wrote of Ferguson: "The city's unemployment rate rose from less than 5 percent in 2000 to over 13 percent in 2010–12. For those residents who were employed, inflation-adjusted average earnings fell by one-third. The number of households using (subsidized federal housing) climbed from roughly 300 in 2000 to more than 800 by the end of the decade."

Suburban poverty has been growing rapidly throughout the last decade, she noted, with the number of such neighborhoods in the 100 largest US metropolitan areas more than doubling in that period.



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