

Who is responsible for violence in Ferguson?

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A St. Louis County grand jury is scheduled to reconvene today to continue deliberations on whether to bring charges against Darren Wilson, the Ferguson, Missouri police officer who shot Michael Brown on August 9.

Legally, the grounds for bringing charges against Wilson, defined as “probable cause” that he committed a crime, are easily provided by the six bullets in the unarmed teenager’s body, as well as the testimony of a half-dozen witnesses who say that Brown was surrendering when he was killed. On basic democratic principles, he should clearly go to trial and face the judgement accorded by the judicial process.

There is a saying, “A grand jury will indict a ham sandwich.” That is, the outcome of a grand jury hearing is largely controlled by the prosecutor. To the extent that there is any debate over whether or not to indict Wilson, it relates not to deliberation among the jurors, but to the tactical considerations of different sections of the ruling class over how best to contain—and prepare for—opposition within the population.

To this end, the protracted wait for the final announcement has been accompanied by an escalating campaign of intimidation and threats on the part of local, state and federal officials, led by the Obama administration. Like the proverbial robber who shouts, “Stop, thief!” officials are endlessly declaiming about violence as they themselves prepare for a massive police crackdown.

Obama, who is himself responsible for vast death and destruction all over the world, gave an interview Sunday morning in which he warned, with a straight face, that “using any event as an excuse for violence is contrary to rule of law and contrary to who we are.”

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon has declared a preemptive “state of emergency,” activating the National Guard, hundreds of members of which are to be stationed at strip malls, shopping centers and

government buildings throughout the area. While there have been absolutely no signs of violence from demonstrators, the police have conducted arrests day after day, including of a news reporter on Saturday evening.

Violence in Ferguson has been entirely instigated by the state, beginning with the shooting of the unarmed Brown. Spontaneous protests that erupted in response were met with a militarized police crackdown, including officers dressed in combat uniforms and toting assault rifles, backed up by armored vehicles as they shot tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters.

Now, the ruling class is preparing for the grand jury decision to set new precedents for military-police mobilization, including the argument that even the *possibility* of protests justifies extraordinary measures and the abrogation of basic democratic rights. It is the domestic equivalent of the doctrine of preemptive war. Both the physical instruments of aggression abroad and its ideological justifications are being aimed ever more directly at the working class and youth within the United States.

Increasingly, the language of the “war on terror” is being applied to domestic opposition. Thus we have the letter from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, sent out to local police departments throughout the country, warning, without any substantiation, that “extremists” are planning to use the Ferguson protests to carry out “attacks” against “critical infrastructure.”

There can be no doubt that provocations are being planned. Over 100 FBI agents have been deployed to the St. Louis area, where they have set up a temporary office. The nature of their operations can already be seen in the highly dubious arrest of two purported members of the New Black Panther Party for allegedly seeking to buy explosives.

To the extent that there is any truth to the allegations, the case reeks of provocation and entrapment by

intelligence agencies. Such tactics have been used countless times before. A warning should go out to all protesters: anyone advocating violent actions is likely a provocateur, seeking to create the conditions to justify a police crackdown.

The resort to violence and repression is an expression of deep-seated anxiety within the ruling class—a fear of popular unrest. In his great work of political theory, *The State and Revolution*, Vladimir Lenin, drawing on the work of Frederick Engels, defined the state power as fundamentally a “coercive force” consisting “of special bodies of armed men having prisons, etc., at their command.”

He added, this time directly quoting Engels, that the degree to which the state power exercises a dominion over society is not the same in all historical periods. “It [the public power] grows stronger, however, in proportion as class antagonisms within the state become more acute.” Engels warned, more than two decades before the calamity of the First World War, that “class struggle and rivalry in conquest have tuned up the public power to such a pitch that it threatens to swallow the whole of society.”

It is exactly these processes that are expressed in the events in Ferguson. Six years after the 2008 financial crash, all of the world's imperialist powers, led by the US, see war increasingly as the only way out of their domestic economic crises. The drive to war is accompanied by an ever-greater police and military presence in all aspects of life.

At the same time, domestic antagonisms, fueled by the pervasive growth of social inequality, become increasingly incompatible with the maintenance of basic democratic forms. The super-rich, who monopolize an ever-greater share of society's wealth while workers' wages plummet, look upon the great mass of the population with fear and hostility.

In analyzing the 2014 elections, characterized by extremely low voter turnout and record campaign spending, the WSWS wrote that they expressed above all the widening chasm between the political establishment and the mass of the population and a fundamental breakdown of the American political system, which is increasingly seen as illegitimate by the majority of the population. With nothing to offer, the ruling class responds to the eruption of social unrest with force.

The lessons of the police crackdown in St. Louis must be drawn all over the country. The breakdown of democracy in the United States is the product of the bankruptcy of the capitalist system, which is the source of war and social inequality. The only way to defend democratic rights is by building an independent political movement of the working class to reorganize society in the interest of social need, not private profit.



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