

## **Agitation for a New Millennium The WTO Protests and the Battle in Seattle**

From late November to early December 1999, somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 demonstrators braved the Pacific Northwest's pouring rain to protest the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its meetings in Seattle, Washington. Over the course of these dramatic days, demonstrators clogged the streets of Seattle to express their disagreement with the WTO and its policies. One of America's largest metropolitan centers was embroiled in prolonged, often violent, demonstrations against world trade policy. National and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), student groups, religious groups, labor unions, and anarchists all joined together in the streets of Seattle in their bid to draw national attention to what they believed were the inequities of "free trade" and the negative implications of such trade policies. This diverse collection of protestors created an agitation movement that brought the day-to-day operations of the city of Seattle, and in turn the WTO, to a halt. Simultaneously, the protests gained an international audience as well as imitators who would agitate against the WTO at its subsequent meetings in other cities around the world.

The WTO demonstrations should not be confused with economic boycotts (such as those during the civil rights movement); rather, the demonstrations were a repudiation of an economic ideal known as neoliberalism. While protests against economic policies are not unique in American history, the WTO protests are worthy of further scrutiny because they involved a blending of both new and old practices of agitation and control at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

## Background

The 1999 “Battle in Seattle”<sup>1</sup> can be better understood after a brief review of the WTO’s history as an establishment force, the ideological assumptions of the WTO, and the dissenters’ primary arguments against the WTO. The following brief historical review of circumstances and primary forces provide a context for appreciating the nature of the rhetorics of agitation and control surrounding the Battle in Seattle.

The groundwork for the WTO was laid in 1944 when members of the United Nations convened the Bretton Woods Conference, which proposed the creation of three institutions to help eliminate the causes of war: The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the International Trade Organization (ITO). The United States approved the first two institutions, but the Senate blocked ratification of the ITO’s charter, fearing it would grant too much authority to an international body. Beginning in 1947, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) served as the organizing principle for international trade rules for almost 50 years and it evolved through eight rounds of negotiations. The WTO was created on January 1, 1995.<sup>2</sup> The WTO was organized as a vehicle to spur global economic development and growth. Founders of the WTO believed economic progress would be obtained if GATT policies were enforced and free trade was promoted globally. The WTO was founded on the premise that the corporate benefits of unfettered global capitalism would trickle down to all citizens of the world.

As years passed, a growing number of critics began to question the assumptions that “development” and “progress” were universally beneficial values. For most Americans, phrases like “economic development” and “progress” had positive connotations and were pursued without much thought or resistance. However, critics contended that the WTO’s development policies primarily benefited only corporations and widened the economic gap between rich and poor populations around the world. Naomi Klein characterized the philosophy of the agitators:

If this new movement is “anti” anything, it is anti-corporate, opposing the logic that what’s good for business—less regulation, more mobility, more access—will trickle down into good news for everybody else. The movement’s roots are in campaigns that challenge this logic by focusing on the dismal human rights, labour and ecological records of a handful of multinational companies.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, a fundamental difference between the establishment and agitators was a dramatic difference of opinion over the belief that unrestrained global capitalism was *necessarily* a public good. The arguments for and against global capitalism constituted the basic ideological differences between establishment and agitator.

Commercial and technological change allowed capital to move around the world with the click of a button. Despite general economic prosperity, people felt insecure and distrustful of institutions. Haynes Johnson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, noted: "There's a profound uncertainty about the pace of change and the uncertainty of where the wonders of the global world are taking us. There is, beyond the roaring good times, an uneasiness about the pace of life." L. Craig Johnstone, a senior vice president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, noted: "I think there is a latent suspicion born of America's traditional xenophobia and propensity toward isolationism. It may also be born in the uncertainty associated with the technological changes we are going through in the business world and the fact that people's jobs are a little less sure than they were before, and they tend to tag that onto trade." Gary Chamberlain, an ethicist at Seattle University, argued that the street protests resonated with Americans who felt the WTO was far removed from their participation. "Until they open the doors at the WTO, what do people have but the streets? People sense there aren't any rules to this global economy and that what rules there are are being made by corporations. The WTO is setting the rules, but in whose favor?"<sup>4</sup>

There were some warning signs that the WTO meeting in Seattle could be a magnet for disruptive demonstrations. There had been thousands of demonstrators in Geneva, Switzerland, the previous year and dozens of arrests had occurred after restaurant and store windows were smashed. There had also been violent protest over globalization in June in London. The week before the conference in Seattle, "Battle in Seattle" T-shirts were for sale. Despite these incidents, few would have predicted the amount of anger toward a 5-year-old organization with 22,500 pages of rules for selling goods and services.<sup>5</sup> The "Battle in Seattle" caused five days of antiglobalization riots that caused \$3 million in physical damage, disrupted WTO future plans, harmed the city's image, and cost Seattle millions of dollars in legal fees and settlements over the next eight years.<sup>6</sup>

### Ideology of the Establishment

Many different groups and individuals were represented in the establishment that protestors opposed in November and December 1999. The establishment was composed of the WTO, the U.S. government, and law enforcement officers from the state of Washington and local agencies. While each group represents a different aspect of the establishment, law enforcement officers became the physical and symbolic "face" of the establishment to protestors and the American public watching the televised demonstrations. The WTO was the *ideological* opponent—the primary establishment target of the protests.

