

# **We Are Winning!**

**The Battle of Seattle – a Personal Account**



*"I wish every city could be like Seattle."*

Michael Moore, Director General of World Trade Organisation



*"This is amazing", I say to one of my comrades, "has there ever been anything like this?"*

*"Not since Spain", she replies, an amusing and heartening exaggeration.*

*A group of friends come up to us and we engage in a jubilant conversation.*

*"We just need to start occupying some buildings," says another member of my affinity group, "we've got the streets that would seem the next order of business."*

*"Yeah, but right now we're just fucking hungry," says another member of my affinity group.*

*"Then you should just go to the grocery store," I chime in, "just go in and take what you want. I mean all that money and property bullshit is over now isn't it?"*

Ummm...Quote from American fanzine entitled Everyday Revolution describing a conversation that took place on November 30



## Foreword

What follows is the personal account of four British eco-anarchists' experiences in Seattle over the period 20<sup>th</sup> November – 5<sup>th</sup> December 1999. Our visit, which coincided with the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), was one of the most exciting and inspiring times of our lives. We learned so much and are keen to share our experiences. However, this account has no pretence at comprehensiveness, its purpose being more to inform than to analyse.

Although much has been made of the significance of the events in Seattle, both by the corporate media, and radical journals, news sheets and magazines, little has been written about what actually took place there. How the day was prepared for, how the event was publicised, how the Conference Centre was shut down, how prisoners were supported and how the tear gas was dealt with remain unanswered questions in many people's minds.

We hope that what follows will help to provide an insight into what happened in Seattle and why. We also aim to highlight some of the discussions and debates it has created in the US.

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## Not the beginning...

The global day of action on Nov 30th was the third internationally co-ordinated action called for by Peoples Global Action (see contacts). Following the successes of May 1998 when global actions coincided with the G8 summit in Birmingham, and June the 18th (when they again coincided with the G8 meeting, this time in Cologne, Germany), a proposal was put out for a third day of action on Nov 30th. This was a direct response to the announcement that the World Trade Organisation would be meeting in Seattle at this time. The meeting aimed to set an agenda for the new Millennium Round of negotiations intended to further trade liberalisation.

Seattle was chosen as an ideal city to host the WTO conference: home to corporations such as Microsoft and Boeing it is both affluent and thriving. It was also a highly convenient location for the US activist community with the highest concentration of North American activists being located in the Pacific North-West.

In the months leading up to the 30<sup>th</sup> various events took place in towns all along the West Coast. Thousands of people attended teach-ins where talks were given on topics including globalisation, free trade and the role of the WTO. These were largely sponsored by groups such as Global Exchange and People for Fair Trade. A group called Art and Revolution who use street theatre and dance to convey their ideas went on tour around the USA and Canada. The Ruckus Society, a group that specialises in training people in skills required for high tech actions, such as climbing, also went on tour. Hundreds of people attended non-violent direct action (NVDA) trainings that were held for those wishing to participate in the mass action being organised by the Direct Action Network (DAN) for the 30<sup>th</sup> (see below).

Additionally a huge amount of publicity was generated. Thousands of flyers were sent out across North America and the rest of the world urging activists to come to Seattle. The media hyped it as 'the next big thing'; unedited articles written by activists appeared in local papers and some of the free left-wing Seattle weeklies published WTO survival guides and urged the people of Seattle to take to the streets on the 30th. A spoof paper called *Seattle Post Intelligence* based on one of the main local papers the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* was printed. In the States newspapers are sold from boxes on the streets - you put your money in, open the box and take your paper out. This means you have access to all the papers in the box. The spoof paper was designed so it wrapped around the real paper. All the newspaper boxes contained copies of the *Seattle Post Intelligence* a few days before the 30th. In the weeks leading up to the Ministerial, Seattle's shop windows were plastered with posters encouraging workers to call in sick and come and join in one of the demonstrations.

### Direct Action Network

DAN was formed in the summer of 1999 at the annual conference of Art and Revolution. Sponsors included organisations such as Global Exchange, Rain Forest Action Network, Ruckus Society and Seattle Earth First! The networks original aim was "to mobilise [their] communities to creatively resist the WTO and organise large scale street theatre and a mass non violent direct action to shut down the WTO Ministerial". As a result local DAN groups set up throughout the West Coast in the months preceding the day of action. Post N30 DAN continues to "fight capital dictated government" by fomenting "a broad based peoples movement".

The vast majority of Seattle residents knew that the WTO was coming, and although many couldn't really say why, most seemed to think it was bad. What had originally been hailed as a marvellous business opportunity for the city was fast becoming a pariah. A few days before the 30th the *Seattle Times* headline was "Who's idea was this anyway?". It also printed an article claiming the police were expecting 5 to 6 officers to be killed during the Ministerial.

Planning for direct action on the 30th was primarily co-ordinated by DAN; although other groups like the Sierra Club (sort of equivalent to Greenpeace/FoE in the UK), the AFL-CIO, one of the biggest unions in North America, and student bodies planned their own demonstrations for the day.

