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USA

Rampage of the Surveillance State: What's Behind the Minneapolis Indictments?

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FOR TWO MONTHS last winter, 4000 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) unleashed an assault on the Twin Cities with a violent roundup of immigrants, prompting a mass, nonviolent grassroots resistance movement that eventually involved hundreds of thousands of protesters. The Trump administration was forced to retreat.

Based on new revelations, it turns out that federal authorities took their sinister siege a step further, according to just-released federal documents. Undercover federal agents engaged in a broad spy operation, targeting activist groups and mainstream labor organizations who supported the resistance.

Agents posing as protesters infiltrated meetings at union halls and in churches, secretly making audio and video recordings, and spied on peaceful demonstrations. They seized union financial records.

These disclosures have emerged in a federal criminal case brought by the U.S. Attorney's office in Minneapolis which indicted 15 activists in June for protests outside the federal Whipple building where immigrants were being held.

After the indictments were announced, prosecutors were required to provide the defense with materials given to the grand jury that indicted the protesters. Those documents detail investigative practices that recall some of the worst abuses by law enforcement in U.S. history, underscoring how the Justice Department and Homeland Security have become the tool of rightwing extremists.

The newly released materials reveal that Homeland Security agents "participated in organizing and directing the groups they were surveilling, at times working to entice people into discussing or committing crimes," according to a filing by Kevin Reich, a Minneapolis attorney representing one of the defendants in a case that's become known as the Minnesota 15.

The 15 defendants are accused of conspiracy, assault and other charges, stemming from protests outside the Whipple federal building in the Twin Cities. The feds allege that the defendants violently impeded immigration officers during the ICE invasion in the Twin Cities.

The defendants counter that they were engaged in First Amendment-protected activities and the charges are aimed at silencing dissent in the metro area where "ICE out" signs, especially in Minneapolis neighborhoods, have become ubiquitous.

Mystery "Antifa"

Prosecutors claimed those charged were members of two groups tied to "Antifa," an anti-fascist movement in the United States, even though there is no actual organization called "Antifa."

Indeed, the 90-page indictment provided no information that the so-called violent activity by the defendants injured anyone. When asked at a June news conference announcing the charges, to identify specific incidents where law enforcement officers were injured by the alleged conspiracy, U.S. Attorney Daniel Rosen declined.

The new spying disclosures are contained in a motion for discovery by attorney Reich, who is asking a federal magistrate judge to require Homeland Security to turn over all its surveillance records.

“Undercover agents posing as protesters surveilled community meetings at churches, parks, libraries, schools and union halls,” Reich wrote. “These agents surreptitiously recorded dozens of conversations with ordinary people who were simply exercising their First Amendment rights to protest ICE’s lawless rampage in our state.”

That included spying on a peaceful No Kings demonstration and another protest against U.S. involvement in Iran.

The government’s presentation to the grand jury reflected a “broad and irrational investigation,” Reich declared. “With no evidence, the government alleged to the grand jury that the conspiracy in this case extends far beyond the defendants to include the AFL-CIO, the Minneapolis Federation of Educators, the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees [a union representing state employees]...Veterans for Peace and the Grease Pit bicycle repair shop, among others.”

It should be noted that the Minnesota AFL-CIO has played a central role in organizing the big No Kings protests in the Twin Cities, developing a large marshaling system that ensured that the marches and rallies would remain peaceful.

Operation Puppet Master

Demonstrations grew massive in Minneapolis this winter in the wake of the January murders by ICE and border patrol agents of two nonviolent citizen observers of ICE activity, Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Between 100,000 and 200,000 protesters rallied outside the State Capitol in St. Paul in April in a No Kings protest that may have been the largest single demonstration in Minnesota history.

Rather than prosecute the killers of Good and Pretti, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the investigative arm of the agency, launched a massive spying campaign on January 29, four days after Pretti’s death, that it dubbed “Operation Puppet Master.” It did so, with a memorandum, filled with lies, claiming that ICE was the target of a violent conspiracy.

“Since November 28, 2026,” the memo said, “ongoing protests and incidents of civil unrest have occurred in public areas throughout Minneapolis, MN. During these events violent opportunists (VOs) have exploited the protests as cover to attempt breaches of federal properties and have perpetrated multiple assaults against federal officers tasked with protecting these facilities.

“HSI St. Paul has identified an organized network of conspirators operating through online and in person who are providing material support to violent opportunists and agitators involved in impeding federal law enforcement, rioting, destruction of federal property and assaults on Federal agents and Officers.”