The unifying ideology of the WTO was neoliberalism, a program of international economic and political policies that de-emphasize government intervention in favor of free market approaches to global trade. Neoliberal policies promote privatization, property rights, deregulation, and fewer restrictions on business while rejecting government intervention into business. These goals are implemented through political agreements, economic pressure, and military action. Proponents of neoliberalism argue that trade organizations, such as the WTO, help to improve efficiency and decrease unemployment through the reduction of labor policies (such as minimum wage and union activities). Moreover, supporters of neoliberalism contend that free trade spreads wealth internationally; successful elites use their profits to invest in future economic development, thereby creating jobs and other economic benefits for society at large.

The World Trade Organization is more than simply a conglomeration of representatives and countries. It is comprised of nation-states, which in turn are composed of an ever-changing cast of delegates to WTO meetings. WTO delegates convene for the purpose of advancing global capitalism and industrialism through the creation of trade agreements that supersede national rules and regulations.

At the time of the 1999 protests, Michael Moore was the director of the WTO; he became the face and voice of the establishment. He described the protestors as selfish protectionists determined to hurt the world's poor by trying to block economic expansion in underdeveloped countries. Moore's position reflected the WTO ideology that unrestrained capitalism was desirable and inherently beneficial to all of the world's people.

The United States and its representatives were strongly identified with the establishment. Delegates are appointed to attend WTO meetings. While delegates ostensibly serve as representatives for both corporations and the public, everyday citizens have little, if any, access to these delegates. As a result, many feel disenfranchised from the high-stakes political and economic talks and international policies of the WTO.

Law enforcement officers were asked to maintain order during the WTO negotiations and thus represented the third and most visible layer of the establishment. While the WTO was the target of protestors, state police officers embodied the establishment's response to protestors. While law enforcement officers may have known little about neoliberalism, they nonetheless became the establishment's enforcement arm.

The WTO lacked persistent, stable leadership for several years before the dissent began; moreover, the organization lacked experience in dealing with protestors. Generally, security for prior WTO meetings was delegated to the host city. The city of Seattle "budgeted six million dollars for police officer overtime salaries to work the three days of the November 1999 meetings."<sup>7</sup> While protests had occurred in the past, they were of a smaller scale than what was to transpire in the streets of Seattle.



### Ideologies of the Agitators

It would be inaccurate to suggest that there was one, fixed ideology accepted by the protestors in the streets of Seattle. Protestors came from a variety of official organizations and loosely affiliated groups. National and international NGOs, student groups, religious groups (e.g., Jubilee 2000), labor unions (e.g., AFL-CIO), and anarchists (the Black Bloc) all joined to protest the WTO in the streets of Seattle. Despite the leaderless nature of the protests, participants found commonality in their ideals. Many protestors came together to promote values of democracy, fair trade, and environmental sustainability. Because trade extends to so many arenas, protestors could pick their causes: protecting clean air, sea turtles, and dolphins; ending the export of jobs; prohibiting child labor; eliminating genetically modified food. One of the protest signs in Seattle read: "The International Monetary Fund kills butterflies." Two hundred people dressed as sea turtles marched against the World Bank. Thousands of environmentalists protested the WTO in Seattle.

Some agitators played more central roles than others in helping to organize the protests. One such figure was Mike Dolan, deputy director of Global Trade Watch. Congressional approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993 brought unions into an alliance with environmental groups. Unions passionately opposed NAFTA, and environmentalists had been some of the first critics of the push for global free trade. Global Trade Watch was a coalition of labor, environmentalists, consumer groups, and churches. The biggest demonstrations in Seattle were the result of a year of collaboration among the groups in the organization. They used the issue of free trade as a tool for organizing and raising funds for a variety of liberal groups. The political director of the teamsters union remarked, "We fight so much with the environmentalists, but we also realized that we are both fighting against the Clinton administration—the bigger evil."<sup>8</sup> The public relations director for the United Steelworkers of America union said, "Trade was always the province of the corporate elite—it was shiny-pants trade lawyers and government diplomats—and we changed that."<sup>9</sup> The largest and most peaceful marches and rallies in Seattle consisted of tens of thousands of union members. Mike Dolan arrived in Seattle several months before the meeting. The organization booked hotel rooms and started scouting locations for protests.

Activists like Dolan targeted corporations because they believed corporations had colonized every aspect of modern life in the name of profits. They believed that such colonization had negative implications for underprivileged populations, the environment, and participatory democracy. Many agitators described their ideology as one of "social justice." While social justice has multiple meanings, proponents generally sup-

port the idea of distributing resources equally to serve *common*, versus *individual*, needs. Social justice's preference for the collective versus the individual puts its adherents at odds with the precepts of the establishment's neoliberal perspective.

