

Missouri governor declares state of emergency, mobilizes National Guard ahead of protests

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18 November 2014

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon declared a state of emergency Monday and mobilized the National Guard, claiming that this was necessary to “keep members of the public safe and protect property” in anticipation of a grand jury decision on whether to bring charges against Darren Wilson, the Ferguson police officer who killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown in August.

Calling in the National Guard is a deliberate move on the part of state officials to silence and intimidate political opposition to the heavily manipulated grand jury proceeding against Wilson. A decision on whether or not to indict Wilson is expected any day.

As Nixon, a Democrat, announced the state of emergency, the streets of Ferguson, Missouri were entirely devoid of protesters, much less violence and looting. Nixon was in effect declaring that even the *possibility* of protests is sufficient to deploy the Armed Forces on the streets of an American city. The move is historically unprecedented and marks a new stage in the deliberate and systematic destruction of democratic rights.

In his executive order authorizing the state of emergency, Nixon insisted that “regardless of the outcomes of the federal and state criminal investigations, there is the possibility of expanded unrest.”

“As part of our ongoing efforts to plan and be prepared for any contingency, it is necessary to have these resources in place in advance of any announcement of the grand jury’s decision,” Nixon said in a separate statement. He added that the National Guard will “support law enforcement’s efforts to maintain peace and protect those exercising their right to free speech.”

Nixon’s claim that deploying the military to crack down on protesters is a means to protect the “right to free speech” is Orwellian. The arguments deployed—based on “protecting property,” “ensuring public safety” and stopping “unrest” in a “state of emergency”—are the standard tropes of every police state.

They are being implemented by a government that routinely cites “democracy” and “human rights” as its principal justifications for militarism and violence all over the world. If similar steps were taken in Russia or Iran, they would be accompanied by howls of protest from the American political establishment and media. But in the United States they have evoked no opposition from the representatives of the ruling class.

The declaration of a state of emergency sets a pseudo-legal framework for the ripping up of key democratic rights protected under the US Constitution. The last time Governor Nixon declared a state of emergency, during the initial protests over the killing of Brown, police effectively suspended the First Amendment right to freedom of assembly by declaring that demonstrators were subject to arrest unless they kept walking. This so-called “five-second rule” was struck down as unconstitutional by a federal judge.

The move by Nixon follows the imposition of de facto martial law last year in Boston, where residents were told to “shelter in place” following the Boston Marathon bombing, as heavily armed police conducted house-to-house warrantless searches similar to those used in the occupation of Iraq. Both Boston and Ferguson have the character of test runs for mass repression and dictatorship. They also serve to condition public opinion for a further militarization of

American society.

St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay, also a Democrat, made clear that the Armed Forces would not be confined to the suburb of Ferguson. He said the National Guard would be deployed to protect “various locations within the city of St. Louis,” adding that the military units would be used for “visibility, deterrence, and early warning.”

“It is my understanding that they will be armed,” said Slay, adding that National Guard units could be deployed at shopping centers, strip malls and government buildings.

These moves are being closely coordinated with the Obama administration. Last week, Attorney General Eric Holder visited Ferguson and held meetings with local and state officials. According to one news report, “the feds are playing an unusually hands-on role in preparing for grand jury protests.”

On the same day as the announcement of the state of emergency, ABC News released an FBI intelligence bulletin issued to local police departments in “recent days” that warns: “The announcement of the grand jury’s decision... will likely be exploited by some individuals to justify threats and attacks against law enforcement and critical infrastructure.”

The FBI said that such “infiltration” could “occur both in the Ferguson area and nationwide.” The bulletin adds that individuals with “intent to incite and engage in violence could be armed with bladed weapons or firearms, equipped with tactical gear/gas masks, or bulletproof vests to mitigate law enforcement measures.”

The memo expresses the degree to which language and concepts developed under the framework of the “war on terror” are being applied to domestic opposition to social inequality, the attack on democratic rights and war. The “extremists” planning to carry out “attacks” against “critical infrastructure” are not foreign Islamic fundamentalists, but people who engage in political protest within the United States.

The use of supposed emergency situations as part of the “war on terror” has long been the justification of the US government for gutting every basic democratic right guaranteed in the Bill of Rights.

The Obama administration, under the pretense of protecting public safety, has asserted the right to assassinate anyone it chooses, including US citizens,

and has presided over the expansion of a military/intelligence apparatus that records, analyzes and reads the day-to-day communications of millions of people.

It is notable that both Nixon and Mayor Slay are Democrats, and that the deployment of the National Guard against future protests has not evoked condemnation from any section of the Democratic Party.

The events in Ferguson are an expression of the disintegration of democracy in the United States. A tiny ruling elite dominates all aspects of economic, social and political life, while the great majority of the population, facing precarious economic conditions, sees itself marginalized and feels increasingly alienated, as revealed in the mass abstention in the midterm elections earlier this month. Under these conditions, the ruling elite responds to any manifestation of social opposition on the part of the population with police violence and intimidation.



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