

Protesters stage anti-WTO vigil

■ Demonstrators gather at the Lane County Courthouse to protest the World Trade Organization

By Jeremy Lang
Oregon Daily Emerald

Eugene residents and University students braved the cold weather Tuesday night not only to protest the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, but to fight for their personal freedom as well.

More than 150 people met outside the Lane County Courthouse for the combined protest and candlelight vigil against the World Trade Organization, which is meeting this week in Seattle.

Eugene resident Lisa-Marie DiVincent, who helped organize Tuesday night's demonstration, said it was necessary for this type of event to happen in Eugene.

"This is an opportunity for people to feel like they can make a difference even if they could not make it up to Seattle," she said.

Created in January, 1995, the WTO regulates tariffs and world trade on many aspects of manufactured and agricultural goods including banking, production and copyrights. The group grew out of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which has regulated world tariffs and trade since 1947.

At this week's conference, the WTO will discuss the rules for international trade. Protesters bombarded downtown Seattle Tuesday, forcing organizers to postpone the conference indefinitely.

In Eugene, guest speakers and local musicians presented their opinions on a stage, and protesters lined the downtown streets with signs railing against "corporate rule" and "imperialism."



Eugene residents and anti-WTO activists Craig Miller and Theresa McDonald are among more than 150 participants in Tuesday night's protest at the Lane County Courthouse.

Lane County Commissioner Peter Sorenson spoke first, telling the protesters they need to stand up for their personal rights and freedom against large corporations and groups like the WTO.

"This is a major issue of sovereignty and the right for countries to govern themselves," Sorenson said. "We have a complex system of checks and balances in place in our government and that concept is overridden by the WTO without our consent."

"We need to fight for the right not to have our labor laws usurped by a world group with no jurisdiction and no appeal process," DiVincent said.

University professors from many departments also spoke at the event. Sociology professor Michael Dreiling said the WTO is not just about trade and that its policies affect the direction in which civilization will unfold. As this direction is made, he said,

young people as a whole need to get involved.

"They will be asked by their children, the next generations, 'What did you do to stop these economic disparities in the world?'" he said.

Gordon Willson-Naranjo, a freshman business major, said college students need to see that the WTO can make decisions that affect their lives as they try to pay for college.

"The WTO only benefits the corporations. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer, which is important for us poor college students," he said.

He added that he only recently became aware of the WTO but could tell instantly how important the issue was to students.

The local branch of Alliance for Democracy sponsored the event. The Alliance is a national grassroots group that fights against the power of large businesses and corporations.

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