Diverse protest groups targeted many different aspects of the establishment, but a majority focused on economic policies they considered unjust. While most participants protested WTO economic policies, others protested environmental and trade policies of the U.S. government plus labor regulations. Still other protestors targeted banks, or multinational corporations such as Starbucks and Nike, firms that were located in the Seattle area.

Union delegations representing labor organizations ranging from teamsters to teachers came to Seattle from 143 countries and 25 states. The AFL-CIO organized a rally in Seattle for 900 Boeing machinists. Dockworkers hoped to shut down the port of Seattle. The Puget Sound chapter of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) planned a student walkout.

While the ideologies and targets of the protestors were quite different, the occasion provided a unifying purpose for the protests. First, the WTO had announced its plans to hold trade talks in Seattle in November 1999. The WTO thus presented agitators with a flag organization that could be symbolically attacked. Second, Seattle offered a favorable setting ideologically as it was known as a politically progressive city on the "left" coast of the United States. Third, while previous WTO meetings had occurred in other countries, protestors knew that if they could capture the attention of the media in the United States, they would, in turn, capture the attention of the world. For these and many other reasons, the Direct Action Network (DAN) and other national and international NGOs chose Seattle as the site to organize their campaigns of agitation.

### Promulgation and Avoidance

Because numerous groups participated in the WTO protests, there was no central leadership. As a result, there was also no unified strategy of petition. Groups individually engaged in promulgation. In the months leading up to the protests, individuals distributed messages via the Internet, in alternative newspapers, and in flyers and handbills.

The use of technology made this protest different from promulgation strategies of the civil rights era:

Lined up against all sides is a guerrilla network of activists that has been empowered by the very same forces that drive economic globalization: technology, the Internet, and lowered barriers—hence costs—to international travel. Groups such as Kenya's Consumers' Information Network, Ecuador's Accion Ecologica, and Trinidad and Tobago's Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action are

linked through scores of websites, list servers and discussion groups to U.S., European, and Asian counterparts.<sup>10</sup>

Activists used technology to encourage like-minded individuals to come to Seattle and join the WTO protests. The secondary target of the promulgation using technology was the mass media, whose attention they hoped to garner through their protests in the streets of Seattle. If multiple media channels were alerted to the demonstrations, the agitators' messages would spread throughout the world on the numerous media Web sites.

One strategy in particular, mesomobilization, differentiated WTO protestors from previous protests. Mesomobilization refers to an individual's ability to use technology for the purposes of coordinating actions without reliance on an interorganizational hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> R. Kelly Garrett observes that "cooperation between diverse and otherwise unconnected organizations during the WTO and IMF protests over the last several years exemplifies this practice."<sup>12</sup>

Nongovernmental organizations used the Internet to plan the protests months in advance of the WTO meetings. Among the groups leading the organizational efforts were local labor unions, the DAN, and the Black Bloc. Each of the major groups that sent protestors to Seattle relied heavily on e-mail and the World Wide Web to organize and promulgate their message. The more established dissent groups like the AFL-CIO utilized more conventional means of organizing their agitation. Most of these groups went through normal channels in requesting permits from the city of Seattle for their demonstration, although many of the demonstrators who showed up were not part of the groups that requested permits.

An estimated 50,000 people arrived in Seattle to protest the policies of the WTO.<sup>13</sup> Early Monday morning (November 29) five members of the San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network unfurled a huge banner protesting the WTO from a construction crane. They were arrested when they climbed down from the crane. At noon several hundred protestors gathered at the United Methodist Church on Fifth Avenue. "Students, nuns, environmentalists and social-justice workers rallied side-by-side with dozens of people dressed in cardboard sea-turtle costumes."<sup>14</sup> Nearly 1,000 protestors from various groups randomly marched through the downtown area over a period of three hours.

Initially, WTO organizers and state officials responded with avoidance strategies rather than using suppression. Police officers chose to postpone any direct confrontation with agitators. Instead, police officers were directed to set up barriers and participate in crowd control. When police in riot gear ordered groups to disperse, they complied and resumed their protest in another area. At 2:35 PM one of the groups smashed a window at a McDonald's restaurant. Nearby a police cruiser was spray-painted with graffiti, and some skirmishes took place.

The police reacted with restraint. They had hoped to allow both the protests and the WTO meetings to take place.<sup>15</sup> A police lieutenant remarked, "The last thing the Seattle Police Department wants is for anyone to get injured."<sup>16</sup> At 5:00 PM an ecumenical group of religious leaders held a rally (Jubilee 2000) to urge the United States and other wealthy nations to forgive the debts of poor countries. WTO members were attending a reception at the Stadium Exhibition Center next to the Kingdome. The crowd of 5,000 marched in the rain to the Kingdome and formed a human chain around it, chanting, "We're all wet, cancel the debt!" The mayor of Seattle, Paul Schell, made a guest appearance at 7:00 PM at a "people's gala" in Key Arena and encouraged the several thousand protestors to: "Be tough on your issues, but be gentle on my town."<sup>17</sup>