Through a process of consultation between the groups DAN was composed of, a set of guidelines for action on November the 30th was drawn up. These proved to be a major source of division among activists. This was especially true of the guideline concerning abstention from

### Guidelines For Action

1. We will use no violence verbal or physical, against any person.
2. We will carry no weapons.
3. We will take no alcohol or drugs.
4. We will not destroy property.

property damage. Many activists felt angry that they were expected to comply with guidelines they had not participated in creating. DAN urged people who wanted to destroy property to do it on a different day of the Ministerial. However, many others argued



that November the 30th had been called as a global day of action before DAN had even formed, and that DAN was in no position to dictate the forms of action that could take place in Seattle. Within DAN there was considerable discussion regarding the use of 'peace police'. These would be people attending the demonstrations whose role would be to look for people within the crowds causing 'trouble' and isolate or remove them if necessary. It was eventually decided that there would be no official 'peace police' but that workshops and DAN spaces generally would be used as a platform to encourage people to talk to and prevent anyone from carrying out property damage if they saw it occurring during the conference.

Organisation of the DAN action was taken on by the 'scenario group' who held regular, completely open planning meetings. All decisions were taken by consensus. These decisions then went to an organising collective made up of representatives from all the sponsoring organisations, sub groups (e.g. food, fundraising and media) and local groups involved. These meetings were also totally open but decisions were limited to the spokespeople. Only when decisions had been agreed upon by the organising collective could they be acted upon.

The stated aim of the DAN action was to "shut down the WTO". It was decided that possibly the only feasible way of doing this would be to attempt to prevent the 3000-5000 delegates from gaining entry into the Convention Centre before the Ministerial started. A series of road blockades were planned so that the entire Conference Centre, which is situated in Seattle's central shopping district, would be cut off and made inaccessible. These blockades would be in conjunction with, and assisted by, a procession that would start from two different points in the city.

The other major task that DAN undertook was holding a ten-day convergence prior to N30. Several warehouses were hired, some for accommodation, others for prop making. One of these buildings, 420 Denny Street, was where the main events of the convergence took place. This space also served as a welcoming and reception point for the hundreds of people streaming into Seattle to shut down the WTO. Food Not Bombs who serve free food in dozens of cities across North America, provided food for donations, three times a day, throughout the convergence. Everyone who arrived was asked to register, giving their name and address to be put on a database that would be used to inform people about future events. People were also given a direct action packet. This pack clearly set out the plan for November 30th and included information on what to do if arrested, how to deal with police and the media and details of jail solidarity. Housing was also allocated. Some squats were opened. However, these were quite small as many people were not prepared to stay in them

because squatting in the US is illegal and trespass is a criminal offence. The majority of people stayed in some of the rented warehouses or with local residents. The whole convergence was extremely well organised.

The convergence began on the 20th of November. The main focus was practical preparation for the blockades on the 30th. The 10 days provided an opportunity to meet new people and to either join an affinity group or form a new one to work with during the conference. Each day there were several NVDA trainings, each one lasting three hours. Two or three 'trainers' led these workshops. There were other workshops about blockades, climbing, first aid, communication and radios and several other practical issues. There were also a couple of workshops on the basics of the WTO and 'pacifism as pathology' but generally very few theoretical workshops.

There were also legal briefings given several times a day. These lasted for around 3 hours and went through role-plays of arrest scenarios, from the point of arrest until release from jail. In the US it is usual that on mass actions there are mass arrests. Jail solidarity was devised as a method of dealing with this.

### Objectives of Jail Solidarity

- To minimise the potential repercussions felt by those resisting the WTO by demanding that all arrestees only be charged with an "infraction". This would be the equivalent to a parking offence and would not show up on a criminal record. The hope was that the only penalty arrestees would have to incur would be "time served".
- To prevent any of the arrestees from being singled out as "organisers", internationals or as being guilty of more serious offences.
- To maintain both collective identity and collective strength in a situation designed to evoke feelings of isolation and vulnerability.

Jail solidarity training sessions and legal briefings explained how this could be achieved. The plan was for all of those arrested to claim the right to silence. This was to be extended to a refusal by prisoners to disclose their names, addresses and dates of birth. Those who felt confident enough to do so were also encouraged to remain entirely silent so as to disguise which of the arrestees were non-US citizens. Each person expecting to risk arrest wore a sticker explaining "*I am choosing to remain silent. I want a lawyer from the DAN legal defence team*" with the DAN phone number below.



In addition each arrestee was to demand the right to a speedy trial in the hope that it would be possible to clog up the judicial system to the extent that it would be impossible to try all of those arrested. The demands were to be given to the police via the legal defence team. A series of tactics designed to cause further disruption were planned to be used if the demands were not met. From going limp and refusing to move, to making as much noise as possible and – as a last resort – going on hunger strike.

