

Protests continue against police violence in St. Louis

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About two thousand people demonstrated in downtown St. Louis, Missouri on Saturday, in a protest called to mark two months since the killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown by police in the suburb of Ferguson.

Last week a St. Louis police officer shot and killed yet another teenager who family members say was unarmed. A preliminary autopsy showed that Vonderrit Myers Jr., 18, was killed by a downward shot to the head, indicating that he, like Brown, was likely either on the ground or surrendering. He was shot between six and seven times.

Darren Wilson, the killer of Michael Brown, remains free under police protection, and the grand jury deliberating on whether or not to press charges against him is not scheduled to issue a decision until next month. Missouri Governor Jay Nixon has refused calls to replace County Prosecutor Robert McCulloch, who has strong ties to law enforcement, with a special prosecutor.

Police arrested seventeen people on Saturday night at a sit-in at the QuikTrip gas station near the area where Michael Brown was killed. Officers used pepper spray and tear gas to disperse protesters, who they said were participating in an “unlawful assembly.” A line of riot police advanced on a group of seated protesters, banging their riot batons against the ground, before carrying out mass arrests.

Protest organizers reported that a Saturday rally drew about two thousand people, significantly fewer than the six to eight thousand that they had been anticipating. The families of Michael Brown and Vonderrit Myers Jr. were present at the events but did not speak. A spokesperson for Myers’s family reiterated that the young man was unarmed when he was gunned down on Wednesday.

Unlike the earlier protests in the aftermath of Brown’s shooting, which were largely spontaneous gatherings of area residents outraged over the reign of police violence in the area and throughout the country, this weekend’s events were led and organized by political forces allied to and in the orbit of the Democratic Party.

Despite the fact that the Obama administration was intimately involved in the brutal police crackdown on peaceful protesters in Ferguson, the Democrats have sought to capitalize on the growing anger over police violence to get an edge in the upcoming elections.

“Ferguson has made it crystal clear to the African-American community and others that we’ve got to go to the polls,” said Democratic Georgia Representative John Lewis. “You participate and vote, and you can have some control over what happens to your child and your country.”

The trade unions and other affiliated outfits, having largely ignored the police crackdown in August, have now moved in, seeking to bring the demonstrations back within the framework of the political establishment.

This weekend’s events were called by Ferguson October, an organization whose sponsors include a range of trade unions, (among others, the Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of Government Employees); the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); identity politics organizations such as the New Black Panther Party; and pseudo-left groups including Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization.

“This is the perfect opportunity for organized labor to get out the message of equality in the workplace,” Mike Louis, the president of the Missouri AFL-CIO, told the

New York Times .

The so-called “weekend of resistance” included an “Interfaith Service” chaired by Cornel West, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, which is affiliated with the Democratic Party. Other events included seminars related to anarchism and feminism.

Ferguson October lists its main sponsors as Hands Up United, which refers to itself as a “youth-led movement that seeks to dismantle the New Jim Crow.”

The first national demand put forward by Hands Up United is for “Obama to come to Ferguson to meet with the people whose human rights have been violated by aggressive and militarized policing.” The second is for Attorney General “Eric Holder to use the full resources and power of the Department of Justice to implement a nationwide investigation of systematic police brutality and harassment in black and brown communities.”

The Obama administration is directly responsible for the police crackdown in Ferguson, having been in constant contact with local police during the entire operation, while making no criticism of the fact that Brown’s killer has not been charged. The Obama administration has dramatically expanded the federal programs that have militarized local law enforcement.

The police murder of Brown was followed by a violent crackdown against peaceful protesters. The largely working-class town was placed under de facto martial law, with hundreds of police, backed by National Guard troops, attacking demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets and carrying out large-scale arrests. Police arrested reporters and imposed a rule that effectively invalidated the constitutionally protected freedom of assembly.

The use of machine gun-mounted armored vehicles to support police dressed in combat fatigues and pointing assault rifles at protesters shocked the country and the world. The events demonstrated the build-up of police state methods in the US, which have been prepared for use against any expression of popular opposition to the growth of social inequality and the attack on democratic rights.

The aim of the organizations leading this past weekend’s events is to maintain the dominance of the very political establishment that is responsible for the police crackdown in Ferguson, Missouri and the broader militarization of American society.



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