### Confrontation and Suppression

In terms of the theoretical model of rhetorical strategies and tactics presented in this text, some of the agitators moved quickly to confrontation. The more radical dissenters, particularly the Black Bloc, did not work in concert with traditional dissent groups but instead enacted a version of the Gandhi and guerrilla approach. Police attempts to restrict access to the streets by activists escalated the confrontations. Black Bloc protestors did not seem interested in concessions or negotiations but were aiming for what Kevin Deluca has termed "image events." "Although designed to flag media attention and generate publicity, image events are more than just a means of getting on television. They are crystallized philosophical fragments, mind bombs, that work to expand . . . thoughts."<sup>18</sup>

Social networking technology was a prominent conduit for the rhetoric of agitation. Protestors used cell phones to coordinate with others dispersed throughout the city, effecting quick tactical responses to the establishment's strategies of suppression and control. Additionally, protestors used computers to assist in their agitation efforts. Protestors in Seattle's streets used laptop computers to coordinate with sympathizers in buildings surrounding the protests. These coordination efforts provided the activists in the streets with a virtual bird's eye view of establishment suppression strategies, enabling protestors to react in "real time" to law enforcement's suppression. In addition to logistical assistance, computers empowered protestors to instantly disseminate images, video, and commentary to audiences around the world.

On November 30, protestors gathered at 6:00 AM near Pike Place Market. Other protestors gathered at the University of Washington and Seattle Central Community College before marching downtown. At 8:00 AM several hundred people marched from Pike Place Market to a location near the Westin Hotel. About 20 protestors chained themselves together around a banner, blocking an intersection. Other protestors linked arms



to block streets, sidewalks, and entrances to the convention center. About 9:00 AM 20 protestors dressed in black threw eight newspaper boxes into the street in front of the Sheraton Hotel. Chased by other protestors, they joined 50 others dressed in black and carrying a banner with an anarchist symbol. Thirty people, some wearing gas masks, used bicycle locks to chain themselves to pipes in front of the Sheraton. Security officers locked down the hotel after demonstrators confronted delegates trying to leave.

At 10:00 AM, the opening ceremonies for the WTO conference were postponed because delegates could not reach the Paramount Theatre. At the same time 20,000 people from numerous groups had gathered at Memorial Stadium for a rally organized by the AFL-CIO. George Becker, president of the United Steelworkers of America, announced to the crowd: "The WTO rules, but who asked for these rules? Who the hell asked our leaders to give us the WTO?"

Downtown, the police attempted to clear an intersection near the hotels by firing tear gas into the crowd from the top of an armored vehicle. After protestors responded by throwing the sticks from their signs at the police, the police used pepper spray and fired rubber bullets. WTO delegates were told to stay inside their hotels until the streets were under control. SWAT teams marched into the area. Protestors sat in the streets until police officers carried them away.

At noon, the Secret Service decided it was too dangerous for Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Charlene Barshefsky, the top U.S. trade minister, to leave the Westin to travel to the Paramount for scheduled events. The WTO opening ceremonies were canceled about an hour later, and protestors claimed their first victory. About 200 anarchists smashed windows at Nordstrom, NikeTown, Planet Hollywood, Starbucks, and other stores. Other protestors attempted unsuccessfully to stop them. WTO officials announced that communication at the conference was functioning despite the disruptions via pagers and cell phones and in meetings rescheduled from the Paramount to rooms in the hotels.

After the labor rally at Memorial Stadium ended at about 1:00 PM, the crowd began the hour-long march to the downtown area. "It is an upbeat, chanting, singing crowd, and by far the most peaceful and organized of the marches."<sup>19</sup> A dancer in the crowd held up a sign: "Turtles and Teamsters: United at last."

Anarchists ignited a fire in a dumpster at about 3:00 PM. Officers fired gas to disperse a large crowd. With each police action, protestors become more defiant. Protestors continued a massive sit-in, returning each time the police dispersed them. President Clinton was scheduled to arrive after midnight, and administration officials warned Mayor Schell that if the protestors were not moved out, the WTO conference would be cancelled. At 4:30 PM—as images of the embattled, littered streets were being telecast throughout the nation—the mayor declared a civil emer-

gency, authorizing a curfew from 7:00 PM to 7:30 AM, allowing only WTO delegates and people with proper identification into the downtown area.

Police on motorcycles and in armored vehicles began clearing the restricted area, firing tear-gas containers and concussion grenades, pepper spray, and rubber bullets. Protestors moved to Capitol Hill, followed by squadrons of riot police. For four hours, the police continued to disperse the protestors, who responded by throwing rocks, sticks, and bottles and setting fire to trash bins and dumpsters. By the end of the evening, more than 500 people had been arrested.<sup>20</sup> The mayor and chief of police held a news conference in which they admitted that they had been caught off guard by the size of the protest.

