

THE BATTLE IN SEATTLE

Part 3

Epilogue

By 12:45 p.m. on Tuesday, November 30, the opening session of the Third Ministerial scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. was officially canceled. The meeting finally got underway at 3:30 p.m. that afternoon despite the ongoing melee outside the Convention Center.

Despite heavy pressure from Governor Gary Locke, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, the Secret Service, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and others, Mayor Paul Schell decided not to cancel the AFL-CIO permit to march. According to police reports, several authorized marches including the Sierra Club (ca. 1,000 people), 500 University of Washington students, 500 people headed out from Seattle Central Community College, and 1,000 supporters of the Tibetan Rights and Taiwanese Association joined with the AFL-CIO group. This group totaled over 40,000 people. Because many streets along the planned AFL-CIO approved route were blocked by “unauthorized” demonstrators, the march was rerouted and left the Seattle Center around 12:15 p.m. headed for downtown with a police escort of 119 officers, some roving and some at fixed posts. Their main role was to keep traffic clear. Criminal activity including looting at Starbucks, vandalized police patrol cars, barricades thrown through windows, and WTO delegates being pushed and shoved intensified after 1 p.m. According to the police after action report,

The size of the disruptive protests and their attendant level of violence and property destruction increased throughout the day. Available police resources were unable to quell the disturbance and prevent the destruction of property. In response to this situation and based on the recommendations of police commanders, the Mayor declared a Civil Emergency at 1532 hours.

The Proclamation of Civil Emergency included an Emergency Order imposing a curfew with criminal sanctions and allowing for arrests of curfew violators. ...Shortly after the Mayor’s action, the Governor authorized deployment of the National Guard.¹

Just before 4 p.m., the crowds between 4th and 6th Streets on Pike turned violent, pelting police with whatever debris was available. According to police reports, some protesters used their own chemical irritants on police. Efforts to calm the crowd failed and police responded using chemical irritants to attempt to disperse the crowd. These were the images of Seattle that were broadcast around the world. The situation had escalated into a full-scale riot by evening with police using chemical irritants and “less lethal munitions” to disperse the crowd. Sometime after 6:30 in the evening, for

¹ Seattle Police Department After Action Report, November 29 - December 3, 1999, World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference, http://www.cityofseattle.net/spd/SPDMainsite/wto/summary_of_events.htm#Tuesday, November 30, 1999.

example, the crowd pulled the driver of a garbage truck from his vehicle and started assaulting him. Police rescued the driver and cleared the intersection.

As the crowd began to move, some moved north and others east. What ensued was a chase of sorts with police in pursuit of the 600 to 800 people who were heading up the hill, across the freeway, to Capitol Hill. “Officers followed the group over the freeway where the Assistant Platoon Commander ordered officers to maintain a line on the east side of the Pine Street overpass to protect the I-5 [freeway] corridor below. The crowd stopped one block east of the established line and began assaulting officers with rocks, ball bearings, and bottles. The platoon commander, calling the situation ‘Pine Street Command,’ began formulating a plan: to encircle the protesters and to make a mass arrest. However, before the plan could be executed, the platoon was dispatched to the East Precinct where the precinct itself was being threatened by mounting protest activity.”² Any attempt by the police to formulate a coherent plan to deal with the situation from that point on was lost. By 9 p.m. that evening, it appeared that police officers remaining in the downtown area were so overwhelmed that they were having difficulty even escaping the area. “Each time the platoons attempted to disengage, the rioters reconstituted and followed the officers—throwing rocks, bottles, golf balls, and firing incendiary devices at them. Similar disturbances occurred simultaneously at other locations in the area...” The crowd activity on Capitol Hill continued well into the night, at least until 3:30 a.m.

President Clinton arrived at the Westin Hotel downtown sometime between 1:30 and 2:30 a.m.

Wednesday, December 1

The police were relatively successful in enforcing the “no-protest zone” perimeter during the morning and early afternoon on Wednesday, December 1, thereby ensuring secure passage for President Clinton as he moved between several venues (the Westin Hotel, the Bell Harbor Conference Center, a Port of Seattle facility on Harbor Island and the Four Seasons Hotel). In the downtown core, officers continued to deal with “highly mobile, aggressive, and hostile protesters.”³ According to a Seattle Times report, “Two hundred National Guard troops in fatigues, ordered by Gov. Gary Locke, helped cordon off much of downtown, and armored trucks patrolled the streets. Police fired pepper spray point-blank at some protesters and wrestled others to the ground with wooden clubs.”⁴

Meanwhile, the American Civil Liberties Union filed for a temporary restraining order in U.S. District Court, seeking to repeal the mayor’s Civil Emergency Order #3 establishing the police perimeter. ACLU argued that this was a direct infringement on people’s right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, but the judge found in

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., http://www.cityofseattle.net/spd/SPDMainsite/wto/summary_of_events.htm#Wednesday, December 1st, 1999

⁴ “Seattle mayor urges protesters to stay in control,” *Seattle Times* (December 2, 1999), <http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/telexis/web/vortex/display?slug=prot&date=19991202>

favor of the mayor and the request for the restraining order was rejected.⁵ Judge Robert J. Bryant ruled that “The denial of (free-speech) rights can be an irreparable injury, but the court must balance other irreparable injuries that may occur, such as the rights of the World Trade Organization delegates to assemble and to engage in rights of free speech, and the rights of the public to be free from personal injuries, and property damage.”

Inside the Convention Center, Chairperson Barshefsky opened the meeting of the committee of the whole by expressing her regrets for the previous days events, calling protests the “irresponsible actions of a tiny minority.”⁶ Apparently attempting to make up for lost time, Barshefsky asked delegations to send to the Working Groups senior officials with the authority to make decisions that departed from what had been discussed at the 1998 Geneva ministerial. She also “reserved the right to hold Green Room meetings with smaller numbers of delegations,” although she preferred more inclusive approaches. She called for “business as usual” for the remaining two and a half days of the conference and urged delegates to find a way to reach a successful outcome. Director-General Mike Moor canceled the reception he intended to host that evening so that the ministers would have more time to work. WTO meetings continued on Wednesday until 11:30 p.m.

By mid-afternoon, protesters were again causing property damage, throwing debris, and blocking traffic. Despite orders to disperse, the crowd refused and police again sprayed chemical irritants on the protesters. Another 250 people were eventually arrested. At Third and Pike Streets, a group staged a sit-down in the middle of the intersection and remained there until the curfew took effect. Later that evening, crowds in the Broadway/Capitol Hill area confronted police, in some cases violently. One incident report captured the general mood:

A Platoon Commander leaving the area of the East Precinct observed a disruptive crowd milling around the area of Broadway Avenue and Pine Street and attempted to clear the area. Some from the crowd jumped on his car and began rocking it by the light bar while others lay in front of the patrol vehicle, preventing it from moving as he was besieged by the crowd. Chemical irritants were deployed to break up the riotous group.⁷

Confrontations between police and a group of about 1,000 to 1,500 protesters in the Capitol Hill neighborhood continued until well after midnight. While the curfew may have quelled vandalism and protest in the vicinity of the Convention Center, protesters

⁵ For the ACLU’s position and other issues ACLU raised with respect to how the police handled the WTO demonstrations, see: <http://www.aclu-wa.org/ISSUES/police/WTO-Report.html>. For the text of the court’s ruling, see:

<http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/texis/web/vortex/display?slug=aclut&date=19991202>

⁶ WTO, WTO Briefing Note, “Ministers start negotiating Seattle Declaration,”

http://www.wto.org/wto/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min99_e/english/about_e/resum01_e.htm

⁷ Seattle Police Department After Action Report, November 29 - December 3, 1999, World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference,

http://www.cityofseattle.net/spd/SPDMainsite/wto/summary_of_events.htm#Wednesday,December1st,1999

had succeeded in locating a sore spot with police: the East Precinct headquarters and the surrounding Broadway/Capitol Hill area adjacent to the Seattle Central Community College. The “siege” of the East Precinct continued until about 3 a.m.

Thursday, December 2

By Thursday, demonstrations took on a somewhat calmer tone. President Clinton departed the city around 10 a.m. and police were able to maintain order without major incident. The key activity on Thursday was a rally outside the King County Jail where many of the people who had been arrested during the previous days of protest were being held. Demonstrators were engaged in negotiations with police so that this action didn't result in the kinds of violent confrontations that had marked previous days' interactions. According to the police department's after action report, “The remainder of the evening was uneventful with officers monitoring the group at the jail and other small roving groups.”

Friday, December 3

The only protest activities that occurred on the final day of the WTO conference was a legal organized labor march. Police agreed that marchers would be allowed within a block of the Convention Center without impeding delegates' access to the meetings. After the labor march, one part of the group went back to the King County jail to continue their vigil and another group proceeded to the Westin Hotel and a few people chained themselves to the doors. Eventually most of these individuals joined the group at the jail demanding the release of those protesters being held.

Inside the Convention Center, the WTO meetings were drawing to a close without any joint declaration. The events of the previous few days had certainly added to the tensions at the Ministerial, but it would be a mistake to conclude that the only reason that greater progress was not achieved in Seattle had to do with what was going on in the streets. Even under the best of circumstances, the Seattle Ministerial was destined to be a tough round of negotiations.

In the end, no joint communiqué was issued from Seattle. According to WTO briefing notes, “Informal meetings continued through the night of December 2 and into December 3. The main discussions were in meetings in which some 20-40 ministers took part. ...Progress was reported in a number of areas, but by late afternoon it was clear that there was too little time left to complete the work of narrowing the gaps, bringing the draft declaration back to the plenary working groups, making any additional changes arising from the working groups and then approving the declaration by consensus. the conference had simply run out of time.”⁸

On December 8, WTO Director-General Mike Moore issued a press statement expressing his frustration with the Seattle conference: “I feel particular disappointment because the postponement of our deliberations means the benefits that would have

⁸ WTO, WTO Briefing Note, “Ministers start negotiating Seattle Declaration,” http://www.wto.org/wto/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min99_e/english/about_e/resum03_e.htm

accrued to developing and least-developed countries will now be delayed, while the problems facing these countries will not be allayed. A package of results is within reach.”

On December 17, the WTO General Council met to discuss “after Seattle” issues. This first attempt to address the unfinished business of the Third Ministerial “resulted in bitter finger-pointing.”⁹ Many factors converged in Seattle to make agreement impossible. There were certainly deep divisions among member states about the scope and content of the new round of talks. So much had been left open that the few days of the actual meeting would have had to involve intensive and substantial negotiations then and there in order to reach a common text of a declaration. The negotiating procedures that were in place looked rational on paper but led to complaints about lack of adequate voice for some member states. Certainly U.S. electoral politics and the importance of the labor vote played a role in both President Clinton’s statements and the U.S. negotiating stance. And of course, the events occurring in the streets of Seattle heightened tensions inside the conference venue. In practical terms, the protests did succeed in sufficiently disrupting the meetings that the time available to participants to interact, both formally and informally was foreshortened.

The fallout of the WTO conference for Seattle businesses and politicians was enormous. The city was left with a whopping bill for services rendered by adjacent police and sheriff departments, as well as the Washington State Patrol. Local business lost out on revenues from what otherwise would normally have been the busiest shopping week of the year: the week after Thanksgiving. Between the mayor’s emergency decree which made it illegal to go and shop downtown stores like Nordstrom that were within the curfew perimeter, and the violence and traffic problems created by the protests, many stores simply closed down for the period of the meetings. Other stores were vandalized and looted. Retailers estimated that they lost somewhere between \$9 and \$10 million in sales and damages.

For both the Seattle Police Department and Mayor Shell, the failure to plan for or adequately respond to the melee in the streets had enormous political costs. Chief Norm Stamper took early retirement early in 2000. He was severely criticized for having delegated all responsibility for planning and operations to his Assistant Chief Ed Joiner. Many wondered why the police chief was missing in action from an early stage in the preparations for hosting the meetings.

The police force came under sharp criticism not only for their inadequate preparations but also for what many saw as an excessive show of force, including the use of “less lethal munitions” on peaceful demonstrators. Televised news coverage of the protests highlighted police dragging off demonstrators who were staging non-violent sit-down protests. Other video clips showed police swinging night sticks at unarmed civilians. For their part, police were dismayed to have been left to hold the lines for long periods without food or water and without adequate back-up or supplies. Individual police officers found themselves alone in the crowd, surrounded by angry and hostile

⁹ “Confidence-building: A Cure for Post-Seattle Blues?” *Bridges*, ICTSD newsletter year 4, no. 1, p. 1.

protesters. The consequence of the first day or so of interaction between protesters and police resulted in a siege mentality between police and demonstrators.

The Seattle Police Department's After Action Report, while providing a detailed account of police operations, proved inadequate to address the many questions, concerns, and complaints city officials had to address. In response, the City Council adopted a resolution at its December 6, 1999 meeting establishing the WTO Accountability Review Committee (ARC). The ARC's work would be divided among three subcommittees or "panels": one to review how Seattle came to host the WTO meeting, one to look at planning, and a third to assess operations just before and during the WTO meetings. The ARC met throughout the first six months of 2000, delivering its final report on September 14, 2000. The report spurred many to call for a better review process for the city prior to agreeing to host such a meeting, but others pointed out that there was little that the city could do to hinder independent organizations such as the Seattle Host Organization from inviting groups to come to the city and hold events.

As for the protesters, police were determined to bring to justice all those who engaged in criminal acts. A website showing photographs of suspects and asking people to help identify and locate the individuals depicted was set up.¹⁰ Most of the charges against protesters were eventually dropped. A few individuals actually won settlements against various police departments for excessive use of force.

In the end, it appears that Seattle businesses including retailers did not incur losses as great as those originally reported. The city found itself \$9 million in debt for hosting the WTO. Using the Washington state Congressional delegation to make its case, the city sought \$5 million from the U.S. Department of State and eventually in May 2000, the Senate Appropriations committee voted to require the State Department to find the money out of its current budget to help cover the costs of police overtime, equipment, and other expenses. The State Department, pointing out that it had already released \$1.2 million to the city for WTO related expenses, eventually gave the city of Seattle \$3.8 million. King County incurred \$2 million in unplanned costs for providing support for police on the front lines. The Washington State Patrol spent an estimated \$2.3 million to provide security during WTO. Various cities and municipalities that provided support found themselves left covering the costs because the mutual aid agreements call for each community to pay for its own contributions.

As of summer 2001, Mayor Schell is in a heated race to hold on to his position as mayor. There is little doubt that his handling of the WTO meetings in 1999 and the subsequent N30 protest action on the one year anniversary have not helped his campaign. No Seattle mayor has lost a race for re-election in the last 50 years, but Schell's approval ratings have been below 30 percent since December 1999.

On the anniversary of the 1999 protests, activists assembled once again in Seattle to commemorate the WTO action. The new movement named "N30" for November 30,

¹⁰ As of July 2001, this website was still accessible:
<http://cityofseattle.net/spd/WTO/spdwtosuspecthome.htm>

the day protesters managed to disrupt the opening ceremony of the Seattle Ministerial, staged a generally peaceful set of protests in Seattle and elsewhere to mark the day. There were some confrontations between police and protesters on November 30 and December 1, 2000, but in general both the mayor and the police were not faulted for how they handled the situation.

From a larger perspective, however, each and every subsequent meeting of world leaders to discuss trade, economics, or the environment has brought with it violent confrontations between protesters and police. Since the Seattle WTO meetings, protests have occurred at almost every international meeting. (See box.)

Seattle was not the first time demonstrators gathered to voice their protests at a meeting of world leaders. But the events of late November and early December 1999 in Seattle marked the beginning of a new era. Spurred on in part because of the growing attention to their cause that worldwide press and electronic media coverage gained them, activists remain committed to staging significant actions whenever and wherever leaders meet to discuss issues related to the politics and economics of globalization. While many argue that there is no coherent agenda among what is often an unorganized conglomeration of various organizations and radical elements, nevertheless this is now one aspect of international meetings that will have to be taken into account in any future plans.

**INTERNATIONAL PROTESTS
2000-2001
(from Agence France Presse)**

January 29, 2000: Davos, Switzerland - The annual World Economic Forum, a high-level talking shop, is disrupted by more than 1,000 protesters who break through a police cordon to get into the town.

February 12-19, 2000: Bangkok, Thailand - The first major peasants' demonstration in Asia at the UN Conference on Trade and Development. 120 NGOs draw up a "Bangkok appeal" against "global governance" as 7,000 riot police are deployed to contain the protests.

April 16, 2000: Washington, DC - 15,000 demonstrators turn out to protest at the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank and form human chains, cordoning off the two bodies' headquarters.

May 1, 2000: London, England - Radicals turn out for a mass May Day rally against globalization, paralyzing the city center.

June 25, 2000: Geneva, Switzerland - Mass military and police presence prevents serious troubles during a march on the eve of a United Nations special social summit.

June 30, 2000: Millau, France - A mass protest, which passes off peacefully for the most part, marks the trial of Jose Bove, the militant French farmers' leader seen as a symbol of the struggle against unbridled market forces, charged with ransacking a McDonald's fast-food restaurant.

September 11-12, 2000: Melbourne, Australia - Police and 10,000 anti-globalization demonstrators, including Trotskyists, anarchists, students, gay rights activists, environmentalists and even schoolchildren, clash in the violent siege of a World Economic Forum summit.

September 26, 2000: Prague, Czech Republic - Violent anti-IMF and World Bank protests see 11,000 anarchists and other extremists hurl Molotov cocktails at police, who reply with tear gas and water cannon in the worst unrest in Prague since 1969, when residents and police clashed following the Soviet invasion of 1968. More than 400 demonstrators are arrested.

December 6-7, 2000: Nice, France - An estimated 50,000 people, trade unionists, anti-capitalists and anarchists, converge on the European Union summit. Clashes with riot police leave 24 policemen injured and 42 demonstrators under arrest.

January 27, 2001: Zurich, Switzerland - Police foil plans for a repeat demonstration in Davos by arresting more than 120 demonstrators before the Forum and expelling 30 from

Swiss territory. Clashes see police fire tear gas grenades and rubber bullets to disperse the stone-throwing crowd who set fire to several cars.

At the same time, up to 10,000 other anti-globalization supporters protested thousands of miles away in Porto Alegre in southern Brazil, among them such luminaries as former South African President Nelson Mandela and Nobel literature laureate Jose Saramago.

April 22, 2001: Quebec, Canada - Some 400 militant protesters are arrested while demonstrating at the Americas Summit against the creation of an American Free Trade Zone. 19 police are injured.

June 15-16, 2001: Gothenburg, Sweden - Thousands of protesters rampage outside a European Union summit in the worst rioting ever to hit a meeting of the bloc. Three people are wounded by police bullets, one critically, and several hundred protesters detained during the violence, which forces organizers to relocate a working dinner of EU leaders and to move several delegations from their hotel.

July 20-22, 2001: Genoa, Italy - An anti-globalization protester is killed for the first time in anti-capitalist riots in spite of a massive 20,000-strong security operation mounted to protect the G8 summit. The entire heart of the city is sealed off but in violence blamed on anarchists, cars are torched, windows smashed and shops trashed. A huge march of at least 150,000 people takes place nonetheless. Police are accused of heavy-handedness after a raid on the headquarters of the Genoa Social Forum, grouping some 800 anti-globalization movements.