As attorney Reich points out, HSI does not identify any “violent opportunists” in its memorandum, nor does it cite any incidents of “rioting, destruction of property” or “assaults on federal agents and officers.”

Two weeks after it began Operation Puppet Master, HSI launched “Project Whipple Shield,” citing protests at the Whipple federal building. The purported purpose of the project was to investigate and disrupt “sophisticated

organized campaigns” aimed at “acts of violence, destruction of property, intimidation of federal officers and employees and attempts to impede federal operations.”

Reich reported that Homeland Security secretly obtained financial records of several national labor unions including the Service Employees International Union and the Communication Workers of America. The records provided federal authorities with nothing useful, according to Reich.

The alleged “conspirators” were listed in a diagram, presented to the federal grand jury, that defies credulity. The so-called conspirators include the Minnesota AFL-CIO; the Minneapolis Federation of Educators Local 59; the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees [a labor union representing state employees], Service Employees Union Local 26; Democratic Socialists of America; Socialist Alternative; and Vets for Peace.

None of these groups have been charged, however, which is further evidence of the spurious character of the accusations.

Also named as a conspirator was Monarca, the rapid response unit of Unidos MN, a pro-immigrant group, that trained thousands of Minnesotans to be non-violent constitutional observers during ICE’s “Operation Metro Surge.” Monarca encouraged observers to blow whistles to alert neighborhoods of the presence of ICE agents and film ICE activities without interfering.

Monarca issued a statement, immediately after the new spy revelations. “Hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans took action together,” it said, “including constitutional observation, sharing food, filing legal briefs, protecting kids on their way to school and marching in subzero weather to protect our neighbors and restore the rule of law....Minnesotans have already proven we won’t cave to bullies. We know the power we have when we organize and act together and we’ll continue using that power to defend our neighbors and our freedoms.”

Bernie Bernham, president of the Minnesota AFL-CIO, also blasted the government’s actions and allegations in a statement:

Instead of holding federal agents accountable for shooting and killing Renee Good and our union brother, Alex Pretti, or addressing the dangerous and deadly conditions within immigration detention facilities, the Trump administration continues to weaponize our federal government to intimidate our unions, our communities, and anyone who peacefully opposes their radical authoritarian agenda.

Marcia Howard, president of the Minneapolis Federation of Educators, the union representing the city’s school teachers, defended her local’s role in the protests, according to the Minnesota Star Tribune.

Howard stated, “Minneapolis educators worked in union to exercise our constitutional rights to peacefully protest Operation Metro Surge and other discriminatory policies of the president and we will continue to do so.”

Going through local banks, HSI surreptitiously obtained financial records of labor unions and nonprofit organizations as part of a “financial investigation” into “domestic terrorist financing.” It used an administrative summons to obtain years’ worth of “wire transfers from various financial institutions to and from Service Employees International Union (SEIU) from U.S. Bank of Minneapolis.”

Not surprisingly, attorney Reich notes, SEIU finances revealed nothing more than “various types of debits and credits to include annuity payments, strike supplies, investments, union member dues, retiree dues, medical expenses and pension fund expenses.”

HSI also issued an administrative summons seeking financial information on the Communication Workers of America (CWA), regarding donations and PAC spending from 2023 to 2026.

The CWA represents 700,000 workers, many in telecommunications, but also in the media industry, including virtually all of the major newspapers in the United States. It may be more than a coincidence that the Trump administration has been on the warpath against journalists.

“Our union has become the latest target of a corrupt administration that weaponizes the legal process against law-abiding Americans exercising our Constitutional rights,” declared Claude Cummings, the CWA president.

The CWA is a union with a long history of standing up to bullies and billionaire bosses. We will not be intimidated, and we will not be silenced in our solidarity with our members, with our communities, and with our neighbors. Our union halls remain open. Our fight continues. Together, we will speak out, we will vote, we will fight, and we will win.

No Limits

HSI also subpoenaed PayPal and Venmo for information regarding payments to and from Voices for Racial Justice, which describes itself as “the longest running social justice organizing training organization in the state of Minnesota.”

HSI agents surveilled community meetings at churches, parks, libraries, union halls, schools and restaurants, including a meeting at the United Labor Center, the building that houses a number of Minneapolis labor unions.

Federal agents also surveilled, investigated and obtained financial records related to Sunrise Movement, a nonprofit focused on climate change and other social justice issues.

Undercover agents described one meeting of the Sunrise Movement at a public library, according to a government document: “During the Action meeting, it was made clear that the Sunrise Movement organization focused on ‘peaceful’ protests.”