Although the DAN space was an excellent training, networking and resource centre, it was not without its problems. The urgent need to train over a thousand people with different levels of direct action experience in a short amount of time meant that there was no room or tolerance for discussion of tactics or philosophies. Lines were quite clearly drawn between 'experts in charge' and punters being taught the 'right' way to participate in direct action. The following quote is one person's experience of the DAN space written at the time:

*"420 is an anarchist's nightmare. We are herded from square foot to square foot, screamed at by self-appointed despots. Someone spreads a rumour that the space was paid for by Microsoft and Boeing which I assume is a joke though for the moment I can well believe it. A few of us attend a Jail Solidarity workshop – we last for half of it: the first half is more along the lines of an NVDA workshop (and in the event of jail solidarity, the prisoner support only speaks of 'non-violent prisoners' excluding support for those charged with felonies such as malicious mischief and damage to property). We are told that is it "wrong" to push back at police lines – that we must sit down and link arms; we are told to point at someone being targetted by the police and chant "Om" so the police will think we're putting a spell on them! We suggest alternative de-arresting techniques and get told to sit down and shut up (one trainer later apologises for this). I am angry, frustrated and disempowered. Pacifism as Pathology suddenly means a whole lot more to me in this context, in the context from which it came."*

The other main purpose of the 420 space was to organise the blockade. The area around the Conference Centre was divided up into 13 'pie slices'. Anyone who wanted to take part in the blockade was asked to choose a piece of pie with their established or newly formed affinity group. Several affinity groups claimed each slice of pie and these 'affinity group clusters' blockaded the intersection nearest to the Conference Centre in the area their slice covered. If forced to retreat due to police actions they fell back to the next junction.

Each evening at the convergence there was a spokescouncil meeting. Here, representatives from each affinity group would discuss developments, their plans, whether their affinity group needed more people, or their cluster needed more affinity



groups and other relevant issues. Although decisions taken at the spokescouncil meeting were limited to the spokespeople they were totally open and attended by many people.

The methods of organisation were very different to those generally used in the UK for mass actions. The level of openness concerning plans for the blockades was incredible. There were huge maps on the walls showing pie slice locations and which affinity groups were blockading where. People organising parts of the action would stand up and introduce themselves stating what their role was. The press were allowed into the 420 space although they were told not to photograph anyone without their permission. However, there were still many people, press and otherwise, photographing both the maps of the blockade locations and the people attending the convergence.

One of the major actions that took place prior to the 30th was the squatting of a warehouse in central Seattle (situated next door to the police command centre for the Ministerial!). Due to the US laws mentioned earlier this was quite a big event. Those occupying the building, which had been empty for several years, were demanding for it be turned into a homeless shelter, a glaringly absent feature in Seattle. The police response to the occupation was to cut electricity and water supplies. However, despite this and several false eviction alerts, the building remained squatted throughout the conference.

On the day before the 30th there was a demonstration held by the Sierra Club in central Seattle. The theme was Environment Day and several thousand people attended. In a show of what was to follow over the next few days, traffic drew to a halt as people took over the streets and converged around the Conference Centre. By late afternoon the crowd had dispersed and last minute preparations for the following day continued.





*"Why confine ourselves to the limited tactics of passive resistance and abstention from property damage? We should use tactics which will further our struggle and help us realise our goals – without fetishising either pacifism or violence. We must not go into action, or in-action, on November 30<sup>th</sup> with a preconceived set of ideas about how we must behave. Rather we should be flexible, spontaneous and free to seize opportunities as they arise!"* Extract from leaflet produced by British activists in Seattle responding to the action guideline concerning property damage and attempting to provide an alternative viewpoint to the prevailing attitude in the DAN space

## November 30<sup>th</sup>

The day of November 30<sup>th</sup> began with the Direct Action Network action, which was advertised as starting at 7am. There were two advertised meeting places, one either side of the Motorway that acts as a (un)natural barrier splitting Seattle from East to West. Many of the affinity groups that were doing the blockades were using the processions as a cover to set up, other affinity groups had gone to their 'pie-slices' already. Some blockades were apparently set up as early as 6am, although it is hard to know what is accurate.

The early morning commuter buses were brimming with people chanting and singing, all making their way to the meeting points. This provided an interesting opportunity to talk to those on their way to work. It was clear that the population of Seattle had already had a rapid education on what the WTO was and how it affected them, and most people had already formed an opinion on it.

At the meeting points, still in the dark, people were going around and pointing out the various colour-coded flags amongst the crowd. They were coded for high and low arrestability, and some of them were for the affinity groups that had chosen where they would blockade, while others were for the 'flying squads', who would be in radio

contact and able to come to the aid of affinity groups that needed support. People who hadn't joined an affinity group were encouraged to do so even at this late stage.

Some of the tripods and blockading equipment was confiscated by police, and only one tripod made it to its destination. The idea had been that the equipment would be hidden under giant puppets, carried in shopping trolleys.

The processions moved off, and the atmosphere was relaxed, with an extremely low-key police presence. The affinity groups broke off as the processions arrived near the Convention Centre, and set up their blockades either using sheer numbers of people, some with arms locked together through 'lock-on' tubes, sit-down blockades, and the one with the tripod.



The only blockading group that actually failed was the one that was trying to blockade Interstate 5 (I-5), the motorway that actually runs underneath the Convention Centre.

