



Nick Cobbing

The Festival of Resistance heads towards the WTO summit. Seattle, US

Global Day of Action November 30th 1999

N30 – Shut Down the WTO, Seattle

“I wish every town could be just like Seattle,” says World Trade Organization Director-General Michael

Moore, just before the police begin rioting. More than 700 organizations and around 75,000 people take part in the protests against the WTO in Seattle, preventing the opening ceremonies from, well, opening, and sending a message to the global elite, many of whom are inside taking notice. “What we hadn’t reckoned with”, says UK Environment Minister Michael Meacher, “was the Seattle Police Department

who single-handedly managed to turn a peaceful protest into a riot.” Days later, the summit collapses in failure due to trade representatives from Africa and the Caribbean refusing to agree to the proposed new round of trade liberalization, in protest against the secret negotiations and bullying of the US and Europe. The *Los Angeles Times* states: “On the tear gas-shrouded

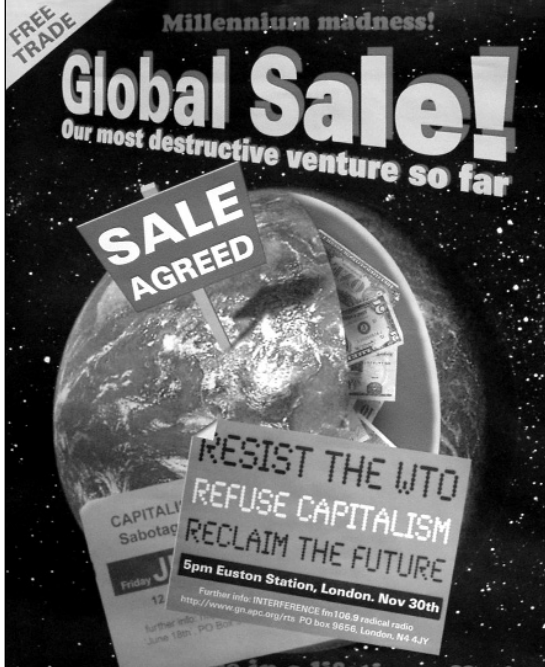


Protesters lock down to blockade the convention centre. Seattle, US

streets of Seattle, the unruly forces of democracy collided with the elite world of trade policy. And when the meeting ended in failure on Friday, the elitists had lost and the debate had changed forever." While activists in Seattle bring the city to a standstill, internet surfers from around the globe are able to log onto a special website, courtesy of US hacktivists armed with scanners, that broadcasts the

sounds of the Seattle police departments' radios live from the blockaded streets. Inevitably mainstream media focuses solely on broken windows and the Black Bloc in Seattle, but reports of actions from Hong Kong to Iceland fly across the world, thanks to the newly launched Indymedia website. In France 5,000 farmers gather under the Eiffel Tower with their sheep, ducks, and goats to

feast on regional products, while 75,000 people live protest in 80 other French cities. Turkish peasants complete a 2,000 mile walk to the capital, having visited 18 towns to discuss the attack on humanity by capitalism. Massive demonstrations take place all over India; in New Delhi hundreds of indigenous people blockade the World Bank building covering it with posters, graffiti, cow dung, and mud; in the



Romeo Ranoco/Reuters

Protest against the WTO is blocked from reaching US embassy. Manila, Philippines

Narmada Valley, youth activists hold an anti-WTO bullock cart rally, crying, "The youth of Narmada has awakened – the WTO will flee!"

Banners with slogans that mockingly call for more order, security, and police are paraded in Berlin, while free food is distributed on the streets of Hamburg and Prague. In Amsterdam's airport, over 100 activists demand free tickets to Seattle from the

airline companies sponsoring the WTO summit. In Geneva, activists sneak into the WTO headquarters and short circuit the electricity mains, crashing computers and communications for several hours. As 8,000 march in Manila to the US embassy and presidential palace, a virtual sit-in involving 200,000 people floods the WTO website.

Over 8,000 in Muzaffer Ghar, Pakistan hit the streets,

carrying banners and posters warning about the dangers to agriculture that the WTO poses. In Lisbon, Portugal hundreds stop traffic in the city centre, while others redecorate McDonald's and the city's Christmas tree with graffiti, while in Porto activists hand out fake money in front of a shopping mall. Stock exchanges are targeted in Buenos Aires and Brisbane, where the street is declared a 'beyond the



The city centre is occupied and the WTO opening ceremonies shut down. Seattle, US

market' zone. In Italy a McDonald's is occupied, a Nestlé factory and Lloyd's Bank get similar treatment in England, while 2,000 people rally in London against the privatization of public transport and are attacked by the police.

Over the following week, actions in solidarity with the 600+ arrested in Seattle take place around the world, notably in Mexico City where 10,000

university students, themselves engaged in a nine month strike against proposed hikes in tuition fees, demonstrate outside the US ambassador's residence, demanding freedom for those arrested and an end to neoliberal policies.

Despite *Fortune* magazine's comment on Seattle, that "Democracy used to be a good thing, but now it has got into the hands of the wrong people," it seems

that the twenty-first century begins early in Seattle, giving hope to people around the world that resistance is alive in the heart of the Empire.