The agent wrote that he privately spoke to one individual whose name is redacted, and “informed him that he works construction and could build items that might assist other groups with more ‘direct-action’ protests.” The agent told the individual “that going to jail did not bother him.”

The Homeland agents also surveilled individuals observing ICE vehicle activity at the Whipple building, even though federal judges in Minneapolis have ruled this year that such observation is not unlawful.

There seems to have been no limit to Homeland Security’s reach. Undercover agents took pictures of license plates

of attendees during a meeting of anti-ICE protesters and activists at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Roseville, a St. Paul suburb.

They used that information to obtain the names of the attendees, searched social media for pictures of the individuals, and compiled an “intel workshop” that included names, photos, addresses and personal information, including family and employment information and vehicle registration information.

“None of these individuals did anything other than engage in protected First Amendment speech in a church meeting,” Reich wrote.

Undercover Everywhere

Homeland Security also sent an undercover agent to an in-person meeting at La Dona Cerveceria restaurant in north Minneapolis, where activists were planning for what was referred to as a general strike and march in Minneapolis on January 23 when tens of thousands marched. The agent described it as “a general discussion of the upcoming walk out on ICE event being held on January 23.”

There were reports of agents surveilling a No Kings protest and a “Stop the War on Iran!” protest organized by 50501, Veterans for Peace and the Sunrise Movement.

“Incredibly,” as Reich notes, a Homeland agent whose last name is Garcia told the grand jury:

“One of the things that is absolutely clear, not only in guidance in just principles as far as this investigation is, no one is ever investigated or looked at or even researched on for First Amendment protective activities. Every single individual that we have investigated there is a criminal predicate to why we’re investigating them, either statements that they have made that are criminal to their actual participation in overt criminal acts.”

Susan Du, a reporter for the Star Tribune, wrote on August 13 that the newly released documents confirmed that the government prosecutor who convened the grand jury for the Minneapolis indictments was Deputy Attorney General Brian Lynch.

Lynch was appointed this year as director of the Joint Task Force Vanguard, a special unit dedicated to prosecuting leftwing political violence.

“Lynch was reportedly photographed participating in the Jan. 6 Capitol protest, standing inside a restricted zone while rioters stormed the building,” Du wrote.

The Justice Department did not respond to a request for comment from the Minnesota Star Tribune about Lynch’s involvement in the protest, but an official told Talking Points Memo last month that while Lynch was present at Jan. 6, he ‘never entered the Capitol, left the grounds after a brief period, and did not commit and was never accused of any violation of law.’

There may be another factor to explain why Lynch came in to prosecute the Minnesota 15. At least 14 federal prosecutors have resigned from the U.S. Attorney's office in Minneapolis since the beginning of the year, largely over directives from Justice Department in Washington, D.C. to defend ICE and immigration policies and the refusal of the department to conduct a civil rights investigation into the killing of Renee Good.

Sinister Precedents

Peter Rachleff, a retired history professor at Macalester College in St. Paul, points out that the surveillance described in documents is not new for federal authorities, noting that the notorious J. Edgar Hoover, cut his teeth more than a century ago, spying on the anarchist movement in America. In 1924, Hoover became the FBI's first director, making subversion a prime focus.

Fast forward to 1941, says Rachleff, when the government went after the leaders of Teamsters Local 574, a militant trade union local in Minneapolis led by socialists, that won the historic 1934 truckers strike.

The union leaders were convicted and sent to prison on federal charges of sedition under the Smith Act, much of which was later found to be unconstitutional.

Then came the massive crackdown against political dissent under McCarthyism in the late 1940s and early 1950s, followed by the spying against the civil rights movement including Dr. Martin Luther King in the 1960s, and the federal COINTELPRO spy and disruption tactics against antiwar, Black and radical groups, in the early 1970s.

Rachleff said he is surprised the Homeland Security targeted some of the mainstream organizations like the Minnesota AFL-CIO, but adds, "I'm not surprised they are going after the resistance movement to ICE."

Rachleff co-founded the East Side Freedom Library in St. Paul, which has become a hub for dialogue and activism in the Twin Cities in the last decade. He said that the latest spy revelations give the movement against authoritarianism a focus for supporting the Minnesota 15 and the Prairieland defendants, a group of activists in Texas, convicted on trumped-up terrorism charges and given shockingly long prison sentences.

"People who are victimized by the authoritarian government can become the center of the next stage of the movement for democracy and justice," Rachleff said.

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Source: [Against The Current](#).

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