

Following murders of Renee Good and Alex Pretti

Trump's DHS carried out vast spying operation against unions and left-wing groups in Minnesota

Jacob Crosse
14 August 2026

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conducted a sweeping domestic spying operation against unions, left-wing organizations and opponents of the Trump administration during the federal occupation of Minneapolis and St. Paul, according to government documents reviewed by the *New York Times* and made public Thursday in a federal court filing.

Undercover agents infiltrated meetings in churches, libraries, parks, schools, restaurants and union halls. They secretly recorded political discussions, entered encrypted Signal chats, collected license plate numbers, and compiled dossiers containing names, photographs, home addresses, employment and family information. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the investigative arm of DHS, also used administrative summonses to obtain years of financial records belonging to national unions and nonprofit organizations without identifying any underlying criminal conduct.

The dragnet was directed not at the agents who murdered Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, but at those who protested their killings, the federal occupation of Minnesota and Trump's mass deportation operation.

Good, a 37-year-old mother of three, was shot and killed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent Jonathan Ross on January 7. On January 24, Border Patrol agents Jesus "Jesse" Ochoa and Raymundo Gutierrez murdered 37-year-old Veterans Affairs nurse Alex Pretti, shooting him in the back multiple times. Seven months after Good's killing and nearly seven months after Pretti's, none of the immigration Gestapo agents responsible have been charged with a crime.

Instead, the Justice Department indicted 15 anti-ICE protesters in June on federal felony charges that could send them to prison for decades. The administration alleges they participated in a sprawling "antifa" conspiracy to impede federal officers. The indictment is part of the nationwide initiative established by National Security Presidential Memorandum 7 (NSPM-7), the White House framework for criminalizing opposition to fascism, mass deportations and the Trump administration.

The latest disclosures appear in a motion for discovery filed Thursday by attorney Kevin Riach on behalf of defendant Isaac Sant, one of the 15 facing charges. Riach wrote:

This case involves an unprecedented campaign by DHS to spy on Minnesotans. During Operation Metro Surge, undercover agents posing as protesters surveilled community meetings at churches, parks, libraries, schools and union halls.

The agents, he continued, recorded "dozens of conversations with

ordinary people who were simply exercising their First Amendment right to protest ICE's lawless rampage in our state." They gathered information through police databases and internet searches and created dossiers "that are apparently now available agency-wide."

HSI formally opened its mass spying campaign, dubbed "Operation Puppet Master," on January 28, four days after Pretti was murdered. The agency claimed, without identifying specific individuals or incidents, that an "organized network of conspirators" was providing "material support" to "violent opportunists and agitators."

Two weeks later, HSI opened a second investigation called "Project Whipple Shield," named for the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building, the headquarters of the federal immigration operation in Minnesota. The stated purpose was to identify "funding sources, organizational structures, and predicate actions" supposedly behind efforts to impede federal operations.

The political character of the operation is displayed in an HSI slide presented to the grand jury under the title "The Conspiracy." Eighteen organizations were arranged around Direct Action Minnesota, with arrows connecting each group to the center based on the alleged affiliation of individual members.

The organizations displayed as part of the supposed conspiracy include the Minnesota AFL-CIO, Minneapolis Federation of Educators Local 59, Service Employees International Union Local 26, Minnesota 50501, Socialist Alternative, the Democratic Socialists of America, Veterans for Peace, Minnesota ICE Watch and several neighborhood rapid-response organizations.

HSI Agent Desmond Garcia told the grand jury that the chart was a "snapshot" of organizations with which alleged members of Direct Action Minnesota were affiliated. As Riach explained, the government's theory appears to be that the overlapping membership of an individual transforms otherwise lawful organizations into co-conspirators.

No organization featured in the chart has been charged with a crime. Yet the visual was shown to grand jurors before they returned an indictment against the 15 defendants.

HSI used its invented conspiracy to launch what it called a financial investigation into "domestic terrorist financing." It secretly obtained wire-transfer records dating back to 2023 involving the Service Employees International Union's main account at U.S. Bank in Minneapolis.

The search uncovered nothing more sinister than "annuity payments, strike payments, strike supplies, investments, union member dues, retiree dues, medical expenses, and pension fund expenses," according to the filing.

The agency also obtained Communications Workers of America

donations and political action committee spending from 2023 through 2026. Its search extended to transactions involving the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers in Canada.

The Sunrise Movement, an environmental organization oriented to Democratic Party electoral politics, was subjected to financial surveillance and undercover infiltration. HSI subpoenaed PayPal and Venmo for payments to and from Voices for Racial Justice, a Minneapolis organization founded in 1993. The only explanation recorded for this search was that the group's website contained articles calling for "ICE OUT" and linked to rapid-response networks.

