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Militarized police forces throughout the US carry out mass arrests

By Isaac Finn

12 July 2016

Following the killing of five police officers by a lone gunman, Micah Xavier Johnson, police and government officials have used the attack to further curb democratic rights and clamp down on anti-police brutality protests across the country.

According to CNN, at least 309 individuals have been arrested in New York City, New York; Chicago, Illinois; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana for participating in protests against the police killings of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling.

St. Paul police arrested 46 individuals last Saturday night on charges of third-degree riot for allegedly marching onto Interstate-94 and injuring 21 officers by throwing rocks at them. Bail was set at \$1,500 for each gross misdemeanor charge, and they could appear in court as early as this morning.

On Sunday, St. Paul police arrested another 52 demonstrators for marching on Grand Avenue. They are currently being cited for public nuisance and unlawful assembly.

In Baton Rouge, riot police armed with military grade equipment had arrested some 102 protesters by Saturday night, most of whom were charged with obstructing public property. Among those arrested was prominent Black Lives Matter activist DeRay McKesson. He was charged with allegedly blocking traffic.

McKesson, who was taken to East Baton Rouge Parish Prison, described conditions in the prison to the *New York Times*, stating, “Not everybody could fit. Some of us had to stand. I, like many other people, slept on the floor or didn’t sleep at all because there just wasn’t enough room.”

McKesson also claimed that prior to his arrest police had attempted to provoke individuals. Witnesses say police tackled McKesson and slammed him to the ground, in what appeared to be a deliberate targeting. The incident was captured on a cellphone video. McKesson was released on Sunday.

According to CBS News, officers also arrested dozens of protesters who had been invited to demonstrate in a local Baton Rouge woman’s yard. Video footage shows that officers in riot gear surrounded the house before moving onto the property to carry out the arrests. Police officials later justified these actions by claiming that protesters planned on marching onto the interstate and disrupting traffic.

Baton Rouge police spokesman, Sgt. Don Coppola, claimed, “It appears protests at Baton Rouge Police Headquarters have become more violent as out of town protesters are arriving.” Coppola also claimed that officers confiscated three rifles, three shotguns and two pistols during the protest.

In recent years police have frequently claimed that demonstrations included outsiders who fomented disorder, in an attempt to discredit mass anger over police killings and justify repressive measures against demonstrators. These assertions recall the claims of late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that “outside agitators” were responsible for stirring up civil rights protests in the 1960s.

The convenience store owner who filmed the police killing of Alton Sterling, Abdullah Muhlafi, has also filed a lawsuit against three Baton Rouge cops who detained him, the city of Baton Rouge, and Police Chief Carl Dabadie Jr. Muhlafi claims that officers entered his store without a permit and confiscated the store’s surveillance video and his personal cell phone. Muhlafi was then locked inside a car for hours and only allowed out to use the restroom.

An officer escorted Muhlafi to the side of a building where he was forced to relieve himself in “full view of the public,” according to the lawsuit.

The mass arrests of protesters and harassment of individuals that record police killings further demonstrates the role played by law enforcement officers in intimidating the population and defending the political and corporate establishment. While various police departments have taken advantage of the Dallas attack to clamp down on protests, legislators and police officials have moved to assert new precedents that further intimidate the population.

A Wisconsin legislator is introducing a “Blue Lives Matter” bill that would make the deliberate targeting of law enforcement officers a hate crime. Such a designation would allow prosecutors to issue heavier penalties for crimes targeting police, firefighters, and emergency medical crews. Lawmakers in nine other states, as well as at the federal level, are discussing implementing similar legislation.

In Detroit, the police department responded to the events in Dallas by arresting four men for allegedly posting comments in support of killing cops. Detroit Police Chief James Craig has indicated that he plans on contacting federal, state and local prosecutors in order to determine what charges could be brought against these individuals.