

...BATTLE IN SEATTLE

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many as 1,000 members from 19 Teamsters locals in Washington mobilized. Portland Machinists Local 1005 paid lost wages so members could afford to take the day off work. Seattle Machinists Local 751 volunteered several hundred members as marshals for the march.

And that was just the union side of the coalition.

Today, Mike Dolan works as the Teamsters Union's top trade policy lobbyist in Washington, D.C. But in 1999, he was the field director for Global Trade Watch, a division of the non-profit group Public Citizen. More than anyone else, Dolan was the Paul Revere of the Seattle WTO protests. Starting in March when Seattle was announced as the meeting site, Dolan invited local, national and international labor, environmental, and non-profit leaders to form an ad hoc coalition. The coalition soon opened an office in downtown Seattle and undertook a region-wide mobilization against corporate globalization. Staff and volunteers working with Dolan spent the next six months visiting college campuses, churches, union halls, and neighborhood groups with a call to join the WTO protest.

Dolan's vision was for a week of massive protest demonstrations led by labor and non-profit groups — to send the message that WTO was a threat to workers' rights, the environment, and democracy worldwide. Others got busy with plans for non-violent civil disobedience, and formed the Direct Action Network, a West Coast network of local grassroots organizations opposed to corporate globalization. To train hundreds of protesters in Greenpeace- and Earth-First-style blockade tactics, the newly formed Ruckus Society held three-day "Globalize This" training camps at a farm north of Everett, Washington.

As the WTO meeting neared, there were tensions between those who wanted to protest the WTO and those who wanted to shut it down by preventing WTO delegates from getting to their meeting. Labor officials wanted nothing to do with the street blockades.

The week of activity began Friday Nov. 26, with a teach-in



MASSIVE LABOR TURNOUT. All over the West, labor organizations sent members. Colorado's AFL-CIO booked 100 plane tickets. Montana's AFL-CIO organized a car caravan. The Oregon AFL-CIO mobilized an estimated 1,600 union members, including 15 busloads and a specially chartered 350-seat Amtrak train. In Washington, every central labor council sent at least three busloads, and Tacoma sent over 30. Forty-two busloads crossed the border from British Columbia, Canada.



THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING: When 50,000 protesters filled Seattle streets, journalists from all over the world were there to document it. The coverage inspired solidarity protests in cities around the world, and woke the global public up to undemocratic aspects of the World Trade Organization.

that packed Seattle's 2,500-seat Benaroya Concert Hall for two days. On Sunday, Nov. 28, the Washington Council of Churches filled St. James Cathedral with a "Jubilee 2000" prayer service calling for Third World debt relief. On Monday, hundreds of Steelworkers, Teamsters, and others marched with about 250 environmentalists dressed in cardboard turtle costumes. That night, thousands of people turned out in pouring rain to form a human chain surrounding a corporate-sponsored reception for WTO delegates, while several miles away filmmaker Michael Moore and singer Michael Franti entertained thousands of others at a Key Arena

"people's gala" sponsored by USW, Teamsters, Rainforest Action Network, and others.

And all that was trivial compared with what was to happen the following day.

Whose streets? Our streets!

Jeremy Simer today works as a strategic researcher for Service Employees Local 49 in Portland. In 1999, he was a recent graduate of University of Washington. In mid-summer, he began working full-time for Dolan's group doing neighborhood-level organizing. But after having worked for months to get people to come to the big labor rally and march, Simer himself decided to go to where the civil disobedience

would occur.

The day activists had dubbed a "festival of resistance" began at 7 a.m. with not one but two giant puppet parades. As the parades wound through downtown, organized "affinity groups" peeled off and made their way to an agreed-upon intersection where they linked arms, sat down, and in some cases locked themselves together. The tactic took police by surprise.

But it wasn't long before police moved in to try to clear streets. Twenty years later, Simer still remembers seeing protesters prodded by police batons, bruised by rubber bullets, hit in the face by gas canisters, and sprayed at close range with

chemical agents. He also remembers the courage, discipline, and determination of the protesters as they stayed put and held on to intersections, or when dislodged, regrouped to try again.

Over the next six hours, police managed to clear some intersections, but with most delegates unable to get through, to worldwide shock, the WTO canceled its opening ceremony.

Meanwhile, with streets occupied and tear gas in the air, police appealed to labor leaders to delay their march until the streets could be cleared. But at a certain point, labor leaders could no longer control the thousands of union members. Two hours and dozens of speakers into the rally, large numbers began leaving the stadium to assemble outside for the march. By the time then-AFL-CIO President John Sweeney took the stage, the stadium was largely empty.

The plan had been for labor marchers to set out, led by Harley-riding Machinists, be met by feeder marches from University of Washington and Seattle Central Community College, and proceed to the Convention Center, where the WTO meeting was to be held. But outside the stadium, careful plans melted into organized chaos as contingents of Tibetan monks, topless women protesters, French farmers, church groups, and students crammed in next to groups of union members in matching colored ponchos.

And as the slow-moving march neared the Convention Center, the streets they expected to pass through there were still occupied, full of demonstrators linking arms and blocking intersections. Concerned that the labor march would disintegrate or be exposed to tear gas, the decision was made to turn the march several blocks shy of the planned route. Brian McWilliams, then president of the ILWU, remembers it as a pivotal moment.

"At the front there was a huge mass of people determined to intervene with what was going on outside the Convention Center," McWilliams recalls. "I think it was a huge mistake not to go forward, because we were all of singular mind about interfering with the blueprint the WTO had for workers and business and the world, and we needed to take it straight to the Convention Center."

As Machinists in orange parade marshal hats struggled mightily to turn the march

Photos by Mike Barlin.