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BLIND SPOT

A DAILY BULLETIN OF UNDERREPORTED ANTI-WTO ACTIVISM

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Blind Spot is published by the Independent Media Center, a grassroots organization committed to using media as a tool for promoting social and economic justice. It is our goal to further the self-determination of people underrepresented in both media production and content, and to illuminate and analyze local and global issues that impact ecosystems, communities, and individuals.

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State of emergency

*Police crack down
on protesters;
National Guard
arrives downtown*

AS DUSK FELL over Seattle, the world watched. With National Guard troops on standby and heavily armed riot police maintaining a very visible presence, Seattle has been declared a "no-go" zone with a curfew effective from 7 p.m.

With indiscriminate usage of their arsenal, police officers were successful in ensuring protestors and delegates alike suffered the stinging effects of CS gas, rubber bullets, and percussion grenades. Middle-aged white men in suits staggered from their WTO Convention meetings into the city's network of streets swarming with conflict. The sight was bizarre.

An escalation to violence did not seem necessarily imminent this morning as nonviolent actions erupted around the major roads that lead to the city's Convention Center. Protesters linked arms in efforts to prevent the delegates from meeting, delaying the beginning of meetings for hours. The police, who were desperately trying to keep roads open, were effectively outnumbered.

By 7:45 a.m. Johnnie Walker, a member of the Bananarchy Movement, joined his fellow anti-Chiquita activists in the formation of a human chain. The main link in the chain had his neck locked to a metal fence with a bicycle U-lock. Walker said, "We're protesting because Chiquita does not recognize worker's rights in Latin America, that they block Caribbean banana producers from getting a fair price — and Chiquita is going to try and get to the WTO."

Delegates suddenly appeared with a police escort, and the line concentrated around the new arrivals. "Back off — you're gonna break this guy's arm," shouted a protestor as 19-year-old Mick struggled to breathe against his restrictive U-lock.

By 10 a.m., the junction of Union and 6th Avenue was awash with people. There was a



EVAN FIRESTONE

**Police shoot pepper spray over seated nonviolent protesters—
a scene that would be repeated numerous times on Tuesday.**

tense atmosphere as riot officers started to put on gas masks. "They're getting ready," shouted a man in a yellow hat. A young woman with a loudspeaker reminded the crowd of the motives of the demonstration: "This is a peaceful protest — sit down and stay sitting. We will not move and we will not be provoked."

The police, however, were not so committed to peace and avoiding provocation. While protesters maintained their nonviolent, passive resistance, the police took the initiative.

Police numbers swelled and within seconds the thick grey smoke of chemical gas permeated the air. People were being dragged behind police lines and sprayed in the eyes with pepper spray. The line of protesters fell back and the junction of Union Street and 6th Avenue fell under police control. Delegates began streaming through police lines as people shouted, "corporate scum — you'd sell your own children!" There's a lot of laughter as one side of the Avenue shouted "we love you" and the other responded with "we love you, too."

The next few hours were a constant to-ing and fro-ing between police and protestors as tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets were blasted indiscriminately into the crowd. By the time the 35,000-strong AFL/CIO union-sponsored march

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The people, united, still have choices

Labor march begins with unity, reaches crossroads in downtown Seattle

Tuesday's 10 a.m. pre-march rally at Memorial Stadium was filled with positive spirit, purpose, and a sense of unity akin to a revival meeting. The rain stopped, the sun broke through and a partial rainbow hovered briefly above the proceedings. Labor leaders and activists from around the world spoke to an impassioned and responsive crowd.

The President of the Longshoremen's Union spoke proudly of the closure of the Port of Seattle with what now seems to be an amazing understatement, "There will be no business as usual today!" Environmentalists, activists, and union members alike cheered loudly.

Unaffiliated protester Anne McElhinney commented as she surveyed the scene, "You know, with one small shift in the focus of our concern, we'd be on opposite sides here."

The march began with great exhilaration, to the strains of the Anarchist Marching Band. Construction workers abandoned work on the Experience Music Project Museum to stand by the fences and watch the marchers gather — less interested, perhaps, in the politics of the day than in the laughing, friendly, and very bare-breasted Lesbian Avengers. Union groups stood ready with banners, hats, signs and customized ponchos.

Marchers grew quieter along the route, moving in a relaxed way, with sporadic chants of protest. Approaching the corner of 5th and Pine, the energy shifted. The march had reached a crossroads in a both a literal and a philosophical sense.

Labor unionists urged the crowd to continue on the planned route down Pine Street, while younger activists made an unplanned and fierce effort to channel marchers down 5th Avenue, into a direct confrontation with a police barricade placed in front of Cavanaugh's Hotel where delegates were scheduled to meet. The young protesters had created a barrier in front of the police's by linking arms, attempting to prevent delegates and those on other "official" business from passing.

This sudden appearance of divisive energy was disconcerting, and brought McElhinney's earlier comment to mind. Two vocal participants at the intersection, each pointing in a different direction, aggressively urged marchers to "Go THIS way!" The Union Longshoreman attempting to direct the march down Pine was



SAM WILD

unhappy. "They're just splitting the group. This is a peaceful march. We're not here to take on a fight." Confused marchers slowed, stopped, milled about the intersection. They could see the police, and were curious, but could see the procession of labor banners and signs continuing along Pine Street.

Ariel, a young protester from Seattle, tried to put a positive spin on her group's desire to divert marchers down 5th into "peaceful" confrontation with the police. "It's just time for people to choose, that's all. The marchers have to decide about how they want to protest. We need them at the Convention Center and on the streets. They can go whichever way they want."

Ultimately, it seemed that a large part of the labor march was simply absorbed into the day's ongoing activities in the downtown area. Carl Nightingale, a protester from Springfield, Mass., associated with ARISE for Social Justice, and companion Martha McCluskey of Buffalo, NY, commented on their experience. "It was interesting to be confronted with the choice," Nightingale and McCluskey agreed, confirming that the labor march had devolved into confusion at 5th and Pine. They expressed concern about the apparent division of the previously united group, and admitted they chose to head towards the police line "mostly out of curiosity."

"We noticed quite a few labor folks going over to talk to the cops," said Nightingale. McCluskey summarized, "It really felt weird to march all that way and have it end up like that, milling around. We felt like we had no clear destination anymore."

As many groups discovered today, this truly was not business as usual, or as planned. Even well-coordinated events in protest of the WTO were disrupted by the need for direct, immediate reaction related to violence and confrontations at the boundary lines drawn by both police and protesters. —J. Berkow

Capitol Hill a mess

As the 7 p.m. curfew closed over Seattle last night, task forces of riot police drove the stragglers and the stranded from downtown.

The police channelled many people up Pine Street and across the I-5 bridge at Boren. A large number of police had pressed on to lower Capitol Hill.

Just after 7 p.m., a police phalanx surged beyond Pine and Minor, passing beyond the curfew boundary set by Mayor Paul Schell Tuesday evening.

There were few reports of property damage beyond the curfew zone. However, police in full riot gear, armed with tear gas, rifles, and batons, made repeated advances east on Pine into the Capitol Hill neighborhood.

Anti-WTO epithets were no longer heard. Neither was there any further looting or violence from the protesters. Instead, chants of "we live here" rose up from an increasingly indignant crowd of about 300.

A sergeant from the SPD ordered the crowd to disperse. Seconds later, volleys of tear gas canisters and stun grenades struck the crowd. For an hour, the crowd retreated in fear and then returned to face off with the police, who were gradually pushing up Pine Street past Bellevue.

By 8:30 p.m., several people were suffering from gassing, and one was rushed to the hospital.

While many remained in the streets, others gathered in bars and restaurants along Pine.

Shortly before 9 p.m., approximately 50 officers pushed the crowd to Harvard Avenue. They advanced with an armored vehicle, launching tear gas and firing rubber bullets into the crowd. Bar patrons were caught inside, choking.

The situation deteriorated as residents erected a barricade outside the Egyptian Theater and smashed the rear window of a police car.

By 11 p.m., police cleared the area. They reportedly dispatched a bomb squad to detonate a device found in a garage off Harvard. —David Sadoway

Sub-Lethal Weapons in Use at WTO

Wondering what that was that ran over your leg yesterday? Here's the run-down on the tools the cops are using on you, and two they might be using.

Tear Gas

OC and CS tear gas were used. OC is conventional pepper-spray, which rarely kills. But CS—the substance apparently in the aerial grenades that flew through the air hundreds of times on Tuesday—is almost universally fatal for lab animals following extended exposure.

The police administered OC through fire extinguisher-style canisters, spraying over the heads of locked-down, seated, and otherwise non-threatening protestors. CS canisters were shot through the air.

One medic at the demo, Jamie from Missoula, Montana, suffered a mild head injury and possible concussion when a flying grenade struck her between the eyes.

Rubber Bullets

Rubber bullets have been fired by Sheriff's deputies and



Port police, and possibly by other agencies. Some have been 1/2-inch diameter black bouncy balls, but after a street confrontation in front of the Independent Media Center, journalists collected several 1/4-inch black rubber buckshots from the street. Many protestors were struck with rubber bullets, some while running away from police lines.

A photojournalist, Oakley Myers, was shot at least five times in the crotch with rubber bullets while attempting to

leave a confrontation at Fourth and Pine. A Swiss activist, Oliver DeMarcellus, got shards of glass in the right eye after his specs were struck by a rubber bullet. He suffered no lasting damage.

Flash Bangs

The police used flash-bang explosives with increasing frequency through the day. These grenades are black, about 3 inches in diameter, and are fired high in the air where they explode with a brilliant light and a very loud explosion.

Helicopters

After dark, a police helicopter with a spotlight moved in on protestors dancing around a bonfire in front of the Westin hotel. It's not clear whether this helicopter was the large black attack helicopter with a gun turret on the front seen over downtown Tuesday morning.

Brilliant lights

After dark, on Capitol Hill, police used a brilliant spotlight from their new armored personnel carrier to disperse demonstrators. A TV news reporter on channel 7 called the lights "painful" to look at.

Marker dye

Two independent reports, one from a police department attorney, attest to the use of marker dye on protestors, followed by physical attacks and arrests by plainclothes officers.

Photojournalist Myers collected three unexploded pellets that appeared to be pink paint balls. This reporter also found exploded blue paint pellets on the street outside the IMC.

Protest, vandalism, looting—then an assault on indie media

SIXTH AND PIKE, 4:40 PM — Protesters planning a night-long lockdown changed plans after Seattle Police issued notice of a 7 PM curfew. Instead, they decided to march to Boren Park for a sunset ceremony and to meet at Victor Steinbreuck Park the following morning at 7 a.m.

Shortly after the announcement, vandals broke the window at the Levi Strauss Store. Conflict broke out as protestors tried to prevent the vandals from looting. Next door a fight broke out in front of the Nike Town store. A young black man was furious at several white men for harrassing his brother, apparently during the Levi vandalism.

One black man wearing a neon orange vest punched a white man in the face and screamed at the surrounding protestors. His friends made attempts to hold him

back but the aggression was contagious. I asked him what was wrong and he responded, "Ya'll are lookin' for a race war?"

Several more young black men started screaming at the protestors, calling them hypocrites, and small fights began to break out. A black woman broke a two-by-four in half and used one half to beat an elderly white woman. Protestors alternately argued and pleaded with the angry group.

The man in the orange vest began to jump up and down screaming "I'm gonna bust out! I'm gonna bust out!": He reached inside his vest as if for a gun. Instantly, the surrounding crowd bolted. I was next to him when he seemed to reach for the gun so I ran and hid behind a pole. What followed was a rapid series of gun scares causing riot-level chaos.

Less than a minute later, police detonated percussion grenades and launched gas canisters immediately over the heads of the protestors, forcing them away from the conflict. In an effort to de-escalate the situation, protestors cried "*Walk! Do not run!*"

At this point I fled to the Independent Media Center's headquarters at 3rd and Union. Dozens of protestors rushed into our building when police sprayed liquid tear-gas at those gathered outside. As I write, our headquarters is surrounded on all sides by riot police. All exits to the building remain blocked, and our only window opens to a tear-gas laden alley.

Many buses are lined up on the streets in preparation for a sweep. Approximately 170 media workers and others are trapped in a room the size of a shoe store.

—Dina Rudick

Emergency

(continued from front page)

arrived at 12:30 p.m., the crowds of protesters who had maintained their blockade for over five hours were showing signs of fatigue. A young woman lay on the road receiving medical attention for rubber bullet wounds to her face, others were getting water poured over their eyes to relieve the effects of stinging gas.

The arrival of crowds of unionists, developing world activists, and a host of progressive organizations' representatives brought a mellow atmosphere to the proceedings. Children, older people, striking steel workers and international NGO delegates worked their placating magic. "I'm here to offer support, chase girls, and party" jokes 51-year-old Larry from the ILWU in Portland, Oregon. As if in response to Larry, a troupe of topless women danced past in a protest as part of the larger demonstration.

Spanish WTO Convention delegates Jose and Salvador sat at the Seattle's Best Coffeeshop opposite Pike Street Market. "We have been invited to attend to the conference. I think it's a problem now —



Police rough up a protester at 5th and Pike.

people have travelled far from around the world. They have to spend a lot of money to get here. They are ministers who have been democratically elected." I asked, Can the protest stop the WTO? "They can't stop the international trade," says Jose.

At the Federal Building on Second Avenue, Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper began to answer questions from the 10 or so journalists awaiting the city's official response. "They said it would be the big-

gest protest of the century and they were right," he said coolly. Having declared the police had not used certain anti-personnel weapons, he refused to discuss how a journalist present at the press briefing had possession of a rubber bullet. He joked, "[I'd better not] drop it — I'd hate to see what that does in this room if it went off."

Back on the streets the tension was rising. Police remained intent on clearing the streets. Battles raged with between the eclectic collection of protesters and police as tear gas canisters flew.

Within a few hours word had spread about the curfew announced at a mayoral press briefing at 5 p.m. The police broke up the protesters into increasingly smaller groups and pressured protesters to leave the streets. Bill Clinton is expected to arrive tomorrow and it is unclear how State authorities intend handle the situation. One thing, however, is certain: Nov. 30, 1999 is a date Seattle will never forget.

—*Sam Wild (U.K.), plus other sources*

Police aggression aimed at nonviolent protesters

At 6th and Union early Tuesday morning, a group of more than 50 protesters sat at the intersection, intending to block traffic. The police present, heavily armed and in riot gear, were grimly bound to make them move.

The cops began with tear gas and by 10 a.m., and having no success, were in a hostile mood. No version of police protocol could include what followed: Members of the group of protesters report that without any warning, conversation or attempt to negotiate, the police began to shoot at them aggressively. Canisters of tear gas were fired directly at

individuals like missiles, and rubber bullets were fired. Police aimed directly for heads, faces and groins, firing repeatedly and accurately.

Independent Media Center (IMC) photographer Oakley Myers, of Olympia, reports, "I was shooting photos of the scene, and the cops aimed right at my crotch and started shooting." He dropped his pants and showed me the multiple welts and bruises on his upper thighs, clearly made by the rubber bullets that the SPD and mainstream media deny are being fired.

Protester Randy Stucker took part in this action and relates a similar story. Gesticulating with a rubber bullet held between his right thumb and forefinger, Stucker spoke emotionally about the encounter. "We were very peaceful. We just sat there." The cops, he says, made no attempt to converse

or negotiate, but at approximately 10 a.m. "just started shooting."

Stucker reports witnessing police surround one man who had placed himself face-down on the pavement. "They must have shot about 40 bullets at

him, right into him, trying to make him move." He shook his head, saying, "It made me want to cry. They looked just like Nazi storm troopers. They didn't say a word — they just started shooting."

—*J. Berkow*

Mayor's press conference

Seattle Mayor Paul Schell reminded press of his radical roots yesterday while explaining why he sanctioned the enforcement of a city centre-wide curfew.

"Remember I know what it was like on the other side," he said referring to his anti-Vietnam activism of the 1960s and 1970s. However, he echoed the sentiments of Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper when he said that he felt that a few key groups were responsible for yesterday's violent protests.

Assistant Chief Ed Joiner was asked to explain whether he felt

that police forces — made up of officers from across Washington State — had played a role in exacerbating the violence by failing to negotiate and allowing the use of anti-personnel weapons early on against non-violent protesters. He said that the decision was a calculated one and was designed to keep the city center open for emergency traffic.

During the conference it was made clear by authorities that the National Guard will be involved in beefing up security and that mass arrests are planned over the next few days.