The Convention Centre was totally ringed by the blockading groups, and everywhere there were stranded delegates walking the whole way around the Centre being turned away by protesters at every entrance. Some got irate, one even pulling a gun on the protesters, another using pepper spray. Some groups had also chosen to try and keep the delegates in their hotels by locking on to the hotel doors to keep them shut.

Some groups tried to build barricades with dumpsters (skips), but these efforts were largely thwarted by undercover cops working in the crowd.



The area around the Centre was a critical mass of people. Everywhere there were amazing things going on. There was an anarchist samba band, and wherever they went, several hundred went too, dancing to the music, so they took people to areas that needed support. There were the radical cheerleaders, pom-poms and all, theatre performances, and giant puppets.

The plans for the communications were complex and involved a lot of expensive radio equipment. US activists don't generally use mobile phones as they are costly and there are no anonymous ones. There was a communication centre, called 'Comm one' and each affinity group would have the necessary equipment to communicate with 'Comm one'. They also had cheap walkie-talkie radios to talk to each other. The idea was that 'Comm one' would relay messages to whoever needed to hear them.

Not surprisingly, first thing on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 'Comm one' was totally blocked and completely ineffective all day. Everyone resorted to using the cheap walkie talkies, and communication worked really well. People would hear the message that support was needed somewhere, relay the message to the crowd, and get people there.

People were out on bikes with walkie-talkies letting everyone know what was going on in different areas. This was a really successful method of communication.

There was also pirate radio broadcasting all day. One of the stations was broadcasting from a tree in a nearby national park, and it carried on all week. Another was broadcasting live from a bike in Seattle, but didn't last long before it got busted.

By about 9am, the blockades were still holding strong. Around this point, the police started to resort to more extreme methods. At this time the actions had been within the DAN guidelines and there had been no property damage. Without even the excuse of provocation, the police attacked.

They attempted to clear those intersections providing access to the Convention Centre, using tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets on the people blockading.

There were stories of people with both arms locked on - totally helpless and vulnerable - being tear gassed. The cops then moved in, lifted off their gas masks, pepper sprayed them in the face, put their masks back on and then beat them with batons.

The people on the blockades held up amazingly. The blockades held during the

**Property destruction** isn't a violent activity unless it destroys lives or causes pain. Private (especially corporate) property is thus infinitely more violent than any action taken against it.

Personal property is distinguished from private property. The former is based upon use - each having what s/he needs. The premise of private property is that we have something someone else needs. Those who accrue more of what others need (or want) can wield greater control over others (and what others perceive as needs/desires), thereby increasing profit to themselves.

Advocates of "free trade" want to push this process to its logical conclusion: a few industry monopolists with ultimate control over everyone else. Advocates of "fair trade" want to mitigate this process via government regulations which superficially impose 'humanitarian standards'. We despise both positions. Private property - capitalism - is intrinsically violent and repressive. It cannot be reformed or mitigated.

Destroying private property destroys the thin veneer of legitimacy surrounding property rights and exorcises the destructive social relationships contained therein. Limited exchange value becomes expanded use value: storefronts become vents to let fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet, a newspaper box is a tool to reclaim public space with, a dumpster obstructs rioting cops - is a source of heat and light, a building facade records ideas for a better world.

After N30, people will never see a shop window or a hammer the same way again. The potential uses of an entire cityscape have increased a thousand-fold. Along with the broken windows are the broken spells cast by a corporate hegemony to lull us into forgetfulness of all the violence committed in the name of private property rights and of all the potential of a society without them. Broken windows can be boarded up and replaced but the shattering of assumptions will hopefully persist for some time.

*Against Capital & State, the ACME Collective (N30 Black Bloc Communique Dec 4 1999)*





gassing, while those without masks calmly walked away. As soon as the tear gas was clearing, the people would be back. The amount that people endured was incredible, and the strength and bravery was unbelievable.

*"As a movement of people we were unstoppable. The negotiators of corporate power and profit orientated policy were left bankrupt by a movement of people who represented a radical coalition of activists that came from around the world and mounted an unprecedented campaign of resistance."* Chris Crass (US activist)

At about 10am, the opening ceremony was cancelled, and only 200-300 of the 3000-5,000 delegates had gained entry. Rumours started circulating that the police were trying to clear intersections to get delegates out, not in! It's impossible to say what was really going on inside the Convention Centre, but needless to say, even if there were still talks going on, the events only one or two hundred yards away certainly couldn't have provided a comfortable working environment.

The police continued to gas and shoot at the crowd with rubber bullets. The only retaliation generally offered by the crowd was the throwing back of the gas canisters, ineffective against the cops wearing gas masks, but more an attempt to get the gas out of the immediate area. There were clouds of tear gas all over the city. The familiar stinging sensation in the eyes and burning throat would hit suddenly, even when walking down a relatively quiet street that wasn't being gassed.

The police were also firing concussion bombs, which at first sight, appear to be live ammunition. They fire them in the air and they explode with an incredibly loud boom. They are designed to panic the crowd and clear the area. They are also dangerous, and if they explode next to your head can kill you.

