

THE BATTLE IN SEATTLE

Part 2

Preparations for the substantive aspects of the Seattle Ministerial moved ahead at WTO headquarters. The agenda had already become quite crowded, with over 200 negotiating proposals having been received by the WTO.¹ Mike Moore, the new Director-General of the WTO was busy trying to build a consensus to dedicate the Seattle meetings to “developing the framework for the global trading system in the 21st century.”² Seattle was to launch the so-called Millennium Round of trade negotiations and expectations were running high.

The meetings would require some skillful diplomacy to pull off any kind of joint communiqué. The persistent dispute over trade in agricultural products already promised to take up most of the available time for negotiations in Seattle unless some breakthrough occurred before late November. Developed and developing countries disagreed on priorities for the proposed new round of trade negotiations, especially with respect to the question of implementation of existing agreements. But this issue could be resolved provided the U.S. and the European Union could resolve their differences with each other and then present a common perspective to the rest of the world. U.S. Undersecretary of Commerce David Aaron, while expressing willingness to be flexible, stated that the U.S. was “not about to turn the WTO into a two-tiered development organization.”³ Other issues included the European Union’s advocacy of their perspective on competition policy and investment. And the U.S. sought tougher labor standards but remained opposed to including antidumping on the agenda, despite Japan’s insistence. By late October, there was still no agreement on any part of the Seattle Ministerial Declaration.⁴ Thus the possibility of reaching a common declaration in Seattle appeared to be a heroic challenge even before the meetings began.⁵

The plan for the Seattle meeting was to have five working groups, each chaired by a designated minister. The five groups were: (1) agriculture chaired by Singapore, (2) market access chaired by Lesotho, (3) “new issues” chaired by Hong Kong, (4) with Brazil proposed to chair the implementation group, and (5) Chile under discussion to chair the group dealing with systemic issues including transparency.⁶ While the negotiating procedure had yet to be spelled out, the general idea was to have the groups

¹ “Trade: Global Growing Pains,” *Business Week* (13 December 1999): 40-43.

² Michael Moore, “Message from the Director-General,” *WTO Focus* 43 (November 1999): 1.

³ Quoted in “Implementation Issues: the Rocky Road to Seattle,” *Bridges*, ICTSD, Year 3 No. 8 (October-November 1999), p. 1.

⁴ Trade ministers from 25 countries held a “Friends of the Round” meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland on October 25 and 26, 1999. Despite the consensus on launching a new round, there was no agreement about its scope or the questions of “implementation” and “liberalization,” two important stumbling blocs in recent WTO discussions.

⁵ For an excellent summary of the issues facing negotiators at the Seattle Ministerial, see the articles in *Bridges*, ICTSD, Year 3 No. 8 (October-November 1999).

⁶ In the end, Singapore chaired “Agriculture,” Lesotho chaired “Market Concerns,” “Implementation and Rules” was chaired by Canada, “Singapore and Other Issues” was chaired by New Zealand, “Systemic Issues” was co-chaired by Chile and Fiji, and Costa Rica chaired “Trade and Labor Standards.”

of 15 to 20 nations’ representatives meet and work out a proposal via consensus and then to refer that draft document to the “Green Room.” Each Green Room would include 15 to 20 delegations from a cross-section of regions and levels of development. The Green Room consensus would then be referred to the full WTO for approval. The procedure seemed workable enough, but the growing size of the WTO -- 135 countries would be represented at the Seattle Ministerial -- meant that consensus would be more difficult to achieve.

We now fast forward to the events of the week of the Seattle meetings...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				November 25	26	27
28	29	30 WTO scheduled to open at 10 am	December 1	2	3	4

Friday and Saturday, November 26-27, 1999

The day after Thanksgiving, the Seattle Police Operations Center (SPOC) set up to monitor security activities surrounding the WTO meetings opened at 7 a.m. to allow staff time to get set up, check communication and control systems and review operating procedures before the WTO’s official opening session on Monday, November 29. The Multi-Agency Command Center (MACC), intended to serve as the nerve center to coordinate operations and logistics in support of the event, was not fully operational until Monday although many of the personnel arrived earlier and began working during the weekend.

