

US courts sentence 15 Prairieland defendants to 556 years in Trump's fascist campaign against left-wing opposition

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Federal judges in Texas have now sentenced 15 defendants in the Prairieland Detention Center case to a combined 556 years and two months in prison, one of the most draconian political prosecutions in modern American history and a test case for the Trump administration's campaign to brand opposition to Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), fascism and capitalism as "domestic terrorism."

On Tuesday, seven additional defendants were sentenced to a combined 106 years and two months in federal prison. All but one of the seven defendants sentenced Tuesday had pleaded guilty, several of them cooperating with prosecutors in an effort to reduce their exposure to decades in prison. Nevertheless, every one of them received more than a year in federal prison, and most received many years. Ines Soto was sentenced to 50 years; Joy Gibson and Rebecca Morgan to 15 years each; Lynette Sharp and John Thomas to 110 months each; Seth Sikes to six years; and Nathan Baumann to 22 months.

The scale of the sentences is extraordinary. Comparable prison terms are typically imposed in cases involving murder, attempted murder of police officers, child sex trafficking or the repeated sexual abuse of children. The 50-year sentence for Ines Soto, a virtual life sentence, is especially appalling. She was not involved in planning the protest, she arrived separately, and left when guards ordered demonstrators to disperse. She had already left the scene before former Marine Benjamin Song allegedly shot and wounded an Alvarado police officer. For this, the government branded her a "terrorist" and secured what amounts to a virtual life sentence.

The six defendants who pleaded guilty before Tuesday's sentencing did so to a single count of "providing material support to terrorists." Wildly different alleged conduct was collapsed into the same terrorism charge, from being present at the protest and damaging property to allegedly helping Benjamin Song evade arrest after the shooting. Nathan Baumann's attorney said his client was admitting only to

graffiti, yet he was still sentenced to 22 months in federal prison.

These sentences follow the June 23 sentencing of eight defendants to a combined 450 years in prison. Benjamin Song was sentenced to 100 years; Maricela Rueda to 70 years; Cameron Arnold, Zachary Evetts, Bradford Morris, Savannah Batten and Elizabeth Soto to 50 years each; and Daniel Sanchez Estrada to 30 years.

As in the first round of sentencings, the latest prison terms were imposed by two far-right Republican-appointed federal judges in the Northern District of Texas: Trump appointee Mark T. Pittman and George W. Bush appointee Reed O'Connor.

The case stems from a July 4, 2025 protest outside the Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas, an ICE facility operated by the private prison company LaSalle Corrections. Prosecutors allege that members of the group protested outside the facility, vandalized vehicles, and set off fireworks, and that Song later shot and wounded an Alvarado police officer who responded to the scene with his own gun drawn.

The savagery of the sentences cannot be explained by the underlying facts of the case. They are political sentences, imposed to create a precedent for treating opposition to ICE and the Trump administration as terrorism.

The Prairieland case is the first major "Antifa" sentencing since Trump issued National Security Presidential Memorandum-7, his executive order targeting "Antifa," Attorney General Pam Bondi's December 2025 memorandum directing federal prosecutors against left-wing opponents of the administration, and the fascistic "counterterrorism" strategy issued under far-right operative Sebastian Gorka. Together, these measures provide the pseudo-legal scaffolding for a campaign to criminalize socialist, anti-fascist and anti-ICE opposition as terrorism.

The purpose of the prosecution is not simply to punish those involved in the Prairieland protest. It is to terrorize a

far broader audience: millions of workers and young people who oppose ICE raids, concentration camps, deportations, police violence and the Trump administration's drive toward dictatorship.

The Prairieland case is the most advanced expression of a broader campaign by the Trump administration and the capitalist state. Across the country, federal prosecutors are using conspiracy statutes, "terrorism" language, and distorted claims of threats or obstruction to trample on the First Amendment and transform left-wing political activity into criminal conduct.

In Illinois, the frame-up of the Broadview Six collapsed only after extraordinary prosecutorial misconduct came to light. The case, brought against anti-ICE protesters outside the Broadview immigration processing center near Chicago, unraveled when grand jury transcripts revealed that prosecutors had dismissed jurors who expressed doubts about the government's case and made improper statements in support of the charges. All charges were ultimately dropped with prejudice, meaning they cannot be refiled.

In Minnesota, 15 anti-ICE protesters face federal felony charges stemming from opposition to the military-style occupation of Minneapolis and St. Paul. As is the case in Prairieland, the Twin Cities indictment was brought under the framework of NSPM-7 and targeted protesters who opposed "Operation Metro Surge," even as the ICE and Customs and Border Protection agents who murdered Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti remain uncharged.

In Michigan, the federal government has mounted another political frame-up against eight anti-war protesters at the University of Michigan. The U-Mich Eight were targeted in coordinated predawn FBI raids across Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin on June 10. A sealed indictment, later unsealed, charged all eight with federal conspiracy offenses carrying penalties of up to 20 years in prison. Their alleged crime was participation in protests against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza and demands that the university divest from Israel.

Taken together, these cases reveal the emergence of a national system of political prosecution. The targets are not fascist militias or corporate criminals, but students, anti-war protesters, anti-ICE demonstrators, journalists and left-wing activists. The Bill of Rights is being shredded with free speech, assembly and association recast as evidence of conspiracy, "material support," obstruction or terrorism.

The Democrats have responded to these attacks on democratic rights with silence. The WSWS has found no statement from any Democratic politician condemning the 556 years and two months in combined prison terms imposed on the Prairieland defendants. Nor have Texas Rep. James Talarico, New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez,

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders or other DSA-backed and "left" Democratic politicians responded to WSWS requests for comment.

Their silence is of a piece with their entire record. The Democrats have repeatedly voted to fund ICE, Customs and Border Protection and the Department of Homeland Security, building up the very agencies now carrying out mass kidnappings, raids and political prosecutions. Even as immigration police kidnapped more than 10,000 people in five days, part of a "major surge" ordered by the Trump White House, the Democrats have done nothing to mobilize opposition.

The trade union apparatus is no less complicit. The WSWS has found no statement from the AFL-CIO, AFSCME, the UAW or IATSE opposing the Prairieland sentences. Their silence is a signal to the state that the union bureaucracy will do nothing to mobilize workers against the criminalization of left-wing opposition, even as the same police state methods are being prepared for use against strikes, protests and every form of working class resistance.

This collaboration is personified by Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien, who spoke at the Republican National Convention in 2024 and has worked openly to cultivate relations with Trump and the far right. His support for Markwayne Mullin's elevation to secretary of the Department of Homeland Security underscored the union bureaucracy's alignment with the agencies overseeing ICE, CBP and the broader assault on immigrants and democratic rights.

The defense of the Prairieland defendants and all those targeted for opposing ICE, dictatorship, war and genocide cannot be entrusted to the Democrats, the Democratic Socialists of America, a faction of the Democratic Party, or the trade union bureaucracy. These forces are not allies, but collaborators in the attack. The defense of democratic rights requires the independent political mobilization of the working class against both parties of big business and the capitalist system.



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