The crowd stayed incredibly calm throughout. When gassed, people didn't run, just walked calmly away. There were chants like "keep moving, stay calm", which helped stop a panicked atmosphere setting in. The levels of preparedness for the day were impressive. A lot of people had gas masks, bicarbonate of soda and water for washing out tear gas, masks and eye goggles. People carried nail clippers for the plastic quick-cuffs that the police use in mass arrests. Medics on bikes cycled around the crowds looking for people that needed help, and a medical centre had been set up

in the 420 where the convergence had been held. The medics were well prepared and extremely visible.

At about 11am, with the blockades still going strong, a black bloc was formed, so called because generally those involved wear black with masks for the sake of anonymity. This was about 100 people who took on - as a pro-active activity, not as a reaction to police violence - the task of engaging in property damage. They moved through the streets of Seattle destroying various corporate store-fronts, cop cars, and spraying anti-capitalist and anti-WTO messages on walls. Among the corporations targeted were Fidelity Investment, The Bank of America, US Bancorp, Key Bank, Washington Mutual Bank, Old Navy, Banana Republic, The Gap, NikeTown, Levi's, McDonalds, Starbucks, Warner Brothers, and Planet Hollywood.

The black blocs worked fluidly throughout the day, breaking up and re-forming, always remaining mobile. They buddied up and looked out for each other. Undercover police posing as 'peace police' (other protestors) targeted the black bloc and some people were arrested. When this happened, the buddies of those who had been arrested tried to de-arrest them. At the end of the day, only half a dozen or so people from the black bloc had been arrested.

The crowd's reaction to the black bloc was extremely negative. People were physically protecting corporate stores like NikeTown, and there were also incidents where 'peace police' physically attacked those engaged in property destruction. Subsequent media misrepresentation (surprise, surprise) of the day and spectacularisation of the black bloc was largely responsible for the backlash against their actions. However, people from the black bloc did attempt to counter this and some took part in interviews with the press explaining their actions and relating them to the wider fight against capital.

One of the other events taking place in Seattle was the labour march. A 35,000 strong crowd from the AFL-CIO, one of the biggest unions in the US, took to the streets in the afternoon. Those on what could be called the 'front line' near the police and Convention Centre, got messages to the union leaders, asking them to bring the march downtown to help support the blockades. The march was marshalled along the entire route, and when it approached downtown, the marshals turned the workers back, taking it away from where support was needed. A few groups in the march, some of the steelworkers, longshoremen and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) broke away from the main body of the march and headed downtown to aid the blockades.



Meanwhile, up and down the West Coast, the longshoremen dockworkers had gone on strike, closing ports from Canada to Mexico, one of the most significant yet least heard of events during the ministerial.

The day continued with the police forcing some of the blockades away from the Convention Centre. There were still thousands and thousands of people downtown, and a state of emergency was called at about 4pm. There would be a 7pm curfew, the National Guard (similar to the Territorial Army) was on its way, and by now it had been made an offence to buy, sell, or possess a gas mask, punishable by up to 6 months imprisonment.

There was a lull in the use of tear gas for a little while. Apparently this was due to the fact that they had run out. The police used chartered planes and flew across the country restocking. Canisters were found imprinted with "use within 4 years of this date", and 1977 printed on them.

The gassing soon resumed, and the levels the police were using escalated. By about 6pm, as it was getting dark, the police started to clear the streets. They marched forward, using rubber bullets and gas to clear the streets in front of them.



*"Seattle is a war zone. The police have declared war on everyone who dares to vary from the routines of production and consumption. The lines have never been so clearly drawn"*

*"Everything that has happened here in Seattle...has crystallized things. This is real. The need for action is constant...The police state is here and everywhere right now."* Quotes from Everyday Revolution, an American fanzine

*"As the evening darkens, a few of us break away from the group of Brits trudging home, to make the most of the last hour before curfew...With rocks in our hands and spray cans in our pockets, we converge on a truly offensive department store...A man comes up to us, looks at the mini black bloc and says, "Hey, cool." We laugh. "Hang on, are you girls?...Waaaayyy cool!!" "*  
B B Gurlsroch, British activist

The dark and the frequent explosion of concussion bombs added to the war zone atmosphere.

The numbers of people on the streets had dramatically decreased. Some people stayed to resist the curfew. The feelings of control we had felt for most of the day rapidly disappeared. The large numbers of Seattle kids out on the street became more apparent as numbers decreased, and they continued tagging walls and doing the odd bit of looting. There was also still a group of several hundred protesters that were slowly being pushed out of downtown by the cops.

They were eventually pushed into a neighbourhood called Capitol Hill, and despite the fact that it's a residential area, police continued indiscriminately gassing everybody, including lots of residents. This resulted in the politicising of many local people. The gassing carried on late into the night, with a stand-off between the police and a collection of both protesters and local residents who were enraged that the police were doing this in their home.

By about 2am, downtown was still a military zone, with deserted streets except for lines of National Guard and cops. Most of those who had stayed in Capitol Hill had drifted off home for the night. Seattle slept in anticipation of another day's protests.





## DAYS 2, 3 AND 4

At around 7am on December 1<sup>st</sup>, people began drifting back into downtown Seattle, again with the intention of preventing the WTO from meeting.

