

FBI helped infiltrate Minnesota protest against police murders

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A protest at the Mall of America last December against police violence was monitored by an FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force cell in close collaboration with local police and mall security, emails obtained by the Intercept show. The protest, called by Black Lives Matter in response to the wave of police killings last year, drew 3,000 demonstrators to the second largest mall in the United States, located in Bloomington, Minnesota, near Minneapolis.

The FBI was alerted to the protest by a confidential tipster who had discovered Facebook posts about the protest. An email by a member of the cell, detailing the time and location of the protest, was then forwarded to the command staff of the Bloomington Police Department.

Bloomington police infiltrated planning meetings, and Mall of America security created a fake Facebook profile to befriend and monitor members of Black Lives Matter Minneapolis. Mall of America gathered still images and videos of social media activity and compiled profiles of people deemed to be the “ringleaders,” which were forwarded to the local police department and city attorney’s office.

Ten people believed to be the organizers of the protest were charged by the City of Bloomington with three to eight misdemeanors. An eleventh person, Pamela Twiss, was “identified” and charged after she sent a letter to the city attorney’s office asking them to drop their charges. In addition to these charges, the city and Mall of America are alleging \$25,000 in police costs and \$40,000 in mall security costs respectively, totaling \$65,000 in restitution. No injuries or property damage occurred as a result of the rally.

Around 750 emails between the Mall of America and the City of Bloomington, sent in the days leading up to and following the protest, were obtained by data

researcher Tony Webster via through a Freedom of Information Act request. Mall of America officials, the office of Bloomington’s city attorney Sandra Johnson, members of the local political establishment, and the Bloomington Police Department collaborated closely to spy on and prosecute the protesters, often corresponding multiple times within an hour.

Of prime importance in the discussions was the need to deter future demonstrations at the mall, particularly those “trying to prove a point.” In an email sent to Bloomington Police Department command staff and Mall of America Director of Security Johnson raised the possibility of charging the organizers of the Black Lives Matter rally with criminal offenses. “To do that we need copies of all of their media interviews, their Facebook page, and any footage we can recover. ... Can BPD assemble the interviews and other evidence? Can MOA assist in getting us what footage and evidence they have? I would also like an estimate of the cost to the City and the MOA for this event.”

The email was cc’d to Johnson’s assistant attorneys, members of the local political establishment, and Mall of America corporate attorney Kathleen Allen. In another email, Johnson explained, “My office cannot do that—it would require us to be witnesses in our own prosecutions.”

Allen responded, “We fully support all efforts by your office to charge the organizers and key leaders with additional criminal charges. ... Dan Jasper and our Public Relations Department are currently working on gathering all intel, interviews, etc. from traditional and social media. Doug Reynolds and his security team will also be pulling similar information. ... [P]lease let us know what else you need to support your efforts. We are happy to help.”

Johnson referred to the Mall of America rally as “a

powder keg just waiting for a match,” and compared the Mall of America to an “assault victim” and the peaceful demonstrators to an “assailant.” In an interview on the *BPD Roll Call*, Johnson justified the prosecution of the protesters, saying, “That assailant may not assault this victim again, but [they] might assault another victim ... the most effective way of deterring future criminal conduct is to go after the organizers, the ringleaders.”

This is not the first time that Mall of America has collaborated with the police and intelligence apparatus. In 2005, Mall of America formed its own counterterrorism unit, the Risk Assessment and Mitigation (RAM), and hired former Israeli sergeant and security agent Michael Rozin as Security Manager to lead it.

The security program he created for Mall of America was presented to the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Homeland Security as a model for security in the private sector. Both Douglas Reynolds, Mall of America’s Security Director, and Sam Root, the Mall of America Intelligence Analyst who crafted the fake Facebook profile of “Nikki Larson,” had careers in the U.S. Army spanning over two decades.

The neighboring city of Minneapolis, less than 11 miles away, has in recent years also acted as a staging ground for domestic repression and state surveillance. Minneapolis was the site of unannounced urban warfare exercises in August last year, and sent representatives to the Obama administration’s global terrorism summit in February.



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