Police had been warned to expect protest activity as early as Friday. And indeed, Friday morning two groups of 30 to 50 demonstrators marched through the downtown area, carrying signs and shouting slogans. While several businesses were targeted, the demonstration was pretty tame and there was no property damage or serious disruption of normal activities. Later in the day, at Westlake Mall in the heart of the downtown shopping district, some of the people who had lingered from the morning protest began to gather a crowd. The original group of 30 grew rapidly until they took up an entire block. Apparently some of the members of this group headed for the Convention Center and successfully managed to gain access to the main floor of the conference venue. While the meetings had not yet begun, these activists had learned that this meant that they had penetrated the security perimeter of the conference venue. The remainder of the group dispersed after about an hour and a half without incident.

Demonstrations remained limited throughout Saturday. Three people were arrested for rappelling over a wall and hanging an anti-WTO banner along the I-5 freeway near the Convention Center. Approximately 25 people trailed behind the arresting officers to the jail, but they did not remain long. Later that evening, a group of about 40 people established a “headquarters” for protesters at Fourth Avenue and East Denny, close to the Convention Center. That evening, Seattle Police Department commanders met with protest leaders in the first of many negotiations that were to occur over the following days.

Sunday, November 28, 1999

Sunday was a busy day in Seattle: the Seattle Marathon began at 5 a.m., ending around noon. The Seattle Seahawks home football game was scheduled for a 1 p.m. kickoff at the Kingdome, located just south of the Convention Center. The game included a pre-game “tailgate party” inside the Stadium Exhibition Center (site of the WTO social event scheduled for the following evening). While both events came off without incident, they required considerable crowd monitoring by police.

On Capitol Hill, about a 20 minute hike up the hill from the convention center, Seattle Central Community College became the gathering point during the day for protest-related activities. During the day, the crowd gathering there grew to about 500 by 1 p.m. They headed north up Broadway, the central street through this neighborhood’s shopping district. East Precinct police officers (whose station is just across the street) “accompanied” the group down Broadway to deal with traffic. Within the hour, a clerk at the local Fred Meyer variety store a little less than a mile away on Broadway, contacted the police to report that a group of people had just purchased all the lighter fluid in the store. Part of the group on Broadway, now numbering about 400, were shouting that they were headed to the downtown Gap store to shut it down. According to the *Seattle Times* report, the mood was festive, perhaps encouraging everyone -- police and protesters alike -- to expect more of the same throughout the coming week.

As the protesters turned back toward downtown, the police kept a watchful eye. Some shop managers, seeing the approaching mob, locked their doors. After blocking the street and disrupting normal traffic patterns for over an hour, the group demanded a police escort back to the Seattle Central Community College. The police obliged and once back at the college, the group dispersed throughout the neighborhood.

Around 6:30 that evening, police began to staff the Convention Center venue. Secret Service officers and military K-9 (dog) teams conducted a security sweep of the building, finishing around 3 a.m. Monday. Shortly after the security sweep was completed, an officer discovered a construction door that appeared to have been forced open and the officials continued their sweep for another four hours. This delay meant that the Convention Center was not accessible to press and delegates until 10:00 a.m. Monday morning.

At the Seattle Center, the mayor appeared before a hosted “party” for anti-WTO groups and told the group to “be tough on your issues, but gentle on my city.” A Ruckus

Society leader responded, “You don’t get it. We are going to shut down the WTO.” Later that night, reporters for various news organizations attended a rally at which protest organizers discussed their strategy for the coming days.

Meanwhile, around 10:30 p.m., a group of protesters broke into an abandoned office building near the convention center and refused to respond to police demands to vacate the premises. Numbering about three dozen, the group declared their intent to convert the building into a homeless shelter. They hung out anti-WTO and housing banners, waved to supporters on the street, and kept guard from the roof of the building. All utilities to the building and the next door property were shot down in an attempt to “discourage occupancy.”