The first arrests were quick to occur to an unfortunate few dozen who arrived in the no-go zone only a few minutes before the curfew ended. As numbers grew a crowd of several hundred began to make their way towards the Convention Centre. At around 8:30am the crowd was ushered into an empty, pedestrianised town square where the first mass arrests took place. The crowd sat down and people chanted, sang and waved banners as they were arrested one-by-one and loaded into buses to be transported either to Seattle jail or Sand Point military base which had been specially prepared to accommodate the hundreds of anticipated arrestees. Virtually no resistance to arrest was put up by any of those occupying the square. The nature of the protest was distinctly in the vein of symbolic and non-violent civil disobedience.



Meanwhile, heated debate occurred as protesters armed with brooms, buckets and bleach proceeded to sweep up the broken glass and to erase the powerful slogans of dissent from the walls of Seattle. Declarations of victory, calls to further action, tags by local kids were scrubbed off and later, someone was stopped short of removing "Free Mumia" from the jail wall. These cleaners (who promoted 'graffiti by chalk' rather than hard-wearing spray paint) argued that much of it was "just tags", failing to understand that tagging is simply another way of expressing social disenfranchisement. They seemed equally unaware that by cleaning up the city they were behaving as apologists for what was and continued to be an amazing show of resistance.

As the day drew to a close more arrests took place. A 2000-3000 strong rally held by the (fairly) militant Steelworkers' Union ended amidst shouts of "Downtown Now!" by an assortment of workers, environmentalists and anarchists bored of the speeches being given by the Union hierarchy. A procession towards the Convention Centre, the Westin Hotel (where Clinton and the rest of the U.S. delegation were resident) and the newly declared no-protest zone soon emerged. Having moved only a few blocks away from where the rally had been held the cops launched tear





gas grenades and concussion bombs into the crowd.

The entirely non-violent and fairly uneventful march was attacked and divided into smaller, more manageable groups. Some sections were driven away from their targets and into areas of town where they would be less able, or less willing, to cause damage or disruption. Those not so lucky were forced into streets filled with riot police where they were surrounded and arrested. Again, some were taken to the jail, but the majority were taken to Sand Point.

Confrontations continued throughout the day, almost all of which were instigated by the police. Crowds were attacked and dispersed by baton-wielding riot cops. People were driven into working class neighbourhoods before the police launched their tear gas attacks. Indiscriminately thousands of protesters, Christmas shoppers, parents with kids, office workers, school children and even WTO delegates were gassed.

In the commotion following the police attack upon the Steelworkers' demo one group was driven towards Pike Place market which was full of hundreds of stall holders and shoppers. The police are said to have launched canisters containing CX

gas – a form of nerve toxin previously only used during the Gulf war – into the market crammed with confused and understandably panicked people. Effects include immediate symptoms like bowel movement, menstruation, headaches, and nausea. After people left, many experienced 'chemical colds'. The cops eventually issued an apology for this incident. Investigations by both the police department and Amnesty International are ongoing regarding the use of this gas.

## Jail Solidarity

By the end of the day almost 500 people had been arrested (compared to around 70 on November 30<sup>th</sup> itself). However, the scenes of resistance and solidarity the arrestees had expressed on the streets of Seattle did not end when their detentions began. It was at this point that jail solidarity came into effect.

## Inside for Us...

Jail solidarity tactics had been attempted on previous demos and actions in the USA with little success. However, like many other things in Seattle, the success of this tactic exceeded everyone's greatest expectations.

The vast majority of those arrested on December 1<sup>st</sup>, both during the morning occupation of the town square and following the Steelworkers' march, began employing solidarity tactics immediately after arrest. Many had come prepared with nail cutters hidden about them to cut themselves and others free from the plastic handcuffs used by American cops in these situations.

As the police buses containing hundreds of prisoners pulled into Sand Point the arrestees learned that the cops were planning to prevent them from receiving legal representation until they had all disclosed their identities. In response several entire bus loads of protesters refused to leave the vehicles they had arrived in and demanded to be put in touch with the DAN legal team. After thirteen hours in occupation of the unheated vehicles and with no access to food water or toilets they were violently evicted by cops who used both tear gas and pepper spray to clear the buses. Around 98% of those arrested took part in the solidarity actions, refusing to give their names and addresses despite severe repression.

Stories of police brutality began to escape from the jails. We heard of one woman who had her trousers removed by a van load of riot cops who then threatened to rape her before dumping her miles out of town; of prisoners being drugged, and of suspected "organisers" being put naked into solitary confinement, and of cops



using pepper spray inside prison cells and tying people to chairs for up to 18 hours whilst interrogating them as to who their leaders were.

## ...Outside for Them!

Unsurprisingly, the following days of action focused upon those of us outside of jail expressing solidarity with, and demanding the release of, those inside.

At around 1pm on December 2<sup>nd</sup> a crowd which had converged on the centre of Seattle slowly made its way towards the jail. They arrived unhindered as by this point the police had toned down the levels of overt violence they were using. Hundreds occupied the forecourt of the jail and closed down its main entrance. Hundreds more encircled the building.

