

“This country is turning into a police state”

Ferguson residents condemn mobilization of National Guard against protests

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Anticipating mass protests in response to the imminent grand jury decision in the police killing of Michael Brown, Missouri’s Democratic Governor Jay Nixon mobilized the state’s National Guard forces Monday afternoon, declaring an official “state of emergency.” The moves toward martial law were necessary to meet “the possibility of expanded unrest” in the St. Louis region, Nixon said.

As Governor Nixon announced his decision, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to residents, including customers at a fast-food restaurant on West Florissant Avenue in Ferguson.

People spoke to the WSWWS with a sense of urgency. The tone of their voices indicated a shared understanding that their hometown could be placed under siege by military and police forces within hours.

“This country is turning into a police state,” said Chris, a local tattoo artist, in a telephone interview. “The First Amendment doesn’t really exist anymore. They’re calling in the National Guard for protests that have been peaceful! It is totally uncalled for. They are armed to the teeth and they have tanks and military helicopters. The Department of Homeland Security is here. The military is here to enforce martial law.”

“They’re trying to start a war,” said Tony, a young man who lives near the restaurant on Florissant. “Why else do you think they would send the National Guard?”

As Tony spoke, a group of people gathered around and nodded in agreement. Within a short period of time, an entire section of the restaurant was engaged in a heated political discussion.

“Protestors are dying because we’re trying to do right,” Tony said. “We want justice. Justice is in the

Pledge of Allegiance, so why can’t we get it?”

Marvin Swanson, a 57-year-old maintenance technician, spoke to another WSWWS reporter a few tables away.

“This means they’re letting that cop go,” Swanson said, after hearing of Governor Nixon’s decision.

“They were setting it up all along,” Swanson added.

Swanson—like most Ferguson residents who spoke to the WSWWS—said he assumed that the police officer who shot Michael Brown, Darren Wilson, would not be punished for the killing. He had anticipated moves to mobilize police forces and the National Guard to crush any opposition.

“It’s not fair at all,” he said. “They have videos of the police blatantly killing Michael Brown. It’s not a secret to me. I knew they were not going to prosecute this guy. The police prosecute who they want to prosecute, and they’re going to kill whoever they want, when they want.”

“We can voice our opinion, but it doesn’t matter. You can tell the truth, but they’ll come back and hit you upside the head with a bat. The National Guard mobilization is definitely a threat.”

In another section of the restaurant, a group of young men grew increasingly enraged as they spoke about the situation. At one point, they paused to watch a press conference given by the St. Louis mayor, Democratic Party politician Francis Slay, on a nearby television.

The mobilization of the National Guard “is not to protect protesters,” said Zephany Bolden Jr., responding to one of Mayor Slay’s assertions. Zephany, a lifelong Ferguson resident, confirmed that the decision to deploy National Guard units was widely anticipated in the area.

“Everybody knows why they’re bringing these troops in,” he said.

“Look at them! They look like the soldier from *Call of Duty*,” he added, pointing to a video game cover that depicts a combat marine, armed to the teeth.

“What they’re defending is poverty, poor schools and unemployment. Look where they stick us! Ferguson is the centerpiece of destruction, poverty, disrespect and harassment. There is no assistance for the people here. They’re cutting WIC, food stamps, and Section 8 housing vouchers. Anything that has to do with helping the people, they’re against.”

Another young man denounced the ongoing cuts to basic social programs, saying that they were forcing residents to resort to desperate measures.

“They wonder why there’s looting? Well, there’s poverty here and we have kids! You get an opportunity to get food for free? You’d better take it. They’re taking food stamps away and cutting Medicaid, while food prices are going up! They get mad when people loot? We’ll—they stopped food stamps!” he said.

The endless wars waged by the US government are responsible for the lack of basic necessities for the American population, Zephany said.

“Obama’s going to start a war in another part of the world, but what do we get from these wars? They’re cutting food stamps! What did we get from those wars? They take our money and build stuff that isn’t beneficial to anybody but the rich class of people.”

One of Zephany’s friends agreed and spoke up. “I was reading about how the rich raise money to care for their dogs,” he said. “What about the homeless folks? The rich know how to take care of animals, but what about people? What about the babies and families and the elderly, sick and homeless? They could invest in that! They’ve been cutting employment programs and after-school programs. They’ve cut the programs that are helping the poor.”

“We need a revolution. We need one. Imagine you get ten thousand people right here and in St. Louis and all over the area. They can’t handle that,” the young man said.

A WSWS reporter pointed out the need to unite the working class across the *world*, not only in St. Louis.

The friend responded with a grin. “An international revolution would be even better.”

Zephany agreed, adding, “We all need to come

together to overthrow the government. Black, white, Puerto Rican, Filipino. We’re fighting for our lives.”

“If you shoot somebody six times, of course you should go to jail,” said Darius, another Ferguson youth who spoke to the WSWS.

“But he [officer Darren Wilson] isn’t in jail! They’re putting the trial on hold. It’s another way to make everybody mad. They want something to happen so that more people can get shot. The National Guard had ARs and tanks! This is the military! Why are you going to attack the people who pay the taxes?”

Darius, who said he did not qualify for food stamps despite living in poverty and working two part-time, minimum-wage jobs, denounced the Obama administration and the entire political establishment.

“I don’t like Obama. I don’t care if he’s black or not. He knows sending the military against the people is wrong. I just completely blow him off. There’s no point in voting, either.

“The Democrats and Republicans are the same. We don’t matter to any of them. When I watched commercials for the elections, I thought, ‘They’re both criminals, so don’t vote for any of ‘em!’ What we need is a revolution so the people can run things.”



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