

## **The WTO Protests in Seattle: An Evaluation**

**Notes on a Talk by Stephanie Guilloud**

**July 18, 2000**

### Introduction

I want to talk about the social movement that "met" in Seattle during the 3rd Ministerial of the World Trade Organization.

Specifically, I want to talk about that portion of the movement that had as its goal to shut down the WTO Ministerial. I want to describe this movement's strengths and weaknesses, where it is now and where it is going.

### Components to Shut it Down: Position, Training, NV-Direct Action

The main component organizations that formed the Direct Action Network were primarily west coast organizations such as the Rain Forest Action Network and Global Exchange in San Francisco, the Ruckus Society based in Oakland and then CISPES and the National Lawyers Guild.

Unlike those groups associated with the Fair Trade Campaign based out of Washington, D.C., the Direct Action Network started from the position of "No." No to the WTO.

The Fair Trade groups, at least here in Washington state, spent the summer arguing about whether its local affiliates could say "no" to the WTO. The "no" was eventually dropped and local fair trade groups started to receive financing from D.C.

The Direct Action Network, on the other hand, started from a position of "No" to the WTO and spent the summer seeing who else would join their movement.

They committed themselves to non violent direct action and the Ruckus Society organized training camps like the one in Arlington, Washington to prepare people.

One example of what direct action means is the question of what a hungry person should do where there is bread on the table.

A lobbyist would argue that the poor person should get the bread. A Progressive would organize a march against hunger. Direct action would take the bread.

## Strengths

### 1