The next day (December 1), police, state troopers, sheriff's deputies, and National Guardsmen moved in to keep protestors out of the downtown area. Despite those efforts, protestors entered the restricted zone and were arrested. About 1,000 people gathered near the hotels, where about 100 police warned them to leave the area or chemical agents would be used. Several thousand protestors assembled at the Pike Place Market. At a news conference, Mayor Paul Schell asked for cooperation. "If you are protesting lawfully, the police will allow you to do so."<sup>21</sup> He said demonstrators must have a permit to demonstrate and must disperse if instructed to do so by the police.

A member of DAN urged protestors to: "Stay calm. If they bust us here this will be known as Seattle's Tiananmen Square."<sup>22</sup> He urged the protestors to be peaceful and suggested they should leave if they had other intentions. Protestors accused city officials of suspending their constitutional rights and mistreating demonstrators. They vowed to continue peaceful demonstrations. David Taylor of DAN announced at a news conference: "We will not be intimidated by the show of force, and will be out in the streets again today. But I hope and I pray that the same level of violence does not continue . . . and we're allowed to continue our peaceful protest of the World Trade Organization."<sup>23</sup> Protests dissipated by early afternoon. Some protestors joined a United Steelworkers march to the waterfront. About 1,500 demonstrators sang songs and dumped mock steel beams into Elliott Bay to symbolize the dumping of foreign steel into the U.S. market. At a luncheon for WTO ministers, then President Clinton stated: "we must deal with the legitimate concerns of legitimate protestors in the streets of the city of Seattle"<sup>24</sup> but criticized the violent and destructive protestors. Small crowds continued to gather through the late afternoon and evening. At 6:00 PM police began enforcing the curfew. Skirmishes flared throughout the night, with more concussion grenades and gas canisters.

On December 2, Seattle remained in a state of civil emergency. Police assumed a lower profile and avoided confrontation with the crowds. One group protested at King County Jail, using a bullhorn to request the immediate release of jailed protestors, a public apology, the dropping of all charges, and a shutdown of the WTO. At 3:00 PM the city relaxed

enforcement of the restriction of free movement in the blocks around the convention center. Later that evening, a demonstration in front of the Paramount Theatre ended peacefully.

On Friday, (December 3), retailers—who lost millions of dollars in revenue—reopened their stores and criticized the city for lack of preparation for the WTO and the demonstrations. The manager of a large shopping mall stated: “I work for a large company. If somebody in my company had made a decision with the poor planning that has occurred here, I believe that individual would be fired.”<sup>25</sup> Demonstrators gathered at the King County Jail and the Westin Hotel to demand better treatment for and release of jailed protestors. The leaders of the well-organized crowd reassured the police that the protests would be peaceful and non-violent. At 10:00 PM the WTO announced that it had not been able to resolve differences among the 135-member nations, and the conference concluded without an agenda for a new round of global trade talks.

On December 4, WTO delegates and demonstrators began leaving Seattle. The Seattle chapter of the ACLU and a coalition of local minority civil rights groups called for an investigation into the actions of the police and city officials regarding protestors. Jailed protestors refused to give their names unless they were guaranteed that they would not face criminal charges or penalties. City attorneys insisted the protestors be arraigned on misdemeanor charges. Protestors then promised to demand court-appointed attorneys and jury trials to draw attention to their cause and to clog the court system. When a judge told 125 detained women that he would dismiss charges against them if they would give their names, they refused. One protestor remarked: “They’re going to have trouble processing us. We’re gumming up the system, and they’re going to want to just get rid of us.”<sup>26</sup> The presiding judge of the municipal court remarked: “The arraignment calendars more closely resemble political theater than standard courtroom hearings.”<sup>27</sup> Court staff, attorneys, and judges worked until midnight for several nights and through the weekend. An agreement was finally reached to release the protestors on their own recognizance if they agreed to return to face charges; the agreement would be rescinded if there was additional property damage after the releases (which began the evening of the fourth and continued through December fifth). Before the releases began, the jailed protestors sang peace songs, conducted workshops, practiced yoga, and threatened a hunger strike.

The vast majority of the demonstrators were committed to nonviolent civil disobedience.<sup>28</sup> In their attempts to contain the actions of a minority of the protestors, police suppressed *all* of those gathered to protest in Seattle. Police officers fired tear gas and rubber bullets at everyone (Black Bloc anarchists, journalists, AFL-CIO demonstrators) massed against them on the other side of police barricades. From the view of the more peaceful-minded protestors and even journalists, they were unfairly grouped together with the minority activists who were violent.

The strategy of escalation and the corresponding police response had two immediate effects. First, most Seattle residents stayed away from the downtown area. Second, many WTO delegates, unable to navigate the streets, were effectively blocked from attending the WTO meetings. Agitators claimed success in interrupting the WTO meetings, a major goal of the protests. Although the basic issues of neoliberalism were too complicated for the general public to understand, the pictures of costumed sea turtles juxtaposed with images of menacing individuals cloaked in black clothes provided the media with startling images to broadcast around the world.