The use of administrative summonses allowed HSI to obtain records without seeking a warrant from a judge. According to the filing, financial institutions were instructed not to disclose the demands "for an indefinite period of time." Riach argues that the searches violated the First Amendment and the Right to Financial Privacy Act.

The surveillance extended far beyond financial records. Undercover HSI agents posed as protesters and activists while attending meetings at the United Labor Center in Minneapolis, Loring Park, Augsburg Park Library, St. John's Church, Zion Lutheran Church and a boxing class at University Baptist Church. Agents secretly made audio and video recordings.

At Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Roseville, agents recorded the license plates of people attending an anti-ICE meeting. They ran the plates through databases, searched social media for photographs and compiled an "intel workup" on each attendee. The resulting DHS dossiers included addresses, employment records, family information and vehicle registrations.

"None of these individuals did anything other than engage in protected First Amendment speech in a church meeting room," Riach wrote. "Yet now their personal information is memorialized in a DHS dossier."

The filing also presents evidence that undercover agents sought to push activists toward illegal activity. At a Sunrise Movement meeting, where participants stressed that the organization was committed to peaceful protest, an undercover agent privately told an attendee that he worked in construction and could build equipment for groups carrying out more confrontational actions. The agent added that he was not afraid of going to jail.

Another undercover agent, using the Signal name "peanutbutterjelly," volunteered to help with fundraising, propaganda, protest flyers and the selection of a donation platform.

The government spied on activity entirely unrelated to the alleged conspiracy. HSI reports document surveillance of a "No Kings" protest and a "Stop the War on Iran!" demonstration organized by Minnesota 50501, Veterans for Peace and the Sunrise Movement. The inclusion of an anti-war protest exposes the scope of the operation. Opposition to American imperialism, no less than opposition to ICE, was treated as a potential threat to the state.

This is a modern-day version of the FBI's Counterintelligence Program, or COINTELPRO. From 1956 to 1971, federal agents infiltrated, disrupted and sought to discredit the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, civil rights organizations and anti-war groups in the absence of any criminal activity.

The Minnesota dragnet is not an aberration. It is the implementation of NSPM-7, issued by Trump on September 25, 2025. HSI explicitly cited the memorandum as authority to open the case.

NSPM-7 orders federal agencies to investigate the "organized structures, networks, entities, organizations, funding sources, and predicate actions" behind vaguely defined political violence. It identifies opposition to "traditional American views on family, religion and morality" and to "support for law enforcement and border control" as suspect motivations.

In other words, the memorandum turns political disagreement with the fascist program of the White House into evidence of potential "domestic

terrorism."

The language has been reinforced by senior White House adviser Stephen Miller, the architect of Trump's mass deportation operation. In remarks cited by Riach, Miller declared that "the leftist is fundamentally motivated by envy, by hatred, by jealousy," and described anti-fascist protesters as "deformed."

Assistant Deputy Attorney General Aakash Singh has translated this policy into prosecutions. According to the filing, Singh told federal prosecutors that Trump was their "chief client" and that anyone unwilling to carry out his directives should step aside. After Pretti's murder, Singh reportedly instructed prosecutors responsible for NSPM-7 cases to "hound" federal agents for charges against demonstrators. "Go big," he said, "and go loud."

The financial oligarchy is terrified by the growth of socialist sentiment, mounting opposition to imperialist war and genocide, and seething anger over levels of inequality without precedent in modern American history. The most powerful oligarchs, including Elon Musk, placed their money, media platforms and political influence behind returning the fascist Trump to the White House after his failed January 6 coup. They require a massive assault on the working class and democratic rights to defend their wealth and power.

Trump's Justice Department is simultaneously revoking the consequences for the fascists who tried to overturn the 2020 election and manufacturing conspiracy cases against left-wing protesters. The administration pardoned or commuted the sentences of the January 6 defendants and moved this year to vacate the remaining Oath Keepers convictions. Three weeks after the last of those cases was dismissed, the Minnesota 15 were indicted.

Riach's filing further notes that Deputy Attorney General Brian Lynch, who convened the Minnesota grand jury and presented the "conspiracy" slide, was himself photographed, masked, inside the restricted zone at the Capitol on January 6 as rioters scaled the walls behind him.

The DHS spying operation is a warning to the entire working class. The fact that it encompassed unions and organizations deeply embedded in Democratic Party politics demonstrates that accommodation with the administration offers no protection. At the same time, the Democratic Party and the union bureaucracies have blocked any independent mobilization against the federal occupation, ICE murders and political prosecutions. They defend the capitalist state and the oligarchy whose interests it serves.

The defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to the courts, the Democrats or the trade union apparatus. Workers must demand the immediate dropping of all charges against the Minnesota 15 and every opponent of ICE targeted under NSPM-7, the prosecution of the agents responsible for the killings of Good and Pretti, the dismantling of ICE and Customs and Border Protection, and the withdrawal of federal paramilitary forces from American cities.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact