

Preemptive state of emergency in Missouri

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With Missouri Governor Jay Nixon's declaration of a state of emergency, coupled with the activation of the state's National Guard, a new threshold has been reached in the destruction of democratic rights in the United States. All but casting aside the frayed veneer of democratic institutions, the ruling class relies ever more directly on naked force.

To justify his decision, Nixon cited the "possibility of expanded unrest" over an imminent decision by a grand jury on whether or not to indict Darren Wilson, the Ferguson, Missouri police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed African-American youth, last August. The National Guard must be deployed, Nixon declared, "in advance of any announcement of the grand jury's decision."

There are no mass protests currently underway in Ferguson, let alone looting or violence. There is no threat to "public safety." The initial demonstrations that followed the killing of Brown were overwhelmingly peaceful. The violence that did occur came not from the population of Ferguson, but from the police—first in the wanton murder of Brown, then in the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, armored vehicles, military helicopters and paramilitary units toting automatic weapons and indiscriminately arresting protesters and journalists alike.

The *potential* for protests against this brutality is declared sufficient grounds to arrogate emergency powers to the police, backed by the military, in Ferguson and throughout the St. Louis area. Democratic and constitutional rights—including the First Amendment rights to free speech and assembly—are simply overridden, with no protest from within the political establishment or the corporate-controlled media.

Missouri's state of emergency, like the initial police mobilization over the summer, is not just about Ferguson. The ruling class is seeking to create a

precedent, a new standard for police-military operations within the borders of the United States.

Nixon's arguments, which could be applied to any city in the United States, expand on the precedent set in the April 2013 lockdown of Boston, Massachusetts. At that time the population was ordered to "shelter in place" and heavily-armed SWAT teams conducted house-to-house warrantless searches. These measures were ostensibly in response to the Boston Marathon bombings, which killed three people. Now, the National Guard is mobilized on the basis of the mere possibility of violent protests.

That Missouri's state of emergency is intended to establish a model for military mobilizations elsewhere is confirmed by the close coordination between the local and state governments and the Obama administration. Following a visit to the region by Attorney General Eric Holder last week, the FBI released a letter to police agencies around the country that made the unsubstantiated claim that a failure to indict Wilson "will likely" lead to violence and attacks on "law enforcement and critical infrastructure." Police, the FBI declared, must prepare accordingly.

So disproportionate is the scale of the response to the actual situation in Ferguson that the conclusion cannot be avoided that there are deeper and more fundamental processes at work. The potential for violent protests is not the cause of the police-military occupation, it is a pretext.

The ruling class is acutely sensitive to the possibility of social conflict in the United States—whether sparked by the events in Ferguson or by something else. In response, it has systematically developed, particularly since the September 11 attacks and the declaration of a phony "war on terror," the political infrastructure and pseudo-legal foundation for police-military rule.

From the outset, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the fundamental target of the domestic measures

taken in the name of fighting terrorism was not Al Qaeda, but the American working class, the ruling class' most feared and hated enemy.

In a statement published on September 19, 2001, the WSWS drew the connection between the measures adopted by the Bush administration and the theft of the 2000 elections one year earlier. We wrote: "The traditional forms of bourgeois democracy [have] become increasingly incompatible with a social structure marked by ever-increasing inequality and a yawning chasm between the political establishment and the broad masses of working people."

This analysis has been confirmed over the past 15 years, under both Bush and Obama. The ruling class has implemented a sweeping anti-democratic agenda: The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security; the enactment of the PATRIOT Act to expand the spying powers of the state; the creation of the Pentagon's Northern Command to oversee the United States and North America; the assertion that the president has the right to detain, torture, subject to a military tribunal and even assassinate anyone, including a US citizen, without due process.

US intelligence agencies operate without any legal constraint, monitoring the communications of virtually everyone on the planet, including American citizens. The federal government coordinates its repressive actions ever more closely with local police forces, which have been armed with billions of dollars of military equipment. The Pentagon, along with its associated think tanks, has already drawn up detailed plans for military operations to "quell large-scale, unexpected civil disturbances" (in the words of a May 2013 military order).

Ever more openly, the methods and even the terminology initially directed ostensibly against foreign terrorists are being turned against the people of the United States. As the events in Ferguson have revealed, the apparatus of repression is being deployed against social and political opposition at home. It will be used not only against the workers and youth of Ferguson, but against all opposition to the relentless assault on jobs, wages and social programs in the US and endless war overseas.

The collapse of American democracy is the political expression of a bankrupt social and economic system. Abroad, the ruling class is engaged in an expanding

campaign of violence and plunder. At home, it has implemented policies resulting in levels of social inequality not seen since the years prior to the Great Depression. There are growing signs that the world economy is heading toward another financial collapse, whose consequences will be even greater than the crisis that erupted in 2008.

Immense social tensions are building up, and the mechanisms employed by the ruling class to regulate them have broken down. After six years of the Obama administration, the government and both major parties are more deeply discredited in the eyes of millions of people than ever before. The extremely low turnout in the recent midterm elections is only an initial expression of growing anger and hostility. Unable to find any solutions within official political channels, masses of people will seek other means.

The resort by the ruling class to repression and violence is not an expression of strength or confidence, but weakness and fear. The corporate and financial aristocracy is afraid, and rightly so, that the consequences of its policies are creating the conditions for revolution.

Social inequality and war, the inevitable outcomes of capitalism, are incompatible with democracy. One or the other—capitalism or democracy—must go.

The ruling class has powerful institutions to enforce its interests, and the events in Ferguson make clear that it is prepared to use them. The power of the working class is stronger still. This power, however, depends on the political organization and mobilization of the entire class as an independent force, conscious of its aims and armed with a socialist program.



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