### Aftermath and Rhetorical Assessment

Agitation won the rhetorical encounter in Seattle. The agitation had both short- and long-term impacts. In the short term, agitators effectively disrupted the WTO trade negotiations and brought international attention to the protests and the protestors' concerns. In the long term, agitators from Seattle helped forge diverse groups of individuals into a sustained movement that literally followed global economic trade conferences around the world. Agitation extended its reach beyond Seattle's streets and became a potential catalyst for change throughout the world.

The agitators had an immediate impact on the WTO trade negotiations. Disenfranchised citizens found a voice and a way to participate in economic trade talks that had been closed to the public. Protestors discovered that the rhetoric of agitation represented an effective way to figuratively break into the previously closed discussions. This breach was costly to the city of Seattle, corporations, and the WTO.

During the five days of rioting and mayhem, Seattle spent \$9 million. King County estimated it spent at least \$2.17 million, the State Patrol about \$2.3 million and the National Guard, called out by then-Gov. Gary Locke to help restore order, about \$280,000. No lives were lost, but scores of protestors were arrested, and merchants lost about \$17 million in revenue and property damage.<sup>29</sup>

Agitators were able to shift some of the mainstream media's coverage of the WTO to issues of environmental standards, social justice, and human rights. Cara A. Finnegan and Jiyeon Kang write, "In Seattle, violent protest was an image event that produced welcome public discourse on issues of globalization on the public screens of television, newspapers, and the Internet," demonstrating the reach of the protests into both the consciousness and living rooms of American audiences.<sup>30</sup>

Mainstream media sources generally demonized the protestors through selecting images of violent groups like the Black Bloc. Corporate media's marginalization of all the protestors as violent had the unintended consequence of encouraging protestors at subsequent demonstrations to begin creating independent media sources. Veteran activists



from the Battle in Seattle “learned about the power of the media the hard way—the image is everything when taken out of context. It was this that really spurred activists to create an alternative to the news as broadcast by the big global players.”<sup>31</sup> Paul O’Connor of Undercurrents (a direct action film collective) remarked: “Mainstream media are obsessed by the violence at summits, but we want to explain the background and broaden the agenda. A lot of people know there’s a lot going on out there that the corporate media do not—or will not report.”<sup>32</sup>

Technology provided protestors a template for enhancing agitational rhetorical strategies globally, and the Internet gave them world-wide reach. “Using relatively cheap consumer technology, like digital video cameras, laptop computer editing software and internet web-streaming, a media counter-culture is emerging, which reflects the values of the anti-globalization direct action movement.”<sup>33</sup> Warren Makepeace of the Webzine SchNEWS explained that while alternative sites are not influenced by advertisers or directors, they are also not impartial. The alternative media are “written by activists, by people who actually go on actions and take part . . . we say: ‘Don’t believe the printed word, go out and take part, learn something new, go and do things for yourselves.’ We suggest books to read, actions to go on, web-sites to go and check out.”<sup>34</sup>

The protests had significant ramifications for the city of Seattle and its political leaders. Three years after the protests, Tom Hayden observed:

Seattle might have salvaged a new identity by taking pride in the rough birth of the movement against corporate globalization on its streets in 1999 . . . but the local legacy of that people’s history remains contested and unclear. Shortly after the confrontations, the police chief resigned. . . . Mayor Paul Schell never fully recovered from that week, and was defeated for re-election . . . under the growing cloud of civic malaise.<sup>35</sup>

In the main, politicians who upheld the ideals of the protestors won their bids for elected office in the years following the Battle in Seattle while those supporting the establishment’s suppression were summarily removed or voted out of office.

On January 4, 2000, Seattle dropped the misdemeanor charges of pedestrian interference for blocking streets or failure to disperse against 280 protestors because of a lack of evidence to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.<sup>36</sup> A class-action suit was filed in October 2000 for 600 protestors arrested at the WTO demonstrations. After a district court ruling upholding the constitutionality of Seattle’s restricted access zone, the lawsuit continued with 157 WTO protestors.<sup>37</sup> In January 2004, the city of Seattle settled for \$250,000.<sup>38</sup> In the summer of 2006, the city settled multiple claims of police misconduct during the WTO protests for more than \$800,000.<sup>39</sup>

A federal trial of a class-action lawsuit for anyone arrested at Westlake Park between 6:00 AM and noon on December 1, 1999, opened in January



2007. Attorneys for the plaintiffs argued that police management followed official policy in instructing troops to squash the dissent and to arrest protestors. Attorneys for the city argued that protestors were advocating so many different causes it was not apparent to the arresting officers what the groups were protesting. The suit charged the city with violating the First Amendment right to free speech by arresting people for protesting the WTO meetings and Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable search and seizure. The jury ruled that the city of Seattle was liable for the unlawful arrest (specifically, lack of probable cause because police did not attempt to determine if each individual arrested was in violation of the city order) of about 200 protestors; however the jury also found that the arrests were not a violation of the First Amendment because the arrests were not the result of a city policy designed to restrict the expression of anti-WTO opinions.<sup>40</sup> In April 2007, the city agreed to settle for \$1 million and to clear the records of the plaintiffs.<sup>41</sup>

