

Minnesota police riot against protesters outside Whipple Federal building

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8 February 2026

On February 7, a combined force of the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office and Minnesota State Patrol troopers carried out mass arrests of protesters outside the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building. The building serves as the nerve center for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) operations that have terrorized immigrants and protesters in Minneapolis and throughout Minnesota.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) dispatched snowplows to block entry points to the Whipple building. Ranks of helmeted, baton-wielding state troopers and sheriff's deputies moved in on protesters who have held daily vigils to oppose ICE operations. Using a bullhorn, a Hennepin County sheriff announced, "Due to the unlawful conduct and threat to public safety, I hereby declare this to be an unlawful assembly."

Police forces advanced shouting, "Move back! Move back!" Protesters responded that the real criminals were the ICE agents inside the Whipple building, and that it was ICE that was "violating a federal judge's orders" and "violating our Fourth Amendment rights." State troopers and deputies then charged, wrestling protesters to the ground and hauling them away.

One witness wrote on social media:

"Hennepin County sheriffs declared an unlawful assembly at the Whipple Building, despite protesters staying behind the fences, out of the road, and well off federal property. They backed protesters into the South Fort Snelling parking lot and then began arrests, kneeling on people and even shooting out a car window with rubber rounds. HCSO may not literally be ICE, but they are bosom buddies and should be treated with equal levels of disdain."

Local media reported that 54 people were arrested on

Saturday. The Minnesota State Patrol confirmed that 25 of those detained by state troopers were arrested for allegedly failing to disperse.

Prior to police declaring an unlawful assembly, fascist Jake Lang menaced the hundreds peacefully protesting from the back of a rented U-Haul truck. Video of the incident shows Lang in the back of the truck with a speakerphone. The fascist proclaimed "Jesus is king" in between slurs against Somali people and praise for the immigration police. Joining Lang in the back of the truck was a man with a paintball gun and another man with large wooden cross.

Lang, a violent participant in the January 6, 2021 attack on Congress, was arrested earlier in the week on felony charges after defacing an anti-ICE sculpture in front of the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul. However, Lang does not appear to have been among those arrested during Saturday's police crackdown.

More than a month after Renée Nicole Good was murdered by ICE agent Jonathan Ross, and more than two weeks after Alex Pretti was gunned down by CBP agents Jesus "Jesse" Ochoa and Raymundo Gutierrez, none of the killers have been arrested or charged with a crime.

These events underscore the real meaning of the January 26 phone call between Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and President Trump concerning Homeland Security's violent "Operation Metro Surge."

In the wake of the phone call, Walz's office issued a statement claiming the conversation between the governor and Trump had been "productive." Walz said, "We need to reduce the number of federal agents in Minnesota," and called on Trump to "work with the state in a more coordinated fashion on immigration enforcement."

Following the call, Trump dispatched his so-called

“border czar,” Tom Homan, to Minnesota to meet with the Minnesota Sheriffs’ Association and the Minnesota County Attorneys Association. Homan declared that the meetings had produced “unprecedented cooperation” in continuing Operation Metro Surge. Under this arrangement, roughly 700 ICE and CBP agents will be freed up for deployment elsewhere, while Minnesota law enforcement agencies will collaborate with the remaining 2,000 federal agents.

The use of state troopers and the mobilization of MnDOT to kettle protesters at the Whipple Federal Building has stripped away the mask from Walz’s posturing against Trump. Both the Minnesota State Patrol and MnDOT operate under Walz’s authority. Responsibility for this police operation cannot be shifted away from the governor or the Democratic Party.

Walz’s rhetoric has undergone a sharp reversal.

Earlier, he described ICE operations by saying, “Donald Trump’s modern-day Gestapo is scooping folks up off the streets.” In a public address last month, Walz said the occupation amounted to a “campaign of organized brutality against the people of Minnesota by our own federal government.”

These denunciations have now given way to open cooperation with the immigration police. Claims promoted by the Democratic Party and the media that violence has declined following Homan’s arrival are lies.

The Democrats are far more fearful that protest actions by the working class and progressive sections of the middle class could develop into a mass political movement directed not only against the immigration police, but against the capitalist system itself, which is responsible for layoffs, the destruction of healthcare, attacks on social welfare programs, and imperialist war.

Phrases such as “general strike,” along with the accurate characterization of Trump’s actions as “fascist” and aimed at establishing a “dictatorship,” are increasingly entering the vocabulary of broad layers of workers.

Protests continue across Minnesota. Thousands of people are volunteering as constitutional observers, documenting ICE and CBP violence, escorting schoolchildren, and supplying immigrant families with food and protection as federal agents seek to hunt them

down.

At the same time, the national media is carrying out its own drawdown of coverage. Reporting on events in Minnesota is being quietly dropped. The goal, shared with the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy, is to bring the protests to an end and wear down the movement. Walz’s policy of deploying police against demonstrators while urging residents to place their faith in the courts and the November elections is aimed at demobilizing the growing opposition to fascism and dictatorship.

The principal obstacle to the development of a general strike and a broader struggle against authoritarianism is the illusion that the Democratic Party can be pressured to fight Trump. The Democratic Party, including its Minnesota affiliate, the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party, defends the capitalist profit system just as fiercely as its Republican counterparts.

The February 7 attack on protesters at the Whipple building must therefore be understood as an exposure of the political bankruptcy of the Democratic Party. Because of its loyalty to capitalism, it is worse than useless in the struggles ahead. Through its actions, the party has declared its collaboration with the fascist in the White House. The working class must build new, independent organizations, including rank-and-file committees, to unite workers across industries and initiate a conscious struggle against war, dictatorship and social inequality.



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