

“We will not work until we have justice for Lorenzo”: Hundreds protest ICE murder of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in Houston, Texas

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Several hundred people gathered outside Houston City Hall on Saturday evening to protest the July 7 murder of construction worker Lorenzo Salgado Araujo by agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The demonstration began at 6 p.m. and continued through persistent rain and oppressive humidity. As many as 400 workers, young people and community residents attended, reflecting the immense anger in Houston, the fourth-largest city in the United States, over the execution of a husband and father who had spent decades building homes throughout the city.

Salgado Araujo was not undocumented. Nevertheless, ICE agents targeted him and the workers traveling with him as they left for a construction job early Tuesday morning. Agents opened fire on his work van, killing him in a fusillade of bullets.

The Department of Homeland Security immediately claimed that Salgado Araujo had “weaponized” his vehicle and attempted to run down federal agents, forcing them to shoot in self-defense. All available video footage and the testimony of the workers who witnessed the killing contradict this account.

The three witnesses remain imprisoned at the ICE detention center in Conroe, north of Houston. They have been threatened with deportation and pressured to “self-deport” after publicly contradicting the government’s lies. ICE is attempting to remove critical witnesses to a state murder while the agent who killed Salgado Araujo remains unnamed and free.

The official account follows the same pattern of lies used to justify the ICE murder of Renée Good and the Border Patrol murder of Alex Pretti earlier this year. In each case, federal authorities portrayed the victim as the aggressor, despite video evidence showing that agents initiated the violence.

The Houston protest expressed the widespread determination among workers and young people to oppose the immigration Gestapo and secure justice for Salgado Araujo. Its official leadership, however, was dominated by the Democratic Party and its pseudo-left satellites, including the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and Socialist Alternative. Local Democratic politicians and the president of the Texas chapter of the Service Employees International Union were also given prominent speaking roles.

After approximately 90 minutes of speeches and chanting, demonstrators marched from City Hall to a federal detention facility in downtown Houston where immigrants are held.

PSL members took control of the microphones, not to advance a socialist program capable of mobilizing the working class against ICE and the capitalist state, but to lead repeated chants of “ICE out of everywhere,” “ICE out of Houston” and “Power to the people.”

One PSL speaker presented the betrayal of the mass anti-ICE movement in Minnesota as an example to follow, declaring, “They held a general strike.”

There was no general strike in Minneapolis. There were two enormous demonstrations involving as many as 100,000 people, reflecting overwhelming working class opposition to the federal occupation and the murders of Good and Pretti. But the trade union bureaucracies, including the Teamsters, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the Communications Workers of America, explicitly barred workers from striking, citing no-strike clauses in their contracts.

The central lesson of Minneapolis is that the working class must break with the Democratic Party, the union apparatus and every form of middle-class reformism. A genuine general strike must be consciously prepared through the formation of democratic rank-and-file committees in every workplace, independent of the union bureaucracies, and through the unification of workers across industries, nationalities and borders. Its aim cannot be to pressure the capitalist politicians who created and funded ICE, but to fight for workers’ power and the abolition of the capitalist system.

The PSL speaker then invited a representative of the Democratic Socialists of America to the stage. She recounted her appeals to Democratic Houston Mayor John Whitmire at an earlier press conference, appeals that predictably fell on deaf ears. She concluded by directing opposition back behind the very party collaborating with the Trump administration.

“We will see you in City Hall on Tuesday, and in November we will see you at the ballot box,” she said.

Democratic state Representative Christina Morales, who represents Texas House District 145, was also provided a platform. Morales called for an “independent investigation” into Salgado Araujo’s murder before effectively blaming the population for failing to elect enough Democrats.

“But I am going to be for real with you,” Morales said. “With having almost 50 percent Latinos in this city, we are underrepresented. Why? Because we don’t vote in the numbers that we should.”

“Our votes matter, y’all,” she continued. “Por favor, never say that our vote doesn’t make a difference.”

The Democratic Party has controlled Houston City Hall for decades and presides over the Houston Police Department, which is collaborating with ICE. Nationally, the Democrats have repeatedly voted to provide ICE and Customs and Border Protection with tens of billions of dollars used to terrorize immigrant communities and construct the infrastructure of dictatorship.

In opposition to the dead end advanced from the official platform, reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with demonstrators about the necessity of mobilizing the working class independently of both

capitalist parties. WSWs reporters raised the fight to establish rank-and-file committees and prepare a general strike, not merely to remove ICE from Houston, but to abolish ICE and the entire repressive apparatus used by the capitalist state against the working class.

Among those interviewed was Janie Torres, the sister of José Campos Torres, a Mexican-American Vietnam veteran murdered by Houston police in 1977. She drew a direct connection between the murder of her brother nearly half a century ago and the killing of Salgado Araujo.

“This happened on the same street that Lorenzo was murdered,” Torres said.

“It is no different what they did to my brother and what they did to Mr. Araujo,” she continued. “It’s no different. Same thing, just different times.”

Torres described Salgado Araujo as a “well-rounded human being with a beautiful soul” who had built a family “with his own heart and hands.”

“He was a hard worker who raised his sons very beautifully,” she said. “Beautiful souls, beautiful wife, beautiful mind, beautiful heart. And they still murdered him.”

She stressed that the killing “was not about documents.”

Her brother “was a US citizen, was in the US military,” Torres said. “They did that to him anyway.”

Under the Trump administration, she continued, immigrants “are not given any type of respect, any type of gratitude or greatness. They are being hunted down like animals.”

“No, that is unacceptable,” she said. “This is America. It is built on immigrants. Instead of going forward in a very positive way, we have gone so, so backwards in a very negative and horrible way.”

Another protester interviewed by the WSWs spoke about the parallels between the murders of Campos Torres and Salgado Araujo. In the case of Campos Torres, he said, “Cops beat him up and said, ‘Let’s see if he can swim.’” He noted that the murder occurred 49 years earlier not far from where Salgado Araujo was gunned down.

The protester explained that after three police officers got into a confrontation with Campos Torres they were “taking him to Harris County [Jail] in handcuffs, and they threw him in the [Buffalo] Bayou,” a major waterway that flows through Houston and Harris County.

He recalled the mass anger that erupted following the murder. “The city blew up after that,” he said. “We did a protest in Moody Park, and it got real nasty. So it looks like it’s going to get like that.”

“We have rights, whether we are here legally or not,” he added. “We still have rights.”

Daniel spoke to the WSWs about growing up in Houston’s East End, where Salgado Araujo was murdered. He said:

It’s a thriving neighborhood. It’s a working class neighborhood. It’s full of migrants, first-, second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-generation migrants. Myself, I am a fourth- or fifth-generation citizen. Speaking about our ancestors, it’s a diverse neighborhood. It’s not only Mexicans. It’s South Koreans, it’s Cubans, it’s Nicaraguans. It’s a vast community.

We have Americans, whether they are documented or not, but a very hard-working community.

This country was built on immigrants. Not only Latin, European, German. That’s what makes this city so great. It’s a giant melting pot. We came from everywhere to make this city what it is today.

Under the second Trump administration, Daniel said, there is “a lot of fear in the community now.”

We have residents who are both documented and undocumented who are afraid to leave their homes now, in fear of retaliation. They are scared to go grocery shopping, to run to the pharmacy. They are afraid that they will be targeted as well based on the color of their skin.

He added:

We support Lorenzo. We support the family and let them know that they are not alone, because that could have been any one of our family members. We all have family members, we all know families, who wake up early in the morning, at the break of dawn, get in their work van, their work truck, to go out and make an honest living.

I feel like, at this point, under this administration, we are being targeted. No matter what color your skin is, I feel that there is no accountability. It’s almost like you can go out and target someone, and in this situation, unfortunately, an honest man, a hardworking man, a family man, lost his life.

Rachel, another protester, said she believed ICE could be driven out of Houston very quickly if workers, including Hispanic and Latino workers, “utilized their work power and quite literally prevented construction from happening, shut down the ports.”

Workers should tell the authorities, she said, “We will not work until we have justice for Lorenzo.”

“I feel as if those in charge will bend the knee quite quickly,” Rachel added.

Rachel also spoke about the treacherous role of the Democratic Party in Houston. “They basically flip-flop whenever Governor Abbott applies pressure to them,” she said. She noted that local Democrats “flip-flopped almost immediately” on promises that the Houston Police Department would not collaborate with the immigration Gestapo in its kidnapping and murder operations.

Explaining this collaboration, Rachel said, “I do believe there is an oligarchy.”

Asked by the WSWs for her thoughts on socialism, Rachel replied, “I think anything is better than this right now. I definitely embrace it more than I ever would have even a year ago.”



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