

by Voi:d

Minneapolis organizers started planning the Feb 25 – March 1 week of action, Bring the Heat, Melt the Ice, just a few weeks before it began. They put the call for out-of-towners and locals alike to come learn together and help keep up momentum beyond the end of Operation Metro Surge. On Feb 12, Homan had announced the ‘drawdown’ reduction in ICE presence, but there were still thousands of agents in the city.

We’d heard from Minneapolis friends how bad things were, how everyone was exhausted, heartbroken, and traumatized. We’d also heard how people continued to show up in huge numbers, confronting ICE agents in the streets and building vast networks of mutual aid. We wanted to be there to support and learn, so a couple friends made the drive out there from Portland.

Bring the Heat, Melt the ICE

The week of action brought hundreds of people to dozens of political education sessions, trainings, and actions. See “Build It And They Will Come,” a report-back from organizers about their intentions behind the week of action, for a more detailed play-by-play and an honest reflection on the ways in which it fell short.

I was so grateful for what I learned during the week, particularly from in-depth trainings on patrolling (scouting for ICE agents by car, bike, or on foot) and rapid response communication systems. There were also trainings and discussions on tenant, school, and workplace organizing, rides coordination and mutual aid, Block ICE Block Parties, Wide Awakes (how to intervene where ICE sleeps), how to care for public memorials after state violence, and more. Local organizer Ricardo Levins Morales led a session providing historical grounding for this moment, where he paid homage to the legacy of revolutionary struggle in Minneapolis during the

George Floyd Uprising, the American Indian Movement, in Cop Watch and police abolition work, and in the organizing work of farmworker, labor, and immigrant communities.

Another focus of the week was to plug out-of-towners into rapid response networks. Over a dozen neighborhood groups created infrastructure for welcoming us on car patrol ('commuter') ride-alongs and walking patrols.

A big question on our minds was how to translate our learnings from Minneapolis to fit back home, and a panel of organizers from the Bay, Chicago, and Northfield (MN) offered some ideas. Compared to Minneapolis, ICE activity in their cities (like in Oregon) has been more spread out, so organizers found it critical to map out regional ICE infrastructure, staging, and hot spots of activity, as well as to maintain region-wide communication. In Chicago, mapping led people to establish community defense hubs (or centros), where they could deter ICE proactively. In the Bay, comrades scouting for ICE in a neighboring county let them know ahead of time that CBP agents were going to stage at Coast Guard Island in Alameda. Having relationships and scouting across a broader region meant that they were better prepared to show up at Coast Guard Island and shut it down.

Actions during the week included a "Worker March Against ICE Collaborators" that drew attention to secondary targets and a "No Collaboration, Free Our Neighbors March" at the Sherburne County Jail, which has partnered with ICE to imprison people they kidnap. There was also a "Neighborhood Block Party Day" and daily phone banking for the Twin Cities Tenant Union Rent Strike. The week ended with a march on Whipple, the federal building where ICE stages from and holds people. The action stopped ICE from going in and out of Whipple for a few hours, and 40 people were arrested.

A common message from Minneapolis comrades was essentially: 'Learn from our successes and our mistakes, but don't

copy/paste. Study and adapt to your local context.' So to start, what can we learn?

The Block

During the height of the surge, thousands of people were on the ground, resisting ICE. People were interconnected and active on such a scale that their response time to ICE activity was under 2 minutes. How did they do it?

Before the start of Operation Metro Surge last December, Minneapolis had set up a relatively centralized system where people would report ICE sightings to a hotline, then the hotline would share that information with a loose network of responders. When the surge began, ICE switched from large-scale raids to snatch-and-grabs that would take just a few minutes. The centralized system was simply too slow and rigid. So people adapted. They created large Signal chats to coordinate neighborhood-level community defense, then those chats splintered off into smaller and smaller areas, down to the scale of a few blocks. More groups formed around protecting schools, places of worship, cultural centers, businesses, and other places ICE is targeting.

Autonomous, hyper-local, de-centralized groups sprung up all over the city around mutual aid and community defense. Every group has its own systems and agreements, unique to the people who live there. When there is such a wide variety of organizing structures, and when there is no apparent leader, the movement as a whole is harder to infiltrate or repress. Organizing with the people immediately around you allows for more trust-building, a particularly vital component for coordinating mutual aid. Valuing a diversity of tactics allows people to remain nimble, move proactively, and effectively escalate.

In the face of such overwhelming fascist violence, it can be hard to imagine what it looks like to build collective power

on the scale we need. What I saw in Minneapolis reminded me that there is no singular way forward, no one leader, no vanguard coming to save us. All we have is our relationships, our courage, and our sense of responsibility to take care of each other.

For more in-depth information, I recommend “Dispatch, Please Advise!” (from Red-Winged Blackbird), “Rapid Response Networks in the Twin Cities,” and “From Rapid Response to Revolutionary Social Change.” There are a number of zines and write-ups on Minneapolis block and tenant organizing, rent and general strikes, blockades, autonomous zones, flash points, collective grieving, and more (linked at the end).

The Neighborhood

On the scale of neighborhoods and across the city, hyper-local groups are working together while still practicing their autonomy and a diversity of tactics. While there is no central leadership, there are strong systems of communication, largely relying on dispatchers, a focus on data collection and collective learning, and – of course – thousands of whistles.

The Dispatchers:

- Dispatchers facilitate daily Signal calls for patrollers in their neighborhood. Throughout Operation Metro Surge, a dedicated team trained and vetted over 1000 dispatchers, building off what they learned from comrades in Chicago.
- They share information between patrollers and other Signal chats to quickly share reports on ICE sightings, using CSALUTER (a variation on the SALUTE acronym, where the “C” stands for “Concerned Community” and the “R” stands for “Response Requested”).
- They provide behind-the-scenes support to patrollers, helping with road navigation, plate checks (checking a database of verified ICE license plates), and

coordination (advising patrollers on where it would be helpful to have more coverage). They share information in a “Relay” chat with other dispatchers, to coordinate patrol hand-offs between different neighborhoods.

- They act as a grounding presence, helping patrollers discern for themselves what to do, and check in with them after intense situations to coordinate after-care.
- They don’t call the shots. Of course some people end up trying to police or control each other, but the goal is for dispatchers to share information and guidance without telling people what to do.

The Data Team:

- The Data Team aggregates, analyzes, and distributes city-wide data on ICE activity, helping reveal patterns in agents’ behavior so that people can make informed decisions and stay one step ahead.
- They source data and quickly shares it back to the community, fostering a culture of collective learning.
- They keep track of ICE agents’ behavior, when they break the law, and when they’re collaborating with cops, to support legal cases and help free people ICE has kidnapped.

The Whistles:

The concept of using whistles for ICE-watch was another gift from Chicago. In Minneapolis, thousands of people are using whistles to Stay Loud, Form a Crowd, intimidate agents, and stop abductions. Whistles are a simple, effective tool to gain power in numbers, deepen community belonging, and inspire courageous action.

The Culture

By fostering a culture of openness, trust-building, and collective learning, mutual aid and rapid response networks have been able to scale up quickly and continually adapt. Some

key elements of the culture:

- **Being welcoming and strategic about vetting practices.** Hyper-local and neighborhood groups tend to be very open to new people (one neighborhood has over 4000 people in Signal chats), although some use systems to vet and onboard (especially among those doing mutual aid, ride-sharing, and dispatching). People are generally focused on growing numbers and building trust.
- **Knowing your neighbors.** Minneapolis has a history of neighborhood-level organizing, but people's local connections grew rapidly during Operation Metro Surge. Knowing your neighbors helps with coordinating mutual aid, responding quickly to ICE activity, and staying alert (such as when agents try to blend in).
- **Having frequent, in-person gatherings and trainings.** Throughout the surge, people gathered to share resources, crowd-source information, and learn together. They organized dance parties, block parties, blockades, autonomous zones, vigils and more to collectively express grief, anger, and joy while building trust and community.
- **Navigating conflict, talking about mental health (see this guide for foot patrollers), and not tolerating bad behavior.** Conflict mediators, mental health and after-care teams play a critical role, as well as many who share the load of keeping an eye out for infiltrators and addressing harm.

None of this is to say that people in Minneapolis have it all figured out, or that they have created something perfect or free from the culture of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy. But many are putting in the work to grow a culture of collective care, to make mistakes together, and to respond at the scale the crisis requires. Folks in Minneapolis are giving us plenty to learn from, critique, and adapt as we continue to face the horrors of this moment, and I am deeply

grateful for their dedication to passing on the lessons.

The 'Drawdown' & What Comes Next

One of the main things we heard again and again is that the 'drawdown' is a misnomer, a messaging tactic designed to outmaneuver the resistance. For context: the end of Metro Surge came just days after Alex Pretti's murder, coinciding with Bovino (mostly likely) being fired as head of ICE coordination in Minneapolis and Homan stepping in. Homan has been switching out the self-described 'turn and burn' tactics Bovino used in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Minneapolis for a strategy that is just as cruel, but with different optics, relying more on secrecy and institutional cooperation (such as from local jails).

The surge brought upwards of 4000 federal agents to the Twin Cities, who operated at a scale and magnitude unlike anywhere in the country. ICE agents kidnapped thousands of people, snatching Black and Brown people off the street, shooting Julio Sosa-Celis and murdering Renée Good and Alex Pretti in broad daylight, and using every intimidation tactic in the playbook. While they're operating somewhat more under cover now and partially moving outward to the suburbs, there are still around 2000 agents in the region. They are continuing to act as a blatantly racist, occupying force. They are continuing this country's legacy of slave-catchers, now with fancy tech, surveillance, and the bloated 21st-century apparatus of the prison, police, and military industrial complex at their backs.

Many took the end of Metro Surge as a win, as a testament to the power they'd built together. At the same time, many I talked to were worried about ICE-watch and mutual aid networks losing momentum and getting less national support. And people's friends, family, and neighbors are still being held in cages. The kidnapping hasn't stopped.

While numbers are shifting with the ‘drawdown,’ the networks and connections folks have built remain strong. People remain determined to watch each other’s backs. Many are focusing on building out labor organizing and eviction defense work, expanding networks of care beyond this moment, and tactics like filing habeas corpus petitions to get people out of deportation holding. I have no idea what’s going to happen next in Minneapolis, but I feel that something has fundamentally shifted in the political landscape there, and I doubt there’s any going back.

Resources (all shared with permission)

Dispatch Distro – an autonomous library of zines against federal occupation of Minnesota

Dispatch, Please Advise! from Red-Winged Blackbird

Rapid Response Networks in the Twin Cities, From Rapid Response to Revolutionary Social Change, They Escalate, We Escalate, Minneapolis Responds to the Murder of Alex Pretti, and North Minneapolis Chases Out ICE (Crimethinc)

Week of Action Patrol Expectations & Explanations (from Lake Street Foot Patrol)

Defend 612 – Resources

Letter From Alex Pretti’s Dispatcher

“We Belong to Each Other Now”: Lessons from Minneapolis – Kelly Hayes

Filter Blockades & Proliferation of Tactics in the Twin Cities: An Interview (Living & Fighting)

How to Set Up a Filter Blockade

Our Neighbors in Minneapolis – Margaret Killjoy

Rapid Response Networks (Live Like the World is Dying)

List of New and Proposed ICE Detention Centers Across the US
Confidence. Courage. Connection. Trust.