Hundreds protest ICE murder of Lorenzo Salgado as Trump escalates conspiracy against democratic rights

Tom Hall
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Hundreds of workers, young people and immigrant families rallied Sunday at Ervan Chew Park in Houston to demand justice for Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, the 52-year-old construction worker and father of three killed by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent on July 7. Salgado's sons addressed the crowd, which later marched onto the Hazard Street bridge.

On Monday, an attorney for Salgado's brother, Victor, filed a habeas corpus petition seeking his release from ICE custody. Victor was inside the work van when his brother was shot. He and two other witnesses, Daniel Tirado Pantoja and José Trinidad Rojas, remain imprisoned at the Montgomery ICE Processing Center in Conroe and could be deported, the evident purpose being to prevent them from contradicting the government's account of Salgado's murder. The agent who killed Salgado has not been publicly identified, arrested or charged.

The witnesses say the agents did not identify themselves and none was standing in front of the van when the officer fired. DHS initially claimed Salgado used the van as a weapon and struck a government vehicle. That claim was absent from a statement Thursday by US Attorney Aaron Reitz. Reitz said the officer was beside or partly inside the van, no agent was injured and Salgado was not the target of the operation.

In a transparent attempt at smearing him after the fact, the FBI later filed an affidavit as part of a search warrant of Salgado's van referring to a "white crystalline substance" in the vehicle, although there was no laboratory result or drug charge. The family's attorney said it was granulated salt commonly used by construction workers to replace electrolytes.

Six days after Salgado's death, ICE officer David Brouillette killed Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero, a young father and worker in Biddeford, Maine, although Guerrero was not the intended target. Subsequent reports revealed that Brouillette had a documented history of domestic abuse allegations, violent threats, erratic behavior and suicidal crises. ICE's decision to arm him exposes the violent and authoritarian forces being recruited and empowered by the agency.

In a July 15 letter, nearly 200 House Democrats asked Department of Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin and acting ICE Director David Venturella to permit independent investigations into the Salgado and Guerrero killings, guarantee investigators access to witnesses and turn over body-camera and training records. On July 20, 38 Democratic senators and Maine Independent Angus King requested body cameras, visible agent identification and more extensive vetting. House Democrats have scheduled a field hearing in Houston for July 24. Border czar Tom Homan, meanwhile, announced that a single officer will wear a body camera during future vehicle stops.

The letters appeal to the officials overseeing the raids and killings to investigate themselves. They do not demand the release of the imprisoned witnesses, the prosecution of the shooters and their superiors, an end to the raids or the dismantling of ICE. Instead, the Senate letter affirms that ICE has a legitimate role in carrying out deportations, differing with Trump only over the methods employed.

The Democrats are trying to conceal the fact that the ICE murders are part of Trump's ongoing conspiracy to establish a dictatorship in the United States. On January 6, 2021, Trump mobilized a fascistic mob to storm the US Capitol, prevent the certification of Joe Biden's election and threaten lawmakers with kidnapping and murder. Yet the Democrats fear an independent working class movement against capitalism and war more than they fear Trump. Through their letters and hearings, they seek to channel popular anger into dead-end appeals to the very officials responsible for the raids and killings.

In a nationally televised address on Thursday, July 16, Trump revived false claims that the 2020 election was stolen, demanded the punishment of officials who rejected them, and called for federal restrictions on voter registration, voting and mail ballots. The following day, Mullin threatened to withhold federal funding and impose fines, penalties and even prison terms on state officials who refuse to submit their voter rolls to Department of Homeland Security scrutiny. His threats made clear that the administration is preparing to seize control of the

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midterm elections and reject any result that does not go Trump's way.

At a State Department summit that same day, attended by representatives of 66 governments, Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared that the counterterrorism apparatus would target socialist, anti-capitalist, anti-war and other left-wing opposition. He called such opposition "enemies of civilization" and vowed to dismantle its networks "brick by brick." Stephen Miller denounced "leftists" as "deformed," and said that their appeals to civil liberties to defend themselves against state prosecution must "fall on deaf ears."

Miller did not name Salgado or Guerrero, but his statement answers demands for independent investigations into their deaths. The administration rejects constitutional rights and restraints on state violence whenever they obstruct its attack on domestic opposition.

Opposition to the ICE murders must therefore be taken up by the working class as part of a broader political movement against dictatorship, uniting immigrant and US-born workers, independently of the Democratic Party, against the raids, state violence and the attack on democratic rights.

At Sunday's rally, a 55-year-old hospital administrator who came to the United States at age three told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "My dad could have been Lorenzo, because I grew up on that side, with family and friends living in that neighborhood."

She described the effect of Governor Greg Abbott's order that Texas hospitals ask patients about their immigration status. "Our families—oh my God—they wouldn't even come because they were afraid they were going to get deported. And how could we guarantee that that information was not going to get to the government? We couldn't."

A young social work student whose parents are fighting their immigration cases said that protesting in the heat was "nothing compared to the fear that these people have to live in." Immigrant victims of domestic violence, she said, are afraid to call Houston police: "Will they take my side, or will they handcuff me and report me to ICE?"

She rejected claims that the Democratic Party would stop the attacks. "I don't listen to them any more," she said. "When Obama came in, I was hopeful for immigration reform. And then the years passed. Nothing happened. Nothing changed."

The student connected the persecution of immigrants with war and the social crisis. Her brother entered the Navy because debt and poverty left him few other options. She said capitalism "needs to go away" and expressed support for socialism. "One group's struggle is basically everyone's struggle," she said. "It's important that we unite and understand these tactics to divide and conquer."

Another young woman described her father's daily life: "That could have been my dad. My dad wakes up every morning at 4:00 a.m. He goes to work; he helps make Houston." Immigrants are not taking jobs, she said: "The jobs are there. We just fill in that gap. We're hardworking people." She identified the president, billionaires and the rich as responsible for the crisis.

Massoud, an Iranian immigrant, called Salgado "an innocent man, a hardworking father, murdered by masked agents of terror." He connected the attack on immigrants with the war on Iran. "Waging war abroad is closely tied to waging war at home," he said. The government is turning ICE into a "loyal paramilitary force," making the international unity of workers against war and dictatorship essential.

Having lived through the Iran-Iraq War, he said, "It doesn't matter how far you are from the actual bombing—just one image can make you hear the terrifying sound of explosions in your head. For people living in war zones anywhere, in any country, the nightmare never stops."

His experience as an immigrant also shaped his response to Salgado's death. "These questions go beyond 'immigrant' issues; they're questions for everyone living in the United States," he said. "The imaginary line between immigrants and non-immigrants seems to be fading. For working families, ICE has become another dangerous, unpredictable threat in life, like an earthquake or a flood."

Workers should build workplace and neighborhood committees throughout Houston and nationally, uniting immigrant and US-born workers against ICE raids, deportations, police violence and war. Linked through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, they must prepare a political general strike against the Trump dictatorship.

The agents who killed Salgado and Guerrero, their supervisors and the officials who organized and covered up the operations must be prosecuted. Responsibility extends through DHS and the White House, including Mullin, Miller and Trump. The detained witnesses must be released, deportation proceedings halted and ICE and the militarized deportation apparatus disbanded. This requires an independent, international socialist movement of the working class.

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