Eventually the demands of those who had been occupying the buses outside Sand Point and those who were blockading the jail were met. Members of the DAN legal team were allowed entry to the jail and the military base in order to provide advice to all of those being detained, regardless of whether they had revealed their identities or not.

Having gained this concession the long process of gaining consensus from all of those blockading the jail as to the next collective course of action commenced. After many, many hours it was decided to abandon the jail blockade, on the understanding that it would recommence if the cops backed out on their pledge to allow prisoners legal advice. Instead people decided to attend the demonstration which had been called by residents of Capitol Hill in response to police brutality. Further stand-offs between cops and residents took place throughout the night.

The following morning, on December 3<sup>rd</sup> – the final day of the Ministerial – the blockade was re-established. The demand: initially the unconditional release of all *non-violent* political prisoners and after discussion the unconditional release of *all* political prisoners (which now numbered around 700). The massive blockade lasted throughout the day, the night and much of the next day. Music was played, speakers debated and food and clothing were donated.

As the evening drew to a close a small group of people locked themselves to the main doors of the Westin Hotel where the US delegates were still resident. Here too the demand was equally clear: the release of all political prisoners. As the "lock-down" became known about hundreds flocked to the hotel and formed a second blockade. Again there was music, debate and food provided by the radical

Longshoremen dockworkers who were inspired by the links they had built with many of the ecologically focused groups over the previous few days and by local people inspired by what they had witnessed and participated in.

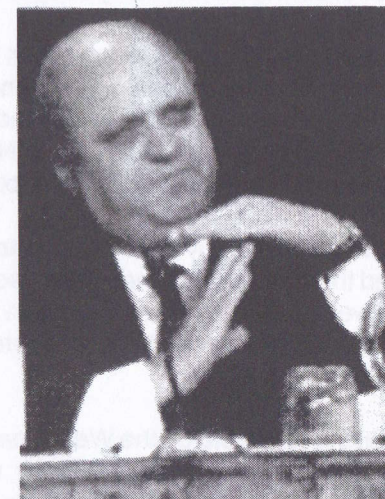
## The Victory!

At around 11pm the news came through. Due to disruption both inside and outside of the conference the Ministerial had been abandoned.

Michael Moore, Director General of WTO

The objective of the meeting had been to draft an agenda for the Millennium Round of WTO negotiations, which would have included time-tabling discussions on how to introduce a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), a Global Free Logging Agreement and numerous other bilateral and multilateral trade and investment treaties. Due to the fact that the opening ceremony had been abandoned, that the first day of talks disrupted to an extent that they were almost worthless and because of the internal ructions between the African nations and those of the West, no final agenda could be agreed upon.

When the crowd outside the Westin heard the news there were a few minutes disbelief followed by totally ecstatic joy. Tens of thousands of previously unconnected groups and individuals from workers in struggle, radical ecologists, feminists and street gangs to students, the unemployed, indigenous groups and Seattle residents had come together to fight against the WTO and had successfully driven them out of town.



*"It was frightening and wonderful and I must have more..."* Quote from American fanzine Everyday Revolution

## Not the End...

The fact that the mobilisation against the World Trade Organisation was so successful in creating such disruption, combined with the new alliances forged between groups in the build up to the Ministerial, has created an incredible feeling of strength within many of the social movements involved. This, coupled with the



excitement and inspiration created by the international aspect of the day of action on November 30<sup>th</sup>, has helped give birth to a new feeling of optimism and a sense of moving forward.

However, all of this has not been without its problems. Both the manner in which the event was organised and mobilised for, and the events and actions that took place during the Ministerial have sparked off a huge number of debates and discussions. Obviously these debates are highly complex and multi-faceted. However, the main areas of contention are fairly easy to identify.

Many people felt uncomfortable with the alliances forged by the Direct Action Network. Many of the self-defined anarchists and those used to working in a non-hierarchical way for radical social and ecological change have – predictably enough – found working alongside reformist NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) and groups with paid “campaigners” problematic.

Some were unhappy about the existence/imposition of the action guidelines. Others found the way in which they were decided upon more problematic. Some of those who were committed to acting within the parameters of these guidelines felt betrayed by the black-bloc and others who got involved in property destruction or fighting with the cops.

Speaking to people on the West Coast of America in the couple of months leading up to Seattle it was clear that many, many people were inspired by the day of action on June 18<sup>th</sup>. People were especially excited to hear about what had happened in London, how it had been organised and what discussions it created. By reading reports and articles in the Earth First! Journal, Do or Die and other publications, listening to talks given by British activists and speaking directly to people who had been there, there was a concerted effort made to build on what had been achieved here, to learn from our mistakes and adapt tactics so that they were appropriate for their own social situation.

For example, having heard about the ease with which the Samba band lead people from Liverpool Street station to the heart of the City, an anarchist marching band was formed. It acted to facilitate the movement of sections of the crowd in Seattle to blockades being attacked by the police, in order to provide back up for other demonstrators. Inspired by the Carnavalesque atmosphere on J18 in London the day of action on November 30<sup>th</sup> in Seattle was similarly named “The Carnival against Capital”. It is now our turn to examine the tactics used on their side of the Atlantic.

What took place in Seattle has been an inspiration to many of us in the UK, and indeed people across the globe. Although there are few tactics used in Seattle which could or should be replicated in the UK, there are certainly many, many things which we can look at, learn from and make relevant to struggles which we are involved in. From the Direct Action Convergence, the DAN Space, the pre-Seattle WTO workshops, the jail solidarity and the Pie Chart to the Radical Cheerleaders, the anarchist marching band, the courage of those taking part in the sit down protests and the militancy of the black-bloc there is so much that we can learn from - and be inspired by - about Seattle.

## POSTSCRIPT- Jail Solidarity

Of the 610 people arrested during the conference on misdemeanour charges:

200 had no charges filed, 350 were dismissed

40 pled out, or took diversion or a dispositional continuance

A grand total of 20 misdemeanour cases and approximately 20 felony cases are still ongoing.

There was debate over whether DAN would provide legal support for those who had engaged in black bloc activity and consequently now face felony charges. The

DAN legal team recently agreed to provide legal support for *all* cases.

## FURTHER READING

- For a thorough examination of the development of capitalism into its present form there are few texts better or more readable than: “Globalisation: Origins-History-Analysis-Resistance” in Do or Die No.8. This magazine contains 360 pages filled with articles written entirely by people on the frontlines of the battle for social and ecological revolution. Available for £5 UK/£6 elsewhere (including postage) from Do or Die c/o 6 Tilbury Place, Brighton BN2 2GY. E-mail: doordtp@yahoo.co.uk
- For information on the roots of the movement which the Seattle events grew out of get hold of the Worldwide Resistance Round-up inspired by Peoples’ Global Action (PGA) Bulletin 5. This also provides useful points of contact for groups around the world and a listing of forthcoming globally co-ordinated events. Send an SAE to Reclaim the Streets, PO Box 9656, London. N4 4JY. E-mail: rts@gn.apc.org
- Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the role of armed struggle in North America by Ward Churchill (Arbeiter Ring Publishing, Canada 1999). ISBN 1-894037-07-3. This book critiques the role of pacifist ideology and its misappropriation in the context of North American activism.



- One of the primary inspirations for this new phase of co-ordinated global activity has been the uprising of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. An excellent book entitled "The Zapatistas: A Rough Guide" has recently been published. The first half of the book is dedicated to detailing the roots of the rebellion and the nature of the resistance. The second half focuses on how we can support the rebellion from home and offers advice on going out to Chiapas. This book has been compiled by people who have spent time in Zapatista communities and all profits will be either returned to the communities or used to further solidarity work in the UK. Available for £5 from CHIAPASLINK, PO Box 79, 82 Colston Street, Bristol, BS1 5BB or e-mail [chiapaslink@yahoo.com](mailto:chiapaslink@yahoo.com). Alternatively, you could order it from your local library: ISBN: 0-907367-99-2.
- For a regular update of social and ecological struggles taking place in the UK and across the rest of the world subscribe to either: the monthly Earth First! Action Update, PO Box 1TA, Newcastle NE99 1TA or e-mail: [actionupdate@gn.apc.org](mailto:actionupdate@gn.apc.org) or the weekly SchNEWS available for the price of a first class stamp from PO Box 2600, Brighton, East Sussex. BN2 2DX. or on e-mail for free from [schnews@brighton.co.uk](mailto:schnews@brighton.co.uk).
- For information about events which erupted around the rest of the world on November 30<sup>th</sup> visit:  
[www.directactionnetwork.org](http://www.directactionnetwork.org)  
[www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)  
[www.N30.org](http://www.N30.org)  
[www.A16.org](http://www.A16.org)

## CONTACTS

- The Earth First! Action Update contains a listing of local groups. Also see address above.
- Earth Liberation Prisoner Support Group effectively support those inside for participating in ecological direct action. They also irregularly publish Spirit of Freedom containing a list of UK and overseas prisoners desiring support and solidarity. Contact them c/o Cornerstone Resource Centre, 16 Sholebroke Avenue, Chapeltown, Leeds, LS7 3HB. Or e-mail: [earthlibprisoner@hotmail.com](mailto:earthlibprisoner@hotmail.com)
- Peoples' Global Action (PGA) exists as an international network of anti-capitalist groups and aims to facilitate a flow of information and inspiration across the globe. For more information visit the excellent new web site: [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org) or e-mail: [pga@agp.org](mailto:pga@agp.org)
- Reclaim the Streets: For contact details see information on the PGA Bulletin under Further Reading. Or visit: [www.reclaimthestreets.net](http://www.reclaimthestreets.net)

*"In so many ways the WTO protestors and the ministers who had to put up with them so richly deserve each other. It is hard to say which was worse - watching the militant dunces parade their ignorance through the streets of Seattle, or listening to their lame-brained governments respond to the 'arguments'. No, take that back, the second was worse. At least the rioters had a good time."*

"Clueless in Seattle", The Economist