Building owner Wah Lui came down to take stock of the situation, but protesters refused to let him enter the building. Adam Kline, a state senator and member of the National Lawyers Guild, was brought in to help mediate the situation. Everyone remained calm but no progress was made. Lui apparently sympathized with the protesters but was concerned about his liability. Eventually, the parties compromised: protesters would be allowed to stay provided they didn’t hold Lui responsible for their safety and the police would not evict the protesters if Lui didn’t insist on it. Instead, the police Incident Commander decided to focus his efforts on providing security for the WTO venue (the Convention Center) and managing traffic in the area.

Monday, November 29, 1999

Throughout the day on Monday, protests increased in size and intensity. The Sierra Club had been issued permits for lawful marches during the day and their march drew several thousand people but without incident. The general pattern of protests throughout the day (and the conference) was that groups would gather in one location, engage in protest activities, and then disperse, converging later at another location. This pattern challenged police planning because small pockets of people engaging in illegal acts were often surrounded by larger groups of protesters engaged in completely legal activities.

Around 1:30 in the afternoon, several hundred demonstrators gathered at the McDonald’s restaurant at Third and Pine, broke windows, and spray-painted graffiti on the building before heading for the freeway. A bicyclist rode ahead of the crowd, radioing police positions back to the crowd. Police apparently worried that the crowd might attempt to enter the freeway and snarl traffic through the downtown corridor at great risk to their safety. The SPD gave authorization for officers to use chemical irritants (pepper spray) to deter the crowd. Some people in the crowd had gas masks and put them on in preparation.

As the group passed Niketown, some members of the crowd started shouting that they should take over the store. Police officers moved in and attempted to establish a perimeter around the store and ordered the crowd to disperse. Someone with a bullhorn shouted, “Keep it peaceful today. Today is not the day to break windows. Wait until

tomorrow.” Eventually the police and the crowd reached an understanding and the crowd moved away and dispersed soon thereafter.

At 6:30 in the evening, two planned marches including a church group of several thousand people and a labor group of several hundred marched from downtown to the Stadium Exhibition Center where the WTO opening social reception was getting underway. The crowd was loud and pushed against the perimeter fencing but did not force it down. On the east side of the hall, some protesters threw rocks at police and pointed laser lights at officers. At the request of police, two labor leaders used patrol car public address systems to encourage the crowd to remain peaceful but they could scarcely be heard above the noise of the crowd. At the end of the march, the labor group was quickly transported to the Key Arena, the basketball venue across town where their rally continued.

Although some arrests were made on Monday, the general atmosphere was one in which protesters seemed to avoid confrontations with police. Leaders of some of the larger recognized groups met with police commanders to make arrangements for a mass arrest of approximately 1000 protesters on Tuesday near the Convention Center. The police told them they were not prepared to oblige.

Monday night, the First United Methodist Church near the Convention Center hosted a crowd of over 3000 people for “Jubilee 2000” to urge first world countries to forgive third world debt. According to the *Seattle Times report*, “Thousands more waited in the wind and rain on downtown's Fifth Avenue to march toward the Kingdome and encircle a World Trade Organization reception at the Stadium Exhibition Center. Marchers were blocked two hundred yards short of their goal by fences and Seattle police on foot, horseback and motorcycles. A Jubilee petition never made it into the hands of WTO chief Michael Moore.” For his part, Moore stated at the opening reception, “There may be as many as 50,000 who demonstrate against us, but 1.5 billion want to join us.”

Tuesday, November 30, 1999

The opening ceremony of the WTO Third Ministerial was scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. at the Convention Center. Throughout the preceding night, protesters quietly assembled in several places close to the venue. The police, aware of this, mobilized the First Watch Task Force. Around 5:30 a.m., police noticed a group assembling around Steinbrueck Park, a mile or so from the Convention Center. Police noticed that people were unloading equipment that is sometimes used to link people together in order to block intersections and prevent police from removing them. The watch commander authorized police to seize this equipment in the interest of public safety. As the group continued to grow in size, police saw many of the protesters equipped with gas masks and canisters of what might be chemical agents. Since the police weren't equally equipped, they decided to withdraw.

When the daytime Field Incident Commander relieved the night commander, task force personnel were reassigned to crowd management duties. Given the situation and

the shortage of backup personnel, many officers were reassigned to other active duty positions without a rest break or even a meal even though they had been on the job for several hours at this point. Supplies (water, radio batteries, food, etc.) were in short supply.

By 7:30 in the morning, the group at Steinbrueck Park began to move east toward a critical intersection in downtown Seattle just between the Convention Center and the Westin Hotel where many of the visiting dignitaries, including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, were staying. Simultaneously, another group was approaching a key intersection on the other side of the Convention Center, outside a line of buses that the police had parked there to form a security perimeter. A third group blocked another key intersection; and a fourth group approached from the south and cut off access from that direction. Finally another group of about 1000 marchers headed down the hill from Seattle Central Community College, converging with those already surrounding the Convention Center.

In short, by the time police reached their assigned posts that morning, they were already vastly outnumbered. The police plan called for protecting the doors to the Convention Center, but not securing secure corridors between hotels where the delegates were housed and the conference venue. When the worst of the illegal activities began, there were only 290 officers -- not including the 50 Washington State Patrol troopers assigned to protect the I-5 freeway -- were on the streets to deal with the demonstrators blocking streets and intersections. There was no plan to help delegates get between their hotels and the meeting sites.

Clearly the early morning activities had been coordinated, with several groups converging on key intersections around the Convention Center within about half an hour to effectively block access to the venue. Protesters engaged in both legal and illegal acts to maintain their positions. Among the most serious crimes were setting fires in the street, chaining themselves to each other and to objects, rolling dumpsters toward police lines, dumping large pieces of concrete in the street, erecting platforms and stages in the streets, "locking down" 14 intersections simultaneously by filling them with people, attacking moving cars, fighting, lying in the street, carrying bottles with flammable liquids, jumping on cars, and using various kinds of equipment (chains, tripods, etc.) to block traffic. On the other hand, locations that had been officially designated for demonstrations were virtually unoccupied.

By 8 a.m., protesters had successfully choked access to the WTO venue and their numbers and organization had completely overwhelmed law enforcement. The watch commander requested and received authorization to lock down the Convention Center and the Sheraton Hotel nearby where many delegates were staying. Within minutes, 911 calls reported protesters breaching police perimeters, breaking windows at Niketown, damaging property elsewhere, throwing objects at officers, breaking windows at Nordstrom, making up, throwing debris and forming up at hotel front doors at the Sheraton, and "taking over" a Starbuck's. Just before 9 a.m., the Sheraton venue commander reported that delegates were being assaulted, property damage was occurring,

and he was quickly losing control of the situation. A “Peacekeeper” SWAT armored personnel vehicle responded to the call. Protesters were again putting on gas masks in preparation for anticipated use of chemical irritants by police (pepper spray, tear gas). Delegates at various locations were under assault, with Metro bus drivers and others attempting to provide shelter and requesting rescue by police. Throughout the day, officers were confronted by protesters armed with chemical irritants while they responded to requests by delegates stranded in various buildings where they had sought refuge from the angry crowds.

Shortly after 9 a.m., the police were authorized to use chemical irritants to clear a path of safe access to the Convention Center. At about the same time, the commanding officer sent out a call for mutual aid to allied agencies. The police could no longer guarantee safe passage of the delegates to the venue. At 9:30 the Seattle Host Organization was notified to keep all delegates at their hotels until order could be restored.

Police attempted to disperse the crowd, using bullhorns and chemical irritants. The crowds broke up in one area only to reassemble elsewhere. Police were frustrated and outmaneuvered by protesters with cell phones and walkie talkies. In many respects, the protesters, both lawful and unlawful, seemed better organized and better prepared than the police. Illegal activities continued; some even wielded sledgehammers. By 11:20, the commander was fully aware that they had inadequate personnel and resources to hold two routes to the Convention Center open. He decided instead to just hold the main access clear. Within minutes, somewhere between six and eight thousand people were headed toward Sixth and Union, just below the Convention Center.

