

Protests continue in St. Louis as police kill eight more in US

Trévon Austin and Patrick Martin
19 September 2017

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside the Justice Center in downtown St. Louis Monday night in a show of support for those who remained jailed after police arrested 123 people on Sunday night during protests over the acquittal of a white St. Louis cop who shot a black man to death in 2011. They chanted “free our people,” denouncing police and prosecutors for keeping people in jail for more than 20 hours when they were arrested on misdemeanor charges of “failure to disperse.”

The Sunday night mass arrests, all but three on the failure to disperse, came as police carried out the “kettling” of protesters, surrounding them, trapping them so they could not escape, then arresting them for their alleged refusal to do what had become impossible—to disperse. St. Louis city officials would not reveal how many of those arrested were still in custody nearly a day later.

One of those arrested was a reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Mike Faulk, who was covering the protest when he was pepper-sprayed and taken into custody after midnight, early Monday morning. Others arrested included legal observers, a doctor, a photojournalist and people who were simply passers-by, but trapped by the police cordon.

The legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri, Tony Rothert, told the *Post-Dispatch* that kettling was unconstitutional because it “caused people who were doing nothing wrong to be detained and arrested along with those who were breaking the law.” He added that it had been used against Occupy Wall Street in 2011 and against protesters during the inauguration of President Donald Trump last January.

He said the tactic had not been used by police during the protests three years ago in nearby Ferguson, Missouri, after the police murder of an unarmed 18-year-old black youth, Michael Brown. “It’s really a military tactic for controlling crowds and controversial because it leads to

constitutional violations,” he said.

Protests spread Monday to a high school in the suburb of Kirkwood, where more than 100 students walked out of first-hour classes and marched to the school’s football stadium for a rally. A school spokeswoman said the students were organized and orderly, and notified the school in advance about the protest. Another 250 students protested at a high school in Webster Groves, another St. Louis suburb, in an action that the school superintendent described as “peaceful.”

A racially mixed crowd staged a silent march to city hall Monday morning, marking the fourth day of protests over the acquittal of former policeman Jason Stockley, cleared by a judge of all charges in the 2011 shooting death of 24-year-old Anthony Lamar Smith. Stockley can be heard on a police dashcam telling his partner, “We’re going to kill this (expletive),” in reference to Smith. He planted a gun on Smith that was later found to have only Stockley’s DNA on it. Yet he was found guilty of no wrongdoing.

St. Louis Mayor Lyda Krewson told reporters Monday morning that “the days have been calm and the nights have been destructive” for three straight days. She called that pattern “unacceptable” and warned “destruction cannot be tolerated.” The Democratic mayor also tweeted, “Thank you to police & first responders for the outstanding job you have been doing.”

The actual level of violence by anti-police protesters has been remarkably limited given the outrageous character of the acquittal and the belligerence shown by the police as they have been massively deployed against demonstrators.

The police have been heavily armed, with full riot gear and shields, and backed by National Guard troops ordered into the city by Missouri Governor Eric Greitens, but not yet deployed against the population. The riot police have conducted themselves with considerable arrogance and aggression, chanting, “Whose streets? Our streets!”, in what amounts to a declaration that the police call the

shots.

“I’m proud to tell you the city of St. Louis is safe and the police owned tonight,” Interim Police Chief Lawrence O’Toole said at a news conference early Monday.

This rhetoric is reflective of the nature of police violence in the United States and efforts by the ruling elite to implement a police state. The use of violence to shut down peaceful opposition and escalation of police violence flow directly from the policies and aims of the ruling classes.

In July, during a speech on Long Island, President Donald Trump essentially told police to have no concern for arrestees, telling them, “Please don’t be too nice.” The supposed purpose of his speech was to “declare war” on the Salvadorian gang MS-13, calling it worse than Al Qaeda, but Trump’s xenophobic rhetoric is an attempt to justify police violence and promote an atmosphere of nationalism and militarism.

Under Trump’s authority, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has carried out a reign of terror against the immigrant population. In March, ICE agents terrorized residents of northwest Chicago when an agent shot and seriously wounded a man in a home where eight family members were present, including a child as young as one.

Today, police within the United States act as a combination of militarized occupation forces and state-sanctioned death squads. They have been given a green light by the fascistic Trump and receive no serious criticism from the Democratic Party, which falsely claims to represent the interests of working people and the poor who are the main targets of police violence.

It was the Obama administration that gave the impetus to the latest wave of police violence, providing advanced military-grade weaponry and equipment to local police forces, while refusing over an eight-year period to prosecute a single cop for killing one of those the police are supposedly sworn to “serve and protect.”

Both capitalist parties support the escalation of police violence in America. The American ruling establishment sees implementing measures of a police state as necessary to suppress the mass opposition developing within the American working class against unemployment, poverty, the decay of social infrastructure and the growth of economic inequality.

The death toll from police violence continues at the pace of more than 1,000 a year, with the tally maintained on killedbypolice.net reaching 857 on Monday. During four days of protests against the whitewash of the police

murder in St. Louis, eight more Americans were killed by police.

The most harrowing of these deaths was the Saturday night shooting of Scout Schultz, a student at Georgia Tech University who suffered from mental illness.

After phoning the police, giving them a description of an individual resembling Schultz—young, white, with long blonde hair, armed with a knife and possibly a gun—Schultz left three suicide notes, then went out to meet the police, certain that they would kill. Despite the fact that the “knife” was a utility tool with a small blade, which Schultz never even opened, and there was no gun, the police riddled the young man with bullets.

Dozens of students and supporters who marched Monday night to protest Schultz’s killing were attacked by Georgia Tech police officers, who fired at least one smoke bomb. Three protesters were arrested. All have been charged with inciting a riot and battery of an officer.

Other police killings since Friday’s verdict in St. Louis include a 15-year-old youth shot to death by police in Fauquier County, in the Virginia suburbs of Washington DC, who allegedly threatened them with a crowbar; a man wandering on the I-5 Freeway in Los Angeles brandishing a knife, clearly disturbed; an inmate at Angola State Prison in Louisiana, who was unarmed but supposedly charged an armed prison guard; another unarmed man who was fleeing police in his car in Hollywood, Florida, near Miami; and three separate instances where police claimed to have shot armed fugitives—in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; West Milford, West Virginia; and East San Jose, California. Details and the names of the victims have not yet been made available in most of these cases.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact