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**NETWAR IN THE EMERALD CITY: WTO PROTEST  
STRATEGY AND TACTICS**

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*Editors' abstract. In a free society, netwar can run wild—sometimes literally. The Battle of Seattle is the best case of this to date. De Armond (Public Good Project) offers an eyewitness account, analyzing all players and their strategies and revealing how and why the Direct Action Network did so well. This struggle featured a rich mix of activists and anarchists, from around the world, who were intent upon disrupting a gathering of governmental and international institutional actors that were assembling to launch the World Trade Organization. The chapter is largely condensed from a longer paper titled "Black Flag Over Seattle," Albion Monitor, No. 72, March 2000, [www.monitor.net/monitor/seattlewto/index.html](http://www.monitor.net/monitor/seattlewto/index.html). Reprinted by permission.*

Seattle, like many American cities, has self-appointed nicknames. One of Seattle's nicknames is "The Emerald City," a reference to its perpetually soggy evergreen vegetation and to the mythical Land of Oz. On November 30, 1999, Seattleites awoke to the reality of an emerging global protest movement. This movement was not created in Seattle. Other protests with similar motives, participants, and strategies had been happening in the United States and around the world for a considerable time. What made the "N30" protests remarkable was the shock that we, like Dorothy and Toto, were no longer in Kansas.

For the next year, roving protests continued the agitation that exploded in Seattle. In the United States, Boston (Biodevastation), Washington, D.C. (A16), numerous cities on May Day (M1), Milwaukee (animal rights), Detroit and Winsor, Ontario (OAS), Philadelphia (Republican Convention), and Los Angeles (Democratic Convention) were visited by what protesters called the "spirit of Seattle." Around

the world, protests took place in Bangkok, London, Prague, Melbourne, and other cities.

On N30, all that lay in the future. Previous protests, particularly the J18/"Seize the Streets" protests in London and other cities around the world on June 18, 1999, foreshadowed the N30 demonstrations in Seattle. The J18 protest was ignored, dismissed, or misinterpreted. Seattle was where the protests broke through the infosphere and into the notice of the world. Oz did not fall, but the walls were breached.

Networked forms of social organization distinguish the new protest movement. Dubbed "netwar" by David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, this style of conflict depends heavily on information and communications technology, nonhierarchical organization, and tactics that are distinctly different from previous forms of civil-society conflicts. Understanding what happened in the Emerald City on N30 requires identifying the numerous actors, outlining their strategies and tactics, and knowing the sequence of events as the protests unfolded.

## PROTEST BACKGROUND

The central fact of the Seattle protests is the utter surprise and confusion during the initial confrontation on Tuesday morning. "It was a classic example of two armies coming into contact and immediately experiencing the total collapse of their battle plans," said Daniel Junas, a Seattle political researcher.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Most quotations are from news coverage in the *Seattle Times* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* series on the WTO protests which ran during December 1999 and January 2000. The complete WTO coverage by these two newspapers is available on the web at <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/wto/> and <http://seattlep-i.nwsourc.com/wto/>. Quotes from Daniel Junas and Jeff Boscole are from personal conversations with the author. The chronology of events was assembled from the WTO documentary *Four Days in Seattle* aired by KIRO TV on December 10, 1999.

For an anarchist view of the Black Bloc, see Tom Trouble, Black Bloc Participant Interview by Active Transformation, <http://csf.colorado.edu/forums/pfvs/2000/msg03110.html>. The police perspective is drawn from: Mike Carter and David Postman, "There Was Unrest Even at the Top During WTO Riots," *Seattle Times*, December 16, 1999, and Brett Smith and Dan Raley, "Police Officer Blames City's Poor Planning," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, December 4, 1999. One participant's experience in the AFL-CIO march is described by Greta Gaard, "'Shut Down the WTO!' Labor and Activists Create Change," *Every Other Weekly*, Bellingham, Wash., Dec. 16–Dec. 29, 1999.

The street action falls into three distinct phases. First, the Direct Action Network (DAN) protesters seized and held a handful of strategic intersections, immobilizing the police. Second, the police strategy fragmented over two contradictory goals: suppressing the DAN protests and allowing the labor parade. Third, the labor parade failed in its goal of controlling and diverting the DAN protesters away from the Convention Center. The influx of reinforcements who abandoned the labor parade and joined the DAN protests left the streets more firmly in control of the protesters, despite the use of tear gas by police from around 10 a.m. By approximately 3 p.m. Tuesday, the battle was decided and the Direct Action Network prevailed in its goal of shutting down the conference.

After that time, the outcome was certain. The battle continued for three days, spreading into other areas of the city. By Thursday, the World Trade Organization ground to an inconclusive halt, and the police ceased attacking civilians, thereby recognizing a conclusion that had been reached before darkness fell on Tuesday.

### **The Players: WTO Opponents**

DAN represents an emerging species of political organization based on networks rather than institutions. The primary networked organizations in DAN were a coalition of such groups as the Rainforest Action Network, Art & Revolution, and the Ruckus Society. Through DAN, these groups coordinated nonviolent protest training, communications, and collective strategy and tactics through a decentralized process of consultation/consensus decisionmaking.

The strategy and tactics of these new—and primarily information-based—networks of nongovernmental organizations evolved from trends represented by the ad hoc mobilization committees of the Vietnam protest era, the “alternative summits” at recent world environmental and human rights conferences, and the loose coalitions that formed in opposition to U.S. policy during the Gulf War. Networks, as opposed to institutions, are shaped by decentralized command and control structures, are resistant to “decapitation” attacks targeting leaders, and are amorphous enough to weld together coalitions with significantly different agendas while concentrating forces

on a single symbolic target. Conflicts involving networks blur distinctions between offense and defense.

The overall strategic goal of the Direct Action Network was to “shut down” the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle. The main instrument for doing so was the fielding of a few dozen “affinity groups”—small units into which the activists organized on their own. These affinity groups were organized at DAN training sessions in the weeks prior to the protests. The central training was conducted by the Ruckus Society and was attended by approximately 250 people, who then became the hard core of protestors in the “first wave”—i.e., those who were willing to risk violent confrontation with the police and arrest once the demonstrations began. Through a variety of independent but strategically congruent actions, this first wave was to be followed by a “second wave” of other affinity groups and supporters who were still militant but less willing to risk arrest and injury—all summing up to a street blockade in the vicinity of the WTO conference. The numerically small affinity groups anchored the protests and provided a catalytic nucleus of blockades around which crowd actions were directed. The Direct Action Network’s goals and consultative strategy were sufficiently broad to encompass all of the protesters’ grievances.

The second major WTO opponent was American organized labor, the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO is a hierarchical institution emphasizing unitary, top-down command. There is little participation by rank and file in union decisionmaking, although ceremonial elections are sometimes held to legitimize leadership decisions. Essentially nationalist in outlook, the AFL-CIO has policy goals that are directed more at American politics and less at international issues. Simply stated, the AFL-CIO’s strategic target was supporting and legitimizing President Clinton’s actions at the conference through purely symbolic displays as a loyal opposition. The AFL-CIO helped attract thousands of people to Seattle. Its main adherents had little interest in joining with DAN’s; but during the second and third days of the protests, a spill-over from the AFL-CIO crowds into DAN’s street actions added to a “third wave” of protest that ultimately overwhelmed the police.

## **The Players: World Trade Organization and Allies**

On the other side of the conflict, the World Trade Organization and its allies composed a much more divided picture. The purpose of the WTO conference was to produce a new framework for the next round of negotiations on international trade. To a lesser extent, the WTO deliberations would broaden the scope of existing trade agreements to include developing countries. Prior to the Seattle conference, three major trading blocks have dominated the WTO: the western hemisphere block organized around the NAFTA treaties, the European Economic Community (EEC), and the Asian industrialized nations. The Seattle talks were the first to include developing countries. Even in the absence of protests outside the meeting, the tensions inside made it very likely that the Seattle round of negotiations would be off to a very rocky start.

The American posture consisted of blocking agreements while giving the appearance of support. President Clinton's strategy was concentrated around his appearance at the conference, rather than the success of the conference itself. If the talks failed to produce a new framework, then the existing agreements (which heavily favored the shared interests of industrialized countries over developing countries) would continue to provide the basis for international negotiations. In relation to the protests, the federal strategy hinged on getting Clinton into the conference.

The City of Seattle, as host of the conference and lead jurisdiction, was the center of responsibility for containing the demonstrations. Aside from this hospitality, Mayor Schell's political concerns were complex. First of all, the primary reason for Seattle hosting the WTO conference was to promote regional trade interests: principally timber and forest products, wheat, and a variety of high-tech industries, of which Microsoft and Boeing are the best known examples. Second, Schell is a liberal with strong ties to the Democratic Party and its main source of financial support, the AFL-CIO. Third and last, Schell is deeply beholden to the progressive Democrats and environmentalists who are a key political constituency in Seattle, although mostly excluded from the Democratic Party by the labor interests. Schell's attempts to satisfy all of these interests were so riddled with contradic-

tions that he became unable to control events and was ultimately left to twist slowly in the wind.

The direct point of contact between the Direct Action Network and the WTO was the Seattle Police Department (SPD). Under the leadership of Chief Norm Stamper, the SPD has become a national laboratory for a progressive philosophy of law enforcement known as “community policing.” Recently, the relations between the police and Mayor Schell’s administration have not been good. The road to community policing has been rough and rocky, particularly in light of the resistance from rank and file cops.

The total size of the Seattle Police Department is roughly 1,800 officers, of whom about 850 are available for street duty throughout the city. Of these, 400 were assigned to the WTO demonstrations. Seattle has about the same ratio of police to population as Chicago, but Seattle’s smaller size limited the number of officers it could field against the protesters—unless, of course, the SPD entered into some sort of joint WTO operation with other police agencies in the region. By Wednesday, the second day of the protests, more than 500 state and regional police, plus some 200 National Guard were deployed.

The largest two outside police forces available to Seattle are the King County Sheriff’s Department and the Washington State Patrol. King County Sheriff Dave Reichert is a conservative Republican and political foe of Mayor Schell. This reflects the long-standing division between Seattle and the King County government. The suburban fringe surrounding Seattle is the traditional political battleground in which statewide elections are fought. The outlying areas go to the Republicans and the heavily urbanized areas go to the Democrats. The suburbs swing back and forth between the two. The State Patrol and National Guard are responsible to Gov. Gary Locke, a nominal Democrat who rose to the governorship through the King County Council. None of these outside agencies are supporters of community policing policies, which meant that assistance entailed Chief Stamper presiding over a joint command divided by fundamental policy differences.

One consideration weighing against the employment of outside police on Tuesday was the strong possibility that they would attack the union parade and city residents. The delayed deployment of outside

police reinforcements prevented contact with the union parade. Once the union supporters boarded their buses and left town, the augmented police hit the streets. Then the police attacks on city residents began and continued through Tuesday and Wednesday night. Unified police command was not established until Thursday, after the Wednesday night debacle on Capitol Hill—which included police attacks on media and elected officials.

### **The Players: Wild Cards**

There are two more players who deserve examination, especially since one ended up dominating the national media coverage. Neither of these two groups was numerous nor strategically significant in terms of the overall outcome of the WTO protests. However, both ended up in effective control of the informational conflict in which the media was both the battleground and the prize.

The first of these groups was the so-called “Anarchists from Eugene,” more correctly known as the “Black Blocs.” The total number of Black Bloc participants numbered between one and two hundred people, slightly less than DAN’s “lockdown” affinity groups. The appearance of Black Blocs at protests is a relatively recent phenomenon. The purpose of Black Blocs is to show a visible presence of the more radical anarchist factions. A Black Bloc consists of protesters who wear black, carry anarchist flags and banners, and take a more confrontational approach to protest.

In an interview in *Active Transformation*, an anarchist journal, one participant in the Seattle Black Blocs explained it this way:

Anarchists were not isolated in the black block. There were anarchists involved in every possible way. There were anarchist labor activists, puppeteers, non-violent lockdown blockaders, marching musicians, medics, communication people, media people, whatever—as well as a group of about two hundred in black masks who had prepared, also in affinity groups, to do as much symbolic physical damage to multi-national capitalism as possible. I have seen black blocs used in protests in the U.S. a lot but never so successfully. It is important to note that the black block was not the result of

some conspiracy. It too happened quite spontaneously, with people who came from all over the country—with similar desires.

The media's tag line of "Anarchists from Eugene" is one of those lazy half-truths that sums up to a conscious lie. The half-truth is that people from Eugene participated in the Black Blocs. The other unreported half of the truth is that people from Seattle and the surrounding region—not affiliated with the Black Blocs—committed much of the vandalism and nearly all of the looting. These people were not part of the Black Blocs, nor were their actions directed or controlled by the Black Blocs. The lie was that the Black Bloc caused the police violence in the streets, when actually the police attacks on the crowds began several hours before the window-breaking spree.

The primary target of the Black Blocs was neither the WTO nor the businesses whose windows were broken. The Black Blocs were in Seattle to radicalize the protest and prevent the nascent movement from being absorbed by the AFL-CIO umbrella group.

The second wild card was a segment of the Seattle Police Department that actively sought to disrupt the chain of command and forcibly turn the initial confrontation with demonstrators into chaos. One clear sign of eroding police discipline was the circulation of mutinous talk regarding the "softness" of the official strategy for dealing with the demonstrators. During an October crowd-control training session, Assistant Chief Ed Joiner answered questions about protester violence by saying that there was nothing to worry about and the protests would be nonviolent. SPD Officer Brett Smith told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* that the FBI and Secret Service had briefed King County Sheriff's officers to "fully anticipate that five to six officers would be lost during the protests, either seriously injured or killed." By noon on Tuesday, the police chain of command was seriously eroding. From this moment on, more and more command responsibilities passed to officers in the streets. The breakdown in command continued through the next day, culminating in the events of Wednesday night. It was not until Thursday that a unified command was established and able to assert total control over police actions in the streets.



## STRATEGIES

The geography of Seattle's downtown favors protesters. In the last decade, two major civil disturbances—accompanying first the Gulf War protests, and later the “Rodney King” riots—have followed much the same path over the same streets, as did the numerous protests during the Vietnam War. Given sufficient numbers and even the most hare-brained strategy, protesters have the ability to dominate the streets of Seattle.

The outcome of the Seattle protests was mostly due to the failure, not the success, of the respective strategies of the AFL-CIO, the Direct Action Network, and the Seattle Police. As is often the case in netwar conflicts, victory goes to the side that decontrols most effectively. As each of the strategies collapsed into confusion and disarray, the DAN strategy proved to be the one that survived the chaos.

The AFL-CIO strategy was to hold a rally at the Seattle Center and then march downtown (but not too far). Central to the AFL-CIO strategy was the notion that they could contain the majority of the demonstrators and keep them out of the downtown area. All the AFL-CIO had to do was prevent any effective protests by groups not under their control and allow the media to spin the tale of how labor caused a sudden change in national policy. The AFL-CIO proved to be unequal to the task of rounding up all the protesters and keeping them muted.

The Direct Action Network planned more effectively, and in the end more realistically, with a “peoples convergence” consisting of three waves (mentioned above) of blockaders enclosing the WTO conference site.

- The first wave consisted of 200–300 people in “lockdown” affinity groups—those who had opted for nonviolent civil disobedience and arrest. Their job was to penetrate the area close to the conference site, seize the dozen strategic intersections that controlled movement in the protest target, and hang on until reinforcements arrived. DAN estimated correctly the size of participation in this first wave.

- The second wave included several thousand protesters, also organized as affinity groups, who had opted for nonviolent demonstration and not being arrested. Their task was to protect the first wave from police violence and plug up the streets by sheer numbers and passive resistance. Many more people joined this second wave than DAN expected.
- The third wave was a march by several more thousand people in the People's Assembly, composed mostly of environmental and human rights groups who elected to participate in the street protests instead of the labor parade. This group entered downtown from the south at about 1 p.m. and marched to the Paramount Theatre inside the protest zone. The size of the third wave vastly exceeded DAN's expectations, as numerous marchers from the AFL-CIO parade merged into the protests downtown.

The first and second waves were organized around a dozen simultaneously converging affinity groups, swarming the protest target from all directions. Each affinity group blockaded a specific intersection. DAN expected the blockade would be maintained until police had arrested sufficient demonstrators to regain control of the streets. Much to DAN's surprise, the blockade was so effective that the expected arrests proved impossible.

Throughout the protests, the Direct Action Network protesters were able to swarm their opponents; seizing key intersections on Tuesday and penetrating the "no-protest" zone on Wednesday. DAN communications channels blanketed the Seattle area and had global reach via the Internet. Indeed, DAN's cohesion was partly owed to an improvised communications network of cell phones, radios, police scanners, and portable computers. Protesters in the street with wireless handheld computers were able to link into continuously updated web pages giving reports from the streets. Police scanners were used to monitor transmissions and provided some warning of changing police tactics. Cell phones were widely used. In addition to the organizers' all-points network, protest communications were leavened with individual protesters using cell phones, direct transmissions from roving independent media feeding directly onto the Internet, personal computers with wireless modems broadcasting live video, and a variety of other networked communications. Floating above the

tear gas was a pulsing infosphere of enormous bandwidth, reaching around the planet via the Internet—although on the scene, at street level, the Internet played little role, because most communications among the affinity groups were face-to-face and via cell phone, unencrypted.

Institutions, such as corporate media, police, and the AFL-CIO, tend to depend on narrow communications—highly centralized and hierarchical. DAN's diffuse communications network allowed protesters to continuously adapt to changing conditions. The consultative form of decisionmaking enhanced the ability to coordinate large-scale actions. The police attempts to arrest "ringleaders" on Wednesday were fruitless, since leadership and communication were widely shared throughout the network of protest groups, and the communications network was continuously expanded and modified. On Tuesday, police cut off some of DAN's communications channels, but in a few hours a new and larger network based on new cell phones was functioning.

The competing strategies of the Direct Action Network and the AFL-CIO put the police in the classically disastrous position of dividing their limited forces and inviting defeat in detail. Working with the labor leaders, the police intended to use the AFL-CIO rally as a means of containing the crowds and keeping the majority of them away from the Convention Center. Much has been made of the decision to rely on a close perimeter defense of the Convention Center, but a larger perimeter and more police would have simply moved the line of battle and dispersed the police, as occurred on Wednesday.

The real question facing the police was whether they would be confronting a protest or a parade. The police put their money on the parade and lost. The labor parade as the dominant factor of the protests was the least likely of all outcomes, but the only one that the police had a chance of controlling.

Overestimating the importance of the parade and underestimating the numbers of the DAN mobilization resulted in the police plans that collapsed early Tuesday morning. The police relied on a "tripwire" outer perimeter to trigger the arrests around the Convention Center, backed up with an inner perimeter to prevent DAN protesters from

entering the WTO conference. At the Paramount Theatre, the distance between these two tripwires was less than the width of a city street. When the crunch came, the outer tripwire (a flimsy barricade of rope) melted into the inner perimeter (a barricade of buses) in a matter of seconds. The police had prepared to defend a perimeter measured in feet and the protesters had arranged a blockade measured in city blocks.

### **Intelligence Failure**

Underlying the failure of the police strategy for controlling the demonstrations was the fundamental failure of intelligence. The picture that law enforcement built of the developing protests was a catastrophe of wishful thinking, breathing their own exhaust, and the most classic of all blunders—mistaking tactics for strategy. The law enforcement agencies had the information necessary to appraise the situation. They lacked a comprehensive understanding of the strategy of the protests. Without that, the pieces of the intelligence puzzle were not going to fit into an accurate picture.

The wishful thinking centered on the alliance between the police and the AFL-CIO. The plan for the labor parade to engulf the protests and steer them into a marginal venue was never a real possibility. The Direct Action Network and their allies had no intention of turning the protest organizing over to the unions. If there was going to be an alliance between protesters and paraders, it was going to be on the protesters terms or not at all. City officials chose to believe the labor assurances of controlling the protesters. This led the police to drastically underestimate the number of protesters. Neither the police nor the unions foresaw the Direct Action Network being able to mount a successful protest, nor did they anticipate a blockade engulfing a dozen city blocks. Once false assumptions became the basis for planning, any evidence to the contrary was disregarded or misinterpreted.

The intelligence picture was further confused by the claims of federal law enforcement officials that the protests would be violent. The publicly released text of one FBI forecast was replete with hysterical predictions:

[E]lements within the protest community are planning to disrupt the conference . . . environmental or animal rights extremists or anarchist-induced violence . . . computer-based attacks on WTO-related web sites, as well as key corporate and financial sites. . . . Corporate sponsors . . . may be subject to surveillance efforts from these groups. . . . to identify the residences of key employees of sponsoring corporations. . . . These employees should remain alert for individuals who may be targeting them in furtherance of anti-WTO activities. . . . Recipients should remain sensitive to threats made by anti-WTO groups.

Nowhere in the FBI “Terrorist Threat Advisory” was the slightest inkling of what was going to be happening in the streets beyond the fact that the conference was going to be “disrupted.” The competing strategies of the Direct Action Network and the AFL-CIO had been trumpeted loudly, widely, and in considerable detail in the press by the organizers, summing up to nonviolent civil disobedience, shutting down the conference, and an ineffectual parade designed to keep protesters away from the Convention Center. City officials at the top elected to pick and choose among information to support their plans. The frontline officers did the same, with opposite results. The rumors within the police department (fantasy or otherwise) about federal expectations of dead and wounded police added to the unreality.

### **Correlation of Forces**

By Monday evening, November 30, the forces had aligned themselves. The Direct Action Network planned to shut down the WTO conference by swarming the streets. The AFL-CIO planned to hold a rally and parade in an effort to influence national trade policy—and the upcoming presidential elections. Police Chief Norm Stamper had decided the protests could be peacefully controlled by his own forces without outside assistance, knowing that the price of assistance could be the peace. The mayor allowed the AFL-CIO to control his actions on Tuesday, hoping against all evidence that the unions would swallow and control the protesters. The Seattle Police Department was tasked with preventing the protests while allowing the labor parade. The outside law enforcement agencies were champing at the bit to enter into the fray, but as long as the SPD maintained order, they had

to sit on the sidelines. The FBI and Secret Service cried doom and gloom—while signing off on Mayor Schell and Chief Stamper’s plan. The Black Blocs were milling around the edges, fondling their crow-bars and dreaming of chaos.

What would happen next was anybody’s guess, but the best guessers would win and the others would lose.

In the end, the advantage went to the Direct Action Network, since its strategy effectively enclosed the coordinated strategy of the AFL-CIO and the federal government. As will be seen, at the critical moment in the street actions, the balance shifted to the Direct Action Network as nonunion protesters and a few union members left the AFL-CIO parade and joined the street protests, effectively sealing the success of the Direct Action Network’s day-long blockade.

## **CHRONOLOGY**

At 5 a.m. Tuesday morning, Washington State Patrol Chief Annette Sandberg was having coffee at the Starbucks near the Convention Center. Nobody would be having coffee there later that evening because it would be smashed and looted. Sandberg saw demonstrators moving into strategic positions before any police had arrived. The converging columns of the Direct Action Network began to shut down Seattle.

The first DAN “arrest” affinity groups moved in on the strategic intersections in the vicinity of the Convention Center. Afterwards, these protesters said that they were surprised by the absence of any police presence on the streets. In many locations, the “arrest” groups arrived earlier than the “nonarrest” groups, which were supposed to protect the arrest groups from removal by the police. The news photographs of these initial “lock-down” groups have a surrealistic air to them. In the empty streets after dawn, groups of protesters lock themselves together with bicycle locks or tubes, covering their linked arms to prevent police from removing them individually. By 8 a.m., most of the key intersections had been seized by the protesters, now reinforced by their second wave.

King County Sheriff Dave Reichert says he got a telephone call at 8 a.m. from a county detective. "He said, 'Sheriff, we're trapped. . . . We have no backup,'" Reichert claimed. "I had officers barricaded in the hotel with a mob literally pounding on the glass, and there was nobody to help them. Nobody." Reichert wasn't on the scene, but already he was seeing "mobs." KIRO TV crews were at the same location and showed lines of grinning demonstrators holding hands and blocking the street—no "mob literally pounding on the glass."

As the number of protesters increased, the 400 police remained in their lines around the Convention Center or at their positions at the Memorial Stadium. The slow infiltration of demonstrators made it difficult for the police to gauge the intentions of the crowd. The Direct Action Network had already swarmed the police and shifted to a defensive strategy of holding on to the streets that they now controlled. The flimsy rope and netting barriers, the "tripwire" at the Paramount Theatre, went down as protesters walked toward the line of city buses next to the theater. The buses were a second line of defense, separating the police from the crowd. The police strategy relied on these "tripwires" to trigger the shift from a passive "wait and see" mode to more aggressive tactics. Unfortunately, the "tripwire" perimeters were now engulfed and isolated by the DAN affinity groups and the crowds that surrounded them.

Meanwhile, at the Memorial Stadium at the Seattle Center, the gates were opening for the AFL-CIO rally, which was scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. Chartered buses from around the region were on the road for some time, carrying a mixture of union members and protesters to Seattle. The AFL-CIO had done mass mailings throughout Washington State, sending postcards to nonunion supporters of a variety of liberal and progressive organizations. "Join the March of the Century," the cards read. Before the stadium opened, DAN had rewritten the AFL-CIO script. The labor parade, a "head fake to the left," was now a sideshow rather than the main event.

By 9:10 a.m., "crowd-control efforts were encountering difficulty," according to Washington State Patrol Chief Sandberg. She placed troopers throughout Western Washington on alert. The day was barely started and the police plan was already beginning to break down. The Secret Service, responsible for the security of federal and visiting gov-

ernment officials, discovered that the streets between the Convention Center, the adjacent hotels, and the Paramount Theater—a distance of up to five blocks along some routes—were closed by protesters. “It hadn’t taken long for things not to be working very well,” said Ronald Legan, the special agent in charge of the Seattle office of the Secret Service.

### **Police Go on the Offensive**

Shortly after 10 a.m., the Seattle Police Department began using tear gas at the southern end of the triangular area blockaded by the Direct Action Network. The use of gas may have been a botched effort to open a pathway into the protest area from outside, since the gas was fired on Sixth Avenue, between University and Union Streets, immediately outside the Olympic, one of the delegate hotels. Police officials later explained that the gas was an attempt to expand and reconnect their now isolated perimeters inside the crowds.

With the release of the gas, mood in the streets rapidly changed. The police were successful in advancing against the crowd only over short distances. There were no instances where police charges were repulsed, or where the crowds counterattacked and cut off police. One major effort to reopen the street connecting the Paramount Theatre to the hotels moved the crowds back until running out of steam. In short, the police tactics were ineffective because of the enormous ratio of protesters to police.

The net effect of the use of gas and the police charges was to cause the crowds to surge from one point to another without allowing police to gain control of the streets. In the midst of the melee, the “lock-down” affinity groups remained in place, blocking intersections and anchoring the protest to the area around the Convention Center. Police gassed and pepper-sprayed the immobile groups, but could not arrest them and remove them from the area because of the continued blockade. These tactics were both ineffective in getting the blockaders to move and successful in infuriating the crowds who saw their main mission as the protection of these groups. The crowds were now frightened and angry, but determined to maintain control of the streets.



The overall strategic situation remained unchanged, despite the tactical chaos. The protesters numbers were sufficient to keep the blockade intact, although it was now a blockade of continuous movement. The police remained isolated inside the protest area without an open avenue to the outside through which arrestees could be removed. The area involved in the disorder—and that's what it clearly was after an hour of tear gas and chaos—spread down Pike and Pine Streets. The protests remained centered on the Convention Center. Although the crowds expanded into the surrounding blocks under the police attacks, they kept surging back to protect the “lock-down” affinity groups holding the key intersections.

### **Labor's Head-Fake Becomes a U-Turn**

By 11 a.m., the rally at Memorial Stadium had been under way for an hour. Roughly 20,000 people half-filled the stadium. The union numbers were swelled by the anti-WTO organizations that had accepted the labor invitation to protest the WTO. These groups were a mixture of environmental, social justice, and human rights groups. Over the next two hours, the joint planning by the labor leaders and police to break the DAN blockade would irretrievably split the brief alliance between labor and the progressive left.

As the labor rally was getting under way, Assistant Chief Ed Joiner was turning down demands from his field commanders to declare a state of civil emergency that would cancel the parade. Joiner said he overruled a recommendation by Assistant Chief John Pirak to declare a state of emergency on Tuesday at about 11 a.m. Despite the fact that “we were getting hit with much larger numbers of protesters than we had anticipated,” Joiner refused.

The veto, Joiner said, was made in consideration of plans for the AFL-CIO march toward downtown. “I felt declaring a state of emergency at that time, before the march ever got under way, was going to send a very strong public message that we already had major difficulties as a city,” Joiner said.

Joiner believed the march would actually work in favor of his stretched police lines. The strategy, he said, was for the peaceful

march to sweep the other demonstrators into its ranks and lead them out of the downtown area.

The final decision was to allow the AFL-CIO parade to proceed from the Seattle Center to downtown. This sealed the fate of the street actions as a victory for the Direct Action Network. If the march had been canceled and the additional protesters had been prevented from joining in the chaos downtown, the city stood a better chance of restoring order. Instead, the strategy of using the AFL-CIO to contain and neutralize the Direct Action Network protests was woefully misdirected.

The march was supposed to wheel away from downtown several blocks from the Convention Center, draw people away from the street protests, and move north to a “dispersal point” near Republican Avenue near Memorial Stadium. The police intended to move in behind the demonstrators and expand the perimeter around the hotels and Convention Center. Joiner said,

I still believe we could have controlled what we were dealing with at that time had the march turned. It was not going to be clean. It would have been messy. But I think we would have been able to open a corridor to get delegates in and out.

As the parade approached downtown, AFL-CIO marshals began blocking progress toward the Convention Center, saying “The route has been changed. Circle around here.” Police were massing several blocks to the south but were not visible to the people arriving from the Seattle Center. Several thousand people broke away from the march, just in time to run into the renewed police push to move people away from the Convention Center. The momentum of the thousands moving toward the Convention Center carried several blocks south, past the parade’s planned pivot at 5th and Pike. Behind them, the leaders of the labor parade moved north from downtown and returned to the Seattle Center, unmolested by police.

### **Pause to Regroup**

Assistant Chief Joiner’s “messy” plan to force the Direct Action Network protesters out of the downtown area and into the AFL-CIO parade set in motion several different actions that had a dramatic effect

on perceptions of the Battle in Seattle. To understand how these actions converged, it is necessary to step back in time to around noon, when Assistant Chief Joiner was turning down requests to declare a civil emergency and cancel the AFL-CIO parade.

From about noon on, the Multi-Agency Command Center in the Public Safety Building began filling with top-ranking officials from government and law enforcement. Federal officials were speaking loudly about the consequences of not regaining control of the streets. State Patrol Chief Annette Sandberg described the federal officials as in a “kind of panicky mode.”

The police attacks on the protesters reached a peak shortly before the parade departed from the Seattle Center. According to police sources, nearly all of the available tear gas was expended before the parade approached downtown. In the preparations for the protest, Mayor Schell and Chief Stamper had laid in stocks of about \$20,000 worth of gas. This was one-fifth the amount recommended by federal officials. According to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, police officers “took matters into their own hands” to obtain new supplies of gas and pepper spray. Other information suggests that the new supplies were part of Joiner’s “messy” postparade attack plans.

Officers sped to Auburn, Renton, and Tukwila police departments, as well as the King County Jail and Department of Corrections, emptying munitions stores and ferrying the supplies back to downtown. Other officers bought additional chemical agents from a local law enforcement supply business. Meanwhile, a police captain flew to Casper, Wyoming, to pick up a large quantity of gas, “stinger shells,” and other paraphernalia from Defense Technology Corp., a subsidiary of Armor Holdings. The locally obtained gas and pepper spray were driven as close to the street action as possible. The munitions were transferred into gym bags and knapsacks that were then run through the streets by plainclothes detectives.

Other improvised preparations did not go as well as the deliveries of tear gas and pepper spray. The declaration of civil emergency was delayed until 3:24 p.m., preventing police reinforcements from other law enforcement agencies and the National Guard from being legally deployed until long after the AFL-CIO paraders had withdrawn to

their buses. Assistant Chief Ed Joiner's "messy" plan was also impeded by the flat refusal of the Seattle Fire Department to turn fire hoses on demonstrators. The fire department decision resulted in the trucks being delivered to the SPD by out-of-uniform firemen who refused to operate the equipment on the grounds that people would be injured by the spray.

### **Black Bloc Runs Amok**

While the police were regrouping and preparing to force the Direct Action Network protesters to join the AFL-CIO parade, several groups took advantage of the lull in the battle. They have all been lumped together into a nameless anarchist horde, but the fact remains that there were two distinct groups acting out different agendas, not one "organized" anarchist conspiracy as the myth would have it.

At approximately 1 p.m., the police temporarily stopped trying to push corridors through the protest area. Earlier, the Black Bloc anarchists had entered into an understanding with the Direct Action Network that they would refrain from vandalism at least as long as the streets remained peaceful. But meanwhile, the Black Bloc arrived downtown armed with hammers, crowbars, spray paint, M-80 firecrackers, and paint bombs. Their goal was a "propaganda of the deed," centering around vandalizing chosen stores—Nike, Starbucks, the Gap, Old Navy, and others—that they saw as fitting targets.

The Black Bloc anarchists were simply biding their time and waiting for an opportunity to vandalize these stores and then get away. They had been closely monitored by the police and FBI since the preceding day. Early Tuesday morning, the FBI had briefed Seattle police on the Black Bloc's whereabouts and activities. The close observation of the Black Bloc included undercover FBI agents dressed to blend in with the anarchists, right down to wearing masks to hide their faces.

According to KIRO TV, the Black Bloc rampage started on 6th Avenue between Pine Street and Olive Way. Vandals smashed the windows of a Starbucks coffee shop in the middle of the block, then moved north toward Olive Way. Turning west on Olive Way, they attacked the SeaFirst bank, then turned south on 5th Avenue. Two or three stores along this block were vandalized. Emerging onto Pine Street, the

Black Bloc turned again, moving west and attacking three or four more stores in the next two blocks. Reaching Third Avenue, the Black Bloc turned south and dispersed.

The *Seattle Times* reported that the vandalism centered mainly along Pike Street, between Third and Sixth Avenue. A map showing the location of vandalized and looted stores published in the *Times* overlaps the route of the Black Bloc only at the beginning and end. The majority of the vandalism occurred around 4th and Pike, a corner that the Black Bloc *avoided* while being videotaped by KIRO TV.

Large numbers of teenagers who were not part of the Black Bloc took advantage of the situation and likewise engaged in vandalism. It was this second group, estimated to number at least one hundred or more, who engaged in looting some of the broken store windows, as well as occupying the awning over the Nike store. In addition to the damage to commercial property, police cars and limousines were vandalized with spray paint and by having their tires slashed.

Jeff Boscole, an eyewitness who was on Sixth Avenue, described how the two groups could be distinguished by their dress and the different slogans that they spray painted on buildings and windows. According to Boscole, the Black Bloc graffiti consisted of legible political slogans, while the “wilding teenagers” were “tagging” with illegible individualized symbols that were not slogans.

The Black Bloc engaged in vandalism numbered no more than thirty to forty people. They all dressed similarly. Many were dressed in black and all were hooded or masked to prevent their identification. They moved at a brisk pace, occasionally stopping in small groups to break windows or spray paint anarchist and anticorporate slogans. Early in the raid, they twice attacked KIRO TV news crews, spraying the camera lenses with paint to stop the crews from taking pictures. After these attacks, news crews followed from half a block to avoid further attacks. The Black Bloc maintained cohesion and moved along its route in a determined manner, several times scuffling with the nonviolent protesters from the Direct Action Network. A handful of plainclothes police and FBI shadowed the group, reporting their movements. Police made no effort to halt the vandalism, but in several instances DAN protesters stopped or interfered with members of the

Black Bloc, while others chanted “no violence” to little avail. The vandalism and looting occurred in the area evacuated by police to create a buffer zone between the DAN protesters and the AFL-CIO parade. The center of the vandalized area coincides with the turning point of the parade.

### **Declaration of Emergency**

At 12:45 p.m., Gov. Gary Locke authorized his chief of staff to begin preparing to call up the National Guard. An hour earlier, State Patrol Chief Annette Sandberg had ordered State Patrol troopers in Eastern Washington on higher alert and dispatched a 22-member Civil Disturbance Team from Spokane to drive the 400 miles to Seattle. Traveling at top speed, they would not arrive before dark.

Shortly after Locke set the National Guard in motion, his office in Olympia received a telephone call from a furious Secretary of State Madeline Albright. Albright demanded the governor immediately take action to release her from her hotel where she was trapped by the demonstrators.

Gov. Locke was able to claim that he was taking action—but all of these things would take time. Locke arrived at the Multi-Agency Command Center in the Public Safety Building at 2:50 p.m., about ten minutes ahead of the mayor. “Almost immediately upon arriving at the command center, there was no doubt in my mind that we needed to call up the National Guard,” Locke said.

Mayor Schell spent most of the day at the WTO conference site, waiting for the opening ceremonies to begin. He did not arrive at the Multi-Agency Command Center until about 3 p.m., two hours after the ceremonies had been canceled.

Upon Schell’s arrival, officials from the SPD, Secret Service, FBI, State Patrol, Department of Justice, State Department, King County, the governor’s office, and the White House moved into a back room and engaged in a heated discussion. While the argument continued, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno called the governor and insisted that the National Guard be called up.

After speaking with Reno, Locke met with the mayor. Schell then spoke with Assistant Police Chiefs Joiner and Pirak. “By that time, we had a chance to look at what was happening. The mayor immediately agreed and authorized [the emergency declaration],” said Joiner. “There was never any hesitation.” The period between the mayor’s arrival at the Multi-Agency Command Center and issuing the proclamation of civil emergency was less than half an hour. At 3:24 p.m., the mayor issued the emergency declaration.

The mayor’s declaration of civil emergency set in motion the reinforcements from the King County Sheriff’s Department, the Washington State Patrol, and local police departments from surrounding cities and towns. The arrival of the reinforcements in the streets occurred relatively slowly over the next three hours, impeded by the discord that dominated the relations between the Seattle police and King County Sheriff Dave Reichert.

### **Battle Resumes**

By 3 p.m., the belated attempt by police to push the protesters away from the triangle of key intersections surrounding the Convention Center was in full motion. The Direct Action Network blockade was still intact, immobilizing the police and preventing movement through the strategic triangle surrounding the Convention Center. As a result, most of the police action took place south and west of the Convention Center. Starting from the south along Union and University Streets, the police moved north along Third to Seventh Avenue to sweep the demonstrators north into the route by which the labor leaders had already retreated.

The police sweep northwards compressed the crowds into the east-west corridor running along Pike and Pine Streets. Here, the police again stalled against the large size of the crowds. The compression halted the police movement for several hours, as dumpsters that had been pushed into the streets to block the center of intersections began to burn. These bonfires slowly spread in an irregular way as the crowds withdrew east, not north as the police wished, and moved up into Capitol Hill in the early evening.

By 5:30 p.m., the police lines—now increased by the arrival of Sheriff’s deputies—had reached the corner of Fourth and Pike. The protesters began withdrawing east along Pike and Pine Streets, toward Capitol Hill, followed by police firing tear gas, stun grenades, and rubber and wooden projectiles, and accompanied in some instances by vehicles. The police did not maintain close contact with the crowds and followed—not drove—them into Capitol Hill. The turning movement of the police—from a northern push to an eastern one—was contrary to the plan outlined by Assistant Chief Ed Joiner. According to political researcher Daniel Junas, the Direct Action Network overheard police radio messages in which units in the East Precinct on Capitol Hill frantically demanded that the police downtown cease pushing demonstrators up the hill. The central command replied that they were pushing the crowds north (i.e., along the route of the AFL-CIO retreat from downtown) not east.

The protesters’ withdrawal from downtown coincided with the arrival of additional police reinforcements, the declaration of a 7 p.m. curfew, and the fall of darkness. The WTO had announced the cancellation of activities around 1 p.m., although word of the cancellation did not become widespread until late afternoon. Based on videos and photographs of the move east up Pine Street, the protesters appear to have decided to leave downtown and were followed, not “swept,” by police. As the police crossed the freeway, the demonstrators melted away. Residents of Capitol Hill began to be attacked by the newly arrived police units from King County and adjoining communities who followed the pursuit teams up Pine.

The police decision to follow up the hill, firing tear gas and rubber bullets, is inexplicable in terms of clearing downtown and appears to be contrary to the “messy” plan outlined by Assistant Chief Joiner. Like the initial deployment of tear gas, it is evidence of loss of control by the commanders. The hot pursuit of the protesters was the second instance where tactics at the street level ran contrary to the strategic direction of the commanders. The police decision not to disengage continued the disturbance late into the night. Failure by commanders to halt the attacks on residents of Capitol Hill would have serious repercussions a day later.



The loose contact between police and demonstrators permitted the last act of serious vandalism of the day. Police were not controlling the intersection at Sixth Avenue and Stewart Street, near the Westin Hotel. Protesters had built a bonfire in the center of the intersection. At approximately 7:15 p.m., a group of vandals smashed the window of the Starbucks coffee shop. This was the same coffee shop from which Washington State Patrol Chief Annette Sandberg saw the Direct Action Network affinity groups at 5 a.m., as they moved into position and seized the strategic intersections surrounding the WTO conference site. Events had come full circle.

## **Day Two**

By the end of the first day, with the departure of the AFL-CIO parade participants, the Direct Action Network assumed total control of the protests in Seattle. After their one brief appearance, the Black Bloc presence in the streets subsided, effectively now under the control of the DAN nonviolence strategy. The media directed considerable attention to the Eugene contingent, and the Black Bloc created unprecedented attention for the philosophy of “autonomist” anarchism and John Zerzan, a Eugene anarchist philosopher who promotes “primitivism” and a withdrawal from technological society. Yet, the Direct Action Network strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience had succeeded against the Black Bloc’s efforts to escalate the police violence, the AFL-CIO’s strategy of controlling and marginalizing protests in favor of a symbolic parade, the attempts of the Seattle police to clear the streets with tear gas, and media efforts to frame the issue in terms of “violent protesters.”

Then, at 7:30 a.m. on Wednesday morning, the police began mass arrests. Direct Action Network protesters began assembling at a few locations and others made their way into the downtown core. Some of the arrests occurred at Denny Park, well to the north of the downtown. Police handcuffed some demonstrators and put them on city buses to the temporary jail at the former Sand Point Naval Air Station. Other demonstrators had their signs taken away from them but were not arrested. These proceeded downtown.

Protesters converged on the Westlake Center, and arrests there began at approximately 8 a.m. As the morning wore on, it became apparent that Westlake Center, rather than the WTO conference location, was the focus of Wednesday's blockade. The Direct Action Network had correctly identified the shopping and business district as being the vulnerable point in the new police strategy. By 9 a.m. Westlake Center was clogged by a peaceful sit-down protest as protesters patiently waited for police to arrest them. The crowds, consisting of demonstrators waiting to join the sit-in and spectators from the business district, continued to swell. As one protester was arrested, more would leave the crowd and sit down. Once again, the netwar tactic of "swarming" the target by stealthy approach succeeded.

By 10 a.m. it was becoming evident that the police tactics were not going to halt the sit-in and that the police were creating a situation that they could not control. At 10:30 a.m., the police commander stepped between his men and the protesters. He walked to the seated protesters, leaned down and said, "We're outta here." He then motioned to his men to leave the area and the police withdrew in an orderly manner. The protesters, both seated and among the crowd, were jubilant. They had prevailed. The disengagement of the police at Westlake Center marked the end of mass arrests as a police tactic.

The preceding day, as police and federal security officials had milled around in an atmosphere of panic at the Multi-Agency Command Center in the Public Safety Building, Ronald Legan, the special agent in charge of the Seattle office of the Secret Service, laid down an ultimatum to Seattle officials about the presidential visit. Legan said,

I remember saying that unless we get control of the streets, we would recommend that he not come. Now the problem there is that, with this president, he sets his own agenda and goes where he wants. And we did not want to have to battle a 30-car motorcade in and out of Seattle.

Seattle Assistant Chief Ed Joiner said he would not characterize the Tuesday discussion as "threatening . . . but it was clear that if the situation was going to be the following day what it was then, there was no way you could bring the president of the United States into Seattle."

## Postpresidential Disorder

On the streets, Wednesday afternoon was a repeat of Tuesday. The police pulled back for the four hours that President Clinton was in public view, just as they had pulled back as the AFL-CIO parade approached downtown. In the words of one TV reporter, “The streets were strangely quiet.” At 1 p.m., Washington Gov. Gary Locke gave a live interview on local television. Locke stated that order was restored to Seattle and told local shoppers to “come downtown”—inside the perimeter of the “no protest” zone. Unfortunately, the governor hadn’t heard about police plans for a 4 p.m. crackdown to drive protesters out of the downtown core, a time that coincides with the downtown rush hour.

As Clinton’s motorcade departed, the streets were once again blanketed in tear gas and police fired pepper spray at anyone who got in their way. At the Pike Place Market, tear gas was severe enough that produce merchants put out signs the next day announcing they were closed because their fruits and vegetables were contaminated by tear gas.

As on Tuesday, the police failed to move the crowds of protesters and the main axis of protest movement once again became Pike and Pine Streets. After two hours, police were able to move only two blocks up Pike from the market to Second Avenue. A protester blockade at Third and Pine stayed in place until protesters voluntarily dispersed at 6:45 p.m.

To celebrate their “control” of the now empty streets, a column of a dozen police cars raced through the empty downtown core with emergency lights flashing and sirens blaring. Police officials explained to reporters that this “wild weasel” operation was a “show of force to clear the streets.” The news videos of the stream of cars is one of the more surreal images from the entire week. Things would get even stranger that night.

At about the same time as the “wild weasels” were racing through the streets, police assaulted Seattle City Councilman Richard McIver. McIver said city police officers yanked him from his car, pulled his arms behind his back and started to cuff him as he drove to a World

Trade Organization reception event at the nearby Westin Hotel. Councilman McIver said,

I don't want to aid the hooligans who are raising hell and I don't want to take on specific officers. . . . But there are huge flaws with the officers when it comes to people of color. I'm 58 years old. I had on a \$400 suit, but last night, I was just another nigger.

### **Street Battles for the Hell of It**

The final incident of Wednesday night demonstrated that civilian control of law enforcement ceased to exist for a time. The "Battle of Capitol Hill" degenerated into a police riot, perhaps the only time during the WTO protests that police command totally lost control of their forces on the street.

As demonstrators withdrew from the downtown curfew area at around 7 p.m., a group of several hundred protesters moved north on Fourth Avenue, followed at a distance by police. The group withdrew in an orderly manner, stopping several times along the way to vote on where they were going. They moved east on Denny Way into Capitol Hill and reached Broadway and East Harrison Street at about 7:45 p.m., where they joined another group that was already at the intersection. By now the group numbered approximately 500. As they passed through the neighborhood, cheering residents and honks of support from motorists greeted them. The crowd marched back and forth along Broadway for about an hour, carrying banners and accompanied by a band playing music. The atmosphere was one of celebration rather than protest.

The crowd was predominantly residents of Capitol Hill, many of whom had been angered by police the previous night when bystanders and people on their way home from work had been indiscriminately attacked by the police who had pursued demonstrators up the hill. At about 9 p.m., police and National Guard forces began arriving in the area. By 9:30 p.m., police closed several blocks of Broadway between East Republican and East John. Tensions were high, as a result of the residents' resentment of the police presence and police fears of violence. KIRO TV reported that the people opposing police that night consisted entirely of Capitol Hill residents. Afterwards, police claimed

there were reports of agitators carrying gasoline bombs and throwing rocks and bottles. They said some protesters charged officers. No gasoline bombs were thrown that evening and news videos show only police charging, not civilians attacking police.

Police began using pepper spray, tear gas, and concussion grenades shortly after 9:30 p.m., first at John Street and Broadway to the south, moving north, and near Harrison, moving south. More police blocked side streets, preventing the crowds from dispersing.

“The protesters looked completely calm to me. . . . They were not instigating this,” said Erin Katz, a Capitol Hill resident who watched from behind police lines near Pine Street. “I heard absolutely no warning and they started to gas them.”

For the next two and a half hours, police rampaged along Broadway. It was during this period that some of the week’s worst instances of police misconduct occurred. National television repeatedly aired footage of a Tukwila officer kicking a young man in the groin and then immediately firing a shotgun within inches of the young man’s torso. At a parking lot near Broadway, two journalism students were videotaping the action. A King County deputy went up to their car and motioned for the young women to roll down a window. When they did, the deputy pepper sprayed them both, shouting “Tape this, bitch!” This footage has also been repeatedly aired on national television. These and other incidents have resulted in civil suits filed against the Seattle police as the agency in charge, as well as the officers involved.

Around midnight, the disorder had drawn several local government officials, who tried to get the police and demonstrators to disengage. They included King County Councilman Brian Derdowski, City Councilmen Richard Conlin and Nick Licata, and Councilwoman-elect Judy Nicastro.

“Those council members tried to work through the chain of command of the Police Department and they were unable to get anybody,” Derdowski said. For two hours, the civilian officials tried to get the police to cease attacking the crowd. Finally, around 2 a.m., the crowd began to leave. The police responded with volleys of gas and rubber projectiles. Derdowski said,

I asked the police to be professional and just take one step back. That would be the sign that these folks needed, and they would disperse. The police said they couldn't do that, so we went back and told the people that they needed to leave the area. And a lot of them did, but a few persisted. And they started singing Christmas carols. They sang "Jingle Bells," and when they started singing "Silent Night," the tear gas started. Something hit me in the back, and there was pandemonium there, and so we left the area.

### **Jail Blockade and Release**

By Thursday, the success of the Direct Action Network protests was undeniable. The WTO conference was prevented from holding its opening ceremonies on Tuesday. On Wednesday, the conference began to come unraveled when President Clinton made repeated statements supporting the demonstrators—although it appears he was referring only to the AFL-CIO—and announced a U.S. policy initiative that guaranteed that major consensus at the WTO conference would be impossible. On Wednesday night, police attacked local residents in the sort of breakdown of command and discipline shown by defeated troops. Graffiti began appearing around Seattle reading: "Remember, We Are Winning!" On Thursday afternoon, police finally came to an accommodation with Direct Action Network protesters and provided a police escort for a march.

The focus of the Direct Action Network strategy now shifted from the WTO to support for those still in jail as a result of the mass arrests. For two days, vigils were held at the Public Safety Building, at times completely surrounding the building.

On Friday evening, after meeting with city officials, Direct Action Network legal staff announced an agreement with the city. Jailed protesters would now begin cooperating with the courts and properly identify themselves. Many had refused to provide their names and addresses, giving their names only as "Jane WTO," "John WTO," or in one case "Emiliano Zapata." Once processed for arraignment, they were released on personal recognizance. Nearly all of those jailed were released by Sunday. After the jailed protesters were released, Seattle City Attorney Mark Sidran issued a statement to the press denying that any agreement had been reached and promising to prosecute

all cases. In January, all of the mass arrest cases were dismissed because police had not filled out arrest forms.

### **Police Officials Resign**

The final act of the WTO protests was the announced departures of Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper, strategic commander Assistant Chief Ed Joiner, Nancy McPherson, civilian director of the Community and Information Services, and Assistant Chief of Investigations Harve Fergusson. Those who made public statements regarding their resignations or retirements said that the decisions had been made before the WTO protests. Chief Stamper stated that one purpose of announcing his resignation was to “depoliticize” the investigations into police actions during the protests and “in making this announcement, I’ve taken my tenure off the table.” The departures of the other police officials were virtually ignored in the media, although they represent the departure of three out of seven of the chief’s highest-ranking assistants.

The Seattle police organizations launched a massive public-relations blitz. In one of the more bizarre actions, police officers began selling T-shirts to local merchants—as if the police had won some sort of a major victory. The shirts showed the Space Needle engulfed in a tornado, saying “Battle in Seattle WTO 99.” Mike Edwards, president of the Seattle Police Officers Guild, said that money from the T-shirt sales would be used to buy merchandise from downtown merchants and that the items purchased would be given to charities. The guild also organized a rally to show support for the police. State Rep. Luke Esser, R-Bellevue, a conservative “law-and-order” advocate, issued a statement saying that he would be attending the police rally “commending those brave men and women for working around the clock in treacherous conditions to maintain law and order during the WTO riots.” The *Seattle Times* ran a variety of pro-police articles, including one front-page headline announcing the retirement of a police dog.

### **CONCLUSION**

The WTO protests in Seattle were the largest left-wing demonstrations in America since the Gulf War. They were also the most success-

ful American political demonstrations of the decade, if success is measured by the degree of congruence between the protesters' goals and the effect on public policy issues.

The WTO protests succeeded in the streets through a combination of strategic surprise and tactical openness. The three key phases of the street actions leading to this success consisted of the Tuesday morning "swarm," which blockaded strategic intersections; the collapse of the police strategy to suppress the Direct Action Network protests while allowing the AFL-CIO parade; and the failure of the AFL-CIO parade to engulf the Direct Action Network protests.

Three things distinguished the N30 protests from the others that followed in other cities and countries. None of the later protests had an AFL-CIO contingent, a rampage of vandalism by anarchists, or a divided police command. The much-touted "Teamsters and turtles together" alliance evaporated immediately. The AFL-CIO shifted its target to China's admission to the WTO and severed what few ties had been made to environmental and human rights groups. The protest movement thoroughly rejected the property destruction tactics of the militant anarchist factions, having never embraced them in the first place. The Black Blocs were never an influential factor in future protests. Every police department expecting protests noted the fate of Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper and made extensive preparations to contain, disrupt, and control the protestors. The protesters, for their part, did not evolve new tactics or repeat the strategic surprise of N30. The parallel to the strategic surprise of the January 1994 Zapatista attacks in Chiapas and the subsequent stalemate in Mexico is worth considering.

The most profound outcome of the WTO protests is the appearance of the netwar construct in American politics. The "Battle in Seattle" was fought not only in the streets, but also in the infosphere. Once the idea of an international left-wing opposition to globalization was demonstrated to be a political force, the informational offensive had succeeded. Strategic surprise occurs in the mind of the opponent.

The WTO protests were the first to take full advantage of the extremely dense and wide-reaching alternative media network via the Internet. The use of "media special forces" is one of the hallmarks of net-



war and informational conflicts. The flexible and improvised communications infrastructure used by the Direct Action Network is a notable feature of the protests. One of the dictums of netwar is that netwar actors have a much greater interest in keeping communications working, rather than shutting them down. The dense and diversified communications used by the Direct Action Network could not have been significantly harmed by any action less than a total media and communications blackout in Seattle. Not only is such an action impossible because of the economic and social costs that would result, but a blackout of the required magnitude would be the netwar equivalent of unconditional surrender by the establishment. Both protesters and their opponents will have to come to terms with the implications of netwar and the struggle for information, understanding, and “topside.” Because the ultimate prize in a netwar conflict is understanding—not opinion—the quality of information (not quantity) determines the final outcome.

Since the N30 protests, a new hybrid of institution and network has multiplied with every protest. Beginning with the Independent Media Center in Seattle, each new protest has spawned a new “indymedia” organization. Producing newspapers, web sites, videos, radio programs, and a steady barrage of information, the indymedia network is an attempt to gain some sort of informational parity with the corporate-controlled mass media. As of this writing, [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org) lists over forty nodes: ten international web sites in various countries, plus two in Australia, six in Canada, twenty in the United States, and five specialized subsites for indymedia support operations. Significantly, the indymedia network has an “all points” connectivity. All of the sites are linked to the others and share information, links, technical support, and web design.

Netwar is nothing new as a form of conflict. What is new is the richer informational environment, which makes the organization of civil (and uncivil) society into networks easier, less costly, and more efficient. The essential conditions for victory in a social netwar conflict are also the conditions that make waging netwar possible: the shared understanding of a situation demanding direct action. In many ways, the victory of the Direct Action Network was implicit in the fact that so many people understood the conflict and were willing to act on

that understanding. The streets of Seattle showed what democracy looks like.

### **EDITORS' POSTSCRIPT (SUMMER 2001)**

Seattle was a seminal win. It sparked new netwars in the streets of Washington (A16), Los Angeles, and in a string of other cities where activists have persisted in their opposition to the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the general process of corporate globalization. One activist has reportedly boasted that protests could be mounted in any city around the world, at any time.

In the United States, netwar in the streets has fared badly since Seattle. Seattle was, in many ways, unique. First, the voluminous swarm of protesters who formed the third wave, drawn from the AFL-CIO participants, surprised both DAN and the law enforcement authorities. In addition, governmental authorities may have learned more from the Battle of Seattle than the activists did. In both the Washington and Los Angeles demonstrations, police were able to preempt or prevent almost all the tactical maneuvers of the activists. In these post-Seattle cases, protest organizers reverted to centralized control of operations—including by locating some command, media, and other functions in the same building—which made them vulnerable to counterleadership targeting. The Battle of Seattle was won without a field general, and without a general staff. Post-Seattle actions have violated the key netwar principle of “leaderlessness.”

Law enforcement, government authorities, and even the American Civil Liberties Union have conducted instructive after-action analyses of the Battle of Seattle. Exactly what lessons the AFL-CIO has drawn are not known, but the practical result has been its withdrawal from post-Seattle demonstrations—leaving NGO activists with less of a pool to draw on. By way of contrast, none of the protest organizations has rendered an after-action analysis of the strategies and tactics used in Seattle, even though the Internet teems with eyewitness accounts.

In all forms of protracted conflict, early confrontations are seedbeds of doctrinal innovation—on all sides. If governmental authorities learned much from their defeat in Seattle, perhaps we should also expect that social netwarriors will learn lessons from their defeats in Los

Angeles, Washington, and elsewhere. Indeed, the events of the summer of 2001 in Genoa indicate that the netwarriors are learning their own lessons—and are steadily willing to apply them in practice.