Not all the protest activities were illegal or even unauthorized. The Sierra Club had a permit for about 1000 people to march at 9 a.m. toward the Seattle Center (away from downtown). 500 University of Washington students had a permit to march from campus to the Seattle Center around 9:30 a.m. Likewise, a group of 500 had a permit to march from Seattle Central Community College to the Seattle Center. And a group of 1000 Tibetan Rights and Taiwanese Association Marchers had a permit to march at noon.

The largest march of the day, however, was to be the one organized by the AFL-CIO. This group, assembling throughout the morning, was estimated at around 20,000 an hour before it was scheduled to depart the Seattle Center for downtown at noon. The plan for this march included deployment of 119 police officers with both roving and fixed posts, mostly to deal with traffic.

In May 1999, 1060 police officers were on the Seattle police force. During the daytime shift on November 30, approximately 400 offices were assigned to WTO demonstration management. The city’s ability to supplement that number with SPD officers drawn from other tasks or shifts was limited. Even before the disruptions had begun that morning, SPD had “cannibalized” other police functions to supply additional manpower to the WTO detail. This meant drawing down patrols in some neighborhoods in order to supply additional personnel to the downtown corridor. While other agencies

supplied additional manpower later on in the week, on the morning of November 30 the only additional aid at SPD's disposal were 90 officers from the King County Sheriff's Department and 50 from the Washington State Patrol.

By 11:30, Mayor Paul Schell was facing a full-scale crisis. Schell, himself an anti-war demonstrator during the Vietnam War, was loathe to adopt a strategy that would have been criticized as impinging on free speech rights. Furthermore, he didn't want Seattle to appear to be an armed camp. Similarly, if the City had been fully prepared to engage in mass arrests, it would appear that they were, in the words of Cliff Traisman, director of the City's Office of Intergovernmental Relations, "to the right of [New York Mayor] Rudolph Giuliani." Furthermore, the mayor apparently believed that putting more officers on the street earlier would have only provoked more violence. Cliff Traisman told a Seattle Post-Intelligencer newspaper reporter on December 2, "The mayor believed that if Seattle woke up Tuesday morning with 1,000 National Guard troops on the street it would have set a tone that would not be conducive to peaceful demonstrations."

Meanwhile, the political pressure was mounting on Mayor Schell to take action. FBI reports confirmed what was already widely known: demonstrators were fully prepared to disrupt the WTO meetings. By mid-morning it appeared that they were succeeding.

Washington State Patrol Chief Annette Sandberg, in town for the event, had already voiced her concerns Monday night. When Sandberg left her hotel at 5 a.m. on Tuesday morning to get coffee at a nearby Starbuck's she saw protesters already taking up strategic positions long before police had arrived at their posts. She went to the Multi-Agency Command Center in the Public Safety Building (police headquarters) in downtown Seattle where officers were closely monitoring closed-circuit traffic cameras focused on downtown. By 9:10 a.m., she was convinced that crowd control efforts were in serious trouble.

Around this same time, Ronald Legan, the Secret Service's agent in charge, was busy trying to find a way to get US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky and the president of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to the Paramount Theater, next to the Convention Center, the official venue for the opening ceremonies. Only a few hundred of the 3,000 delegates had managed to make it to the Paramount. Albright and others under federal protection were frustrated that they could not leave the hotel. Albright was reportedly "fuming." Even the deputy director of the Secret Service in Seattle to monitor operations was trapped in his hotel just half a block from the Paramount.

At 11 a.m., Seattle Assistant Police Chief John Pirak recommended to Assistant Chief Ed Joiner, the WTO commander, that he cancel the AFL-CIO march and declare a state of emergency. Joiner and Mayor Paul Schell faced a critical decision.