

Minneapolis shooting video exposes ICE lies, frame-up of Venezuelan immigrants

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Newly released government camera footage has demolished the official account used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the FBI and the Trump administration to justify the January 14 shooting of Julio C. Sosa-Celis in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the felony prosecution of Sosa-Celis and Alfredo A. Aljorna.

The shooting of Sosa-Celis took place at the height of the federal occupation of the Twin Cities by federal immigration agents. It occurred one week after ICE thug Jonathan Ross murdered Renée Nicole Good on January 7, and it would end up being the second of three shootings conducted by federal agents that month in the city. The third was the murder of Alex Pretti on January 24. The shootings provoked mass protests from Minnesota residents on January 23 and January 30.

The *New York Times* and local outlets obtained the video and published it Monday. The tape, which does not include audio, directly contradicts the ICE agent's claim that he was beaten by three men wielding a shovel and broom for roughly three minutes before opening fire. Instead, the confrontation shown in the footage lasts about 12 seconds, shows only two men struggling with the agent, and shows no sustained attack with a shovel.

The reason the street camera was pointed in that direction in the first place was because Valentina Tiapa, Alfredo A. Aljorna's partner, called 911 after Aljorna told her ICE agents were chasing him on Interstate 94 and appeared to be trying to cause a collision. Begging the dispatcher for Minneapolis police to intervene, Tiapa said through an interpreter, "They are coming" and "They are just five minutes away." The city camera that later captured the shooting was positioned at the nearby intersection, recording the route of the chase as it came off the highway and onto their block.

The report exposes not only the lies of the agents involved, but the criminal character of the entire federal operation. The federal government had access to the city-owned camera footage within hours of the shooting, Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara told the *Times*. Yet prosecutors filed

felony charges against Sosa-Celis and Aljorna without watching the video, relying instead on an ICE agent's statement and an FBI agent's affidavit describing the footage. Nearly three weeks passed before a prosecutor actually viewed the recording, by which point the government's case was already collapsing.

The two Venezuelan men were jailed and prosecuted on the basis of a narrative the government either knew was false or made no serious effort to verify. The U.S. Attorney's office moved to dismiss the charges only days before the deadline to secure a grand jury indictment, cynically describing the footage as "newly discovered evidence," even though authorities had possessed it from the beginning.

The footage exposes as lies the statements made by former Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem in the immediate aftermath of the shooting. Noem publicly accused Sosa-Celis and Aljorna of the "attempted murder of federal law enforcement," while federal officials branded them "violent criminal illegal aliens." But the video shows Sosa-Celis tossing the shovel aside before the struggle began. There were not three attackers, and there was no bludgeoning of any kind.

The footage does show the ICE agent shooting through the closed door of the duplex. The bullet struck Sosa-Celis's upper leg and ended up lodged inside the house near a child's playpen, leaving a hole in the front door. After the shooting, ICE used tear gas to force the couples from the home, taking the adults into custody while the two children were left with relatives.

After reviewing the evidence, Minneapolis Police Chief O'Hara told the *Times*, "it sounds like an unarmed person got shot running away."

The shooting was followed by a savage assault by federal agents, in concert with O'Hara's police, on the surrounding neighborhood. As protesters gathered in outrage, federal agents blanketed the area in tear gas and chemical munitions. One family, attempting only to drive home with six children after a basketball game, was trapped as agents set off tear gas under their vehicle. Their six-month-old baby

stopped breathing, and three of the children were ultimately taken by ambulance to a hospital. Local police, focused on protecting the murderous and lying ICE Gestapo, refused to assist the family.

The exposure of the lies in the Sosa-Celis case is not an aberration. The same lies were uttered following the January 7 murder of Renée Good by ICE agent Jonathan Ross, and on January 24 following the execution of Alex Pretti by CBP agents, Jesus “Jesse” Ochoa and Raymundo Gutierrez. Months later, as in the case of Sosa-Celis, the agents responsible have faced no meaningful punishment. The agents who lied under oath in the Sosa-Celis case have merely been placed on leave. Ross, Ochoa and Gutierrez have yet to be charged with a crime.

This is the American class justice system. Immigrants and workers are slandered, jailed, assaulted, terrorized and killed on the basis of fabricated affidavits, while the armed agents of the state who shoot and lie are shielded from prosecution. It is a federal crime to make false statements in support of criminal charges. But no such standard is applied when the lies come from ICE agents, FBI agents or cabinet officials.

While Sosa-Celis was not seriously injured after being shot, workers and young people continue to die at alarming rates inside ICE custody. On Monday, the Senate Judiciary Democrats reported that another person has died in ICE custody, bringing the number of deaths this year to 15 and to more than 45 since Trump took office again. This mounting toll is the foreseeable outcome of a fascistic system built on overcrowding, medical neglect, abuse and profit.

Over the weekend, the funeral for Royer Perez Jimenez, a 19-year-old Mexican immigrant from Chiapas who died on March 16 in ICE custody in Florida, was held. Speaking to CBS, Jimenez’s family denounced the charges that led to his detention as fabricated, insisting he had been confused during his arrest because he did not speak English fluently. His uncle, Manuel Perez, declared, “He was unjustly accused as a criminal. ... They fabricated a crime.”

As in Minneapolis, the government has advanced an account that serves only to shield itself from responsibility. ICE claims Jimenez died of an apparent suicide, but the official cause remains under investigation, and the family categorically disputes that version, demanding a full inquiry and stating that they suspect homicide. In their announcement on Jimenez’s death, ICE noted that he had been screened by medical staff and answered “no” to all suicide-risk questions when he entered the detention center.

While Democrats periodically denounce the worst outrages, they do not fundamentally oppose these attacks on immigrants, which are being used to destroy the democratic rights of the entire working class and establish a presidential dictatorship. Last month, New York Senator Chuck Schumer

boasted that Senate Democrats had secured a deal to fund TSA, FEMA and other DHS functions and that Democrats would continue fighting for “serious reforms” at ICE, not for its abolition, which is supported by a majority of self-identified Democrats.

Schumer praised an agreement that, by his own account, would “strengthen security at the border and at ports of entry.”

The Democrats fundamentally agree with the Republicans on the need for “border security,” militarized deportation agents and the maintenance of a vast detention apparatus, much of which they themselves helped build and expand. Their disagreements are over tactics, public relations and political management. Even as they publicize the deaths, they work to preserve the agencies responsible, proposing only that ICE operate with masks off, body cameras on and somewhat cleaner paperwork.

But ICE cannot be reformed, any more than the police, Border Patrol or the CIA can be transformed into instruments serving the interests of the working class. These institutions exist for definite class purposes. They defend capitalist property, enforce national divisions within the working class and terrorize immigrants and the poor. The exposure of the video in Minneapolis, together with the mounting deaths in detention, shows that the issue is not a few bad agents or insufficient oversight. It is the nature of the capitalist state itself.

The defense of immigrants, democratic rights and the lives of all workers requires the abolition of ICE and the entire apparatus of repression. That task cannot be entrusted to either capitalist party. It falls to the working class, immigrant and native-born alike, united across borders in a common struggle against the ruling class and the capitalist system.



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