The success of the demonstrations extended beyond Seattle and helped lead to prodemocratic globalization movements around the world. As Naomi Klein observed: "By focusing on global corporations and their impact around the world, this activist network is fast becoming the most internationally minded, globally linked movement ever seen."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, subsequent anti-WTO protests were held in Genoa, Quebec City, Salzburg, Prague, Washington, D.C., and other cities around the world. Disaffected individuals throughout the world coalesced into a formidable protest movement. "Ever since the Battle for Seattle of December 1999 proved that big boys' rules are not absolute, the global army of protest against the accepted order has grown in size, scope and ambition, its links strengthened by the new electronic technologies."<sup>43</sup>

Numerous scholarly works suggest that violent escalation served a productive role in terms of promulgating images of the protest to the national news media. Kevin DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples observe that the "combined coverage time on CNN, ABC, CBS, and NBC increased by 26% from Monday's [November 29] coverage and the placement of the story improved from the third, fourth or fifth story to the lead or second story."<sup>44</sup> DeLuca and Peeples argue that while the opening images of these stories were violent, other images were available to mediated audiences including environmentalists dressed in sea turtle costumes, protestors nonviolently blocking streets, and thousands involved in the labor march. Even more significantly, "the protestors' criticisms of the WTO received an impressively extensive and sympathetic airing—the claim that the WTO is an undemocratic organization with a pro-corporate agenda that in practice overrules national labor, environmental, and human rights laws was broadcast to an international audience."<sup>45</sup>

DeLuca and Peeples continue by discussing how violent images were interspersed with protestor quotations, providing dissenters with a national (versus localized) audience. Moreover, breaking news stories

with violent images were accompanied by background stories that focused on the issues and actions that made the WTO controversial. What had previously been a critique advanced by select pockets of concerned citizens was propelled into the national consciousness by the media. DeLuca and Peebles conclude: "Far from discrediting or drowning out the message of the WTO protestors, the symbolic violence generated extensive media coverage and an airing of the issues."<sup>46</sup>

While it is widely held that the WTO protests were a rhetorical success, there were areas where agitators could have been more effective. First, the diversity of agitators produced far too many flag issues and flag persons. The issues of human rights and fair trade became blurred with the combined issues of environmentalism, unfair labor practices, human rights violations, and poverty. Moreover, the lack of a central flag individual resulted in agitation lacking a rallying focus. Agitators' focus on the WTO as a flag organization did help to bring some attention to the debate over free trade. Some observers have suggested, however, that news coverage of the protests left mainstream Americans confused about the reasons behind the violent confrontation.

That agitators were able to sustain protests for three days in inhospitable weather suggests that a broad, unified ideological base of support already existed within the varied groups. Perhaps if the agitators in the streets of Seattle had outlined a specific set of grievances and remedies, they would have had more influence on WTO policy. The protestors demonstrated their resolve but made little, if any, change to the development of the free trade agreements that continue to this day. While they successfully communicated some grievances to a wider audience, they also created a negative impression of the anti-free trade movement among many Americans.

The establishment lost the rhetorical encounter in Seattle. Avoidance tactics were used far too long, giving agitation the time both to solidify and to mobilize protestors. The initial establishment delay in control tactics presented an ambiguous message to the agitators. Agitation usually responds to ambiguity by escalation. When the Seattle police finally intervened, they overreacted. The evidence presented by the "Battle in Seattle" suggests that police escalated their tactics precisely because they did not know how else to quell the random acts of violence that were taking place around the downtown area. Moreover, the evidence clearly suggests that the establishment was not expecting the worst to happen. Earlier adjustments in the control strategies could have prevented some of the violent reactions. The graphic images of that violence broadcast by the media converted some closet supporters into active protestors.

The establishment learned from Seattle. The following year, protestors at the World Bank/International Monetary Fund conference met with immediate police crack downs even before the conference began. Police made preemptive arrests of activists and closed down protest headquar-

ters, effectively squashing most of the direct action and violence that occurred in Seattle.

The WTO protests ushered in both new and old strategies of control and tactics of agitation. Many observers have suggested that the multiplicity of anticorporate movements have radically altered traditional conceptualizations of the form and function of protest groups. In fact, "groups" are now replaced with metaphors such as "hubs" and "spokes." Despite the diversity of disaffected citizens woven together in the streets of Seattle to protest the WTO, many of the classic characterizations of rhetoric of agitation and control outlined in this book can be applied to the Battle in Seattle. These protests have become emblematic of agitation and control in the twenty-first century and the debris of communicative symbols left behind bear witness to the continuation of agitation and control at the dawn of a new century.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Stuart Townsend wrote and directed a movie, *Battle in Seattle*, starring Woody Harrelson, Ray Liotta, and Charlize Theron in 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> The WTO and Global Trade. Accessed 2/26/2009 from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/international/wto/history.html>
- <sup>3</sup> Naomi Klein, *Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate* (New York: Picador, 2002): 4.
- <sup>4</sup> David Postman, Lynda V. Mapes, Alex Fryer, and Sally Macdonald, "Why WTO United So Many Foes—Sense Of Unease And Injustice Took Trade From Elites To Streets," *Seattle Times*, December 6, 1999. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19991206&slug=2999734>
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> David Bowermaster, "Jury Says Seattle Violated Rights of WTO Protestors," *Seattle Times*, January 31, 2007. Accessed 2/27/2009 from [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003548929\\_wto31m0.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003548929_wto31m0.html)
- <sup>7</sup> Margot Hornblower, "The Battle in Seattle," *Time*, November 22, 1999: 3. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/time/1999/11/22/seattle.battle.html>
- <sup>8</sup> Postman, Mapes, Fryer, and Macdonald.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Hornblower, 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Alan Scott and John Street, "From Media Politics to E-protest: The Use of Popular Culture and New Media in Parties and Social Movements," *Information, Communication & Society*, 3(2) (2000): 215–240.
- <sup>12</sup> R. Kelly Garrett, "Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICTs," *Information, Communication & Society*, 9 (April 2006): 212.
- <sup>13</sup> David Bowermaster, "WTO Protest Revisited as Civil Suit Filed against Seattle Comes to Trial," *Seattle Times*, January 10, 2007. Accessed 2/27/2009 from [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003517500\\_wtotrial10m0.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003517500_wtotrial10m0.html)
- <sup>14</sup> Alex Tizon, "Monday, November 29," *Seattle Times*, December 5, 1999. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19991205&slug=2999667>
- <sup>15</sup> David Postman, Jack Broom, and Florangela Davila, "Police Haul Hundreds to Jail," *Seattle Times*, December 1, 1999. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19991201&slug=2998735>
- <sup>16</sup> Tizon.

- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Kevin Michael DeLuca, *Image Politics* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999): 6.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> "Schell Urges: Stay in Control," *Seattle Times*, December 2, 1999. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19991202&slug=2998835>
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Postman, Broom, and Davila.
- <sup>23</sup> "Schell Urges."
- <sup>24</sup> Tizon.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Byron Achohido and Nancy Bartley, "Deal Struck To Free All Jailed Protestors On Own Recognizance," *Seattle Times*, December 5, 1999. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19991205&slug=2999673>
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- <sup>28</sup> Joshua Robin and Frank Vinluan, "Most Protestors To Go Free; Sidran Dropping WTO-Week Charges Against 280," *Seattle Times*, January 4, 2000. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=20000104&slug=A20000105010602>
- <sup>29</sup> Dan Richman, "Union May Strike at WTO Movie Filming," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, December 7, 2006: 1. Accessed 2/27/2009 from [http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/business/294980\\_movie07.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/business/294980_movie07.html)
- <sup>30</sup> Cara A. Finnegan and Jiyeon Kang, "'Sighting' the Public: Iconoclasm and Public Sphere Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 90(4) (2004): 391.
- <sup>31</sup> Darius Bazargan and Bill Hayton, "Global Protests Breed New Media," BBC, July 14, 2001. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/europe/1438232.stm>
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Tom Hayden, "The Legacy of the Battle for Seattle," *The Nation*, September 22, 2002. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20020930/hayden20020912/print>. Former Police Chief Stamper wrote *Breaking Rank: A Top Cop's Exposé of the Dark Side of American Policing* in 2005. In the book, he accepted responsibility for the poor preparation of the police department for the WTO protests.
- <sup>36</sup> Robin and Vinluan.
- <sup>37</sup> Jim Brunner, "City Lawyer Expects to Defeat WTO Suit," *Seattle Times*, January 1, 2004. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=20040101&slug=wto01m>
- <sup>38</sup> Bob Young and Jim Brunner, "City to Pay Protestors \$250,000 to Settle WTO Suit," *Seattle Times*, January 17, 2004. Accessed 2/27/2009 from <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=20040117&slug=wto17m>
- <sup>39</sup> Bowermaster, "WTO Protest Revisited."
- <sup>40</sup> Bowermaster, "Jury Says."
- <sup>41</sup> Bob Young, "City to Pay \$1 Million to Settle Lawsuit over WTO Arrests," *Seattle Times*, April 3, 2007. Accessed 2/27/2009 from [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document\\_id=2003648547&zsection\\_id=2003925728&slug=wto03m&date=20070403](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document_id=2003648547&zsection_id=2003925728&slug=wto03m&date=20070403)
- <sup>42</sup> Klein, 4.
- <sup>43</sup> Trevor Royle, "Anarchy Rules! How Protest Became Cool," *Sunday Herald*, April 29, 2001. Accessed 2/27/2009 from [http://findarticies.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4156/is\\_20010429/ai\\_n13959295](http://findarticies.com/p/articles/mi_qn4156/is_20010429/ai_n13959295)
- <sup>44</sup> Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19(2) (2002): 139.
- <sup>45</sup> DeLuca and Peeples, 139.
- <sup>46</sup> DeLuca and Peeples, 140.