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USA

Minneapolis General Strike and Federal Agents Murder Another Person

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The day after a remarkable one-day general strike in Minneapolis held to protest federal agents' murder of Renée Nicole Good, on January 26 federal agents murdered a second person, Alex Jeffrey Pretti, an intensive care nurse at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Federal spokespeople immediately declared that Pretti was a domestic terrorist who had intended to "massacre" federal agents who, they said, shot him in self-defense but videos of the event contradicted the government's claim.

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One can see clearly in the videos that Pretti, holding a telephone in his hand to video ice agents, stepped up to assist a woman who had been pushed down, when he was attacked by seven agents who knocked him to the ground, pepper sprayed him, and beat him. The agents then discovered that Pretti was carrying a concealed handgun, as he was permitted to do under state law, though he never brandished the weapon. Agents took his gun from him and then Border Patrol agents shot him ten times, killing him.

As had happened earlier with Good's murder, Federal agents took command of the shooting site, and even though state officials with a judicial warrant demanded a right to examine the scene the Department of Homeland Security refused. Despite the below zero temperatures (-6 degrees Fahrenheit, -21 Celsius), hundreds of people took to the streets to protest Pretti's murder and thousands showed up for a spontaneous outdoor memorial service for him.

Governor Tim Walz, who had earlier ordered the National Guard to stand ready, now mobilized it to keep order in Minneapolis. Local activists have been angered to learn that he is sending it to protect the Whipple Federal Building which houses the federal court and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center rather than to stop ICE from attacking people in their neighborhoods.

There are already 3,000 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. President Donald Trump, a Republican, has threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act which allows the president to mobilize the U.S. military to occupy the city. He now says that Democratic governor Walz and Democratic Mayor Jacob Frey "are inciting Insurrection, with their pompous, dangerous, and arrogant rhetoric." So far, Trump has not sent in the military troops though his Justice Department is investigating the governor and mayor for allegedly impeding ICE agents.

The people of Minneapolis and the entire country have been shocked and appalled to see ICE agents breaking down doors and entering homes without warrants. ICE officers stop people of color on the streets demanding to see their identification and proof of citizenship. ICE went to one home, arrested a five-year old boy, and then accused his father of abandoning him before sending the whole family to detention in Texas. A handicapped woman in a car on her way to a doctor's appointment had her car window broken and was dragged out of her car, then passed out and was taken away in an ambulance. These violent attacks on many residents, both immigrants and U.S. citizen, which have become everyday events, have frustrated and angered the people of the Twin Cities. After the ICE murder of Good, people were prepared to act.

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The Minneapolis general strike against ICE on January 23, the day before Pretti's murder, was supported by labor unions, religious groups, and community organizations mobilizing under the slogan "Day of Truth & Freedom" and calling for "no work, no school, no shopping." It virtually stopped economic activity in the city. The idea of a general strike arose from the ranks of activists who saw it as the necessary next step. While many unions and union members participated, none of the unions called a strike, which would have been a violation of their collective bargaining agreements with employers and could have led to legal and economic penalties. Many workers called in sick, using one of their sick days to take the day off, while in other cases hundreds of small businesses closed down to support the strike, releasing their workers for the day.

Thousands of Minneapolis and St. Paul residents participated in dozens of self-organized committees that responded to the ICE and Border Patrol in their workplaces and communities. Local groups have been organizing for months. Neighborhood groups come out with shrill whistles when ICE agents are spotted on the streets and some use their cars to block streets. Teachers organized in their schools and then helped organize parent groups so that both could respond to ICE officers who shot chemical agents at students and arrested teachers. In a few cases these informal networks have created neighborhood or workplace assemblies, though such assemblies are not yet common.

On the day of the strike, one hundred clergy members who gathered at the airport and blocked the facility were arrested for failure to comply with police and then released, while tens of thousands marched through downtown Minneapolis in sub-zero temperatures. Everywhere people shouted "ICE out." There were also protests in other cities across the country, many demonstrating in that half the country in sub-zero temperatures, with snow, sleet and ice.

Trump has now begun to change his approach under pressures from Democrats, some Republican legislators, and conservative pro-gun organizations. The rightwing gun groups believe Americans need their guns so that, if necessary, they can fight the federal government, so they are outraged that federal officers killed a man who had a legally registered handgun that he never brandished and that was taken from him before he was shot several times in the back. Trump has asserted that he and Democratic Governor Walz are "now on a similar wavelength." Trump is replacing the head of the Minneapolis deportation operation, the notoriously violent Gregory Bovino, a Border Patrol commander-at-large, with Tom Homan, the White House "Border Czar." Trump also changed his view of Good, the first Minneapolis ICE murder victim, after he learned that her father was a fervent Trump supporter.

Trump's attack on immigrants and citizens continues to expand with "Operation Catch of the Day" in Maine which, as in Minneapolis, is targeting Somali immigrants. With a budget of $85 billion dollars and 22,000 agents, ICE has the power to continue to wreak havoc on other U.S. cities as it has on Minneapolis. ICE funding comes up again in the federal budget on January 20 and Democrats are threatening to refuse to vote for any bill that contains ICE funding. Whether they can and will stop the vote for more money for ICE remains to be seen.

The Minneapolis general strike has been a significant step. Unlike Europe or Latin America, we don't have general strikes in the United States. The Minneapolis general strike is unprecedented in contemporary America. Not since 1934 has there been a general strike in Minneapolis and no other city has gone on strike since the Oakland general strike of 1946. But it has also been a long time since federal officers have beaten, gassed, and murdered white U.S. citizens with impunity. We have gone beyond the reactionary McCarthyism of the 1950s. The events in Minneapolis confirm that we now live in the grip, the death grip, of an authoritarian government, but also that there is a powerful, popular resistance. We are in a struggle for justice, for democracy, and for our lives. And that struggle goes on, most intensely in Minneapolis, but also everywhere else in the country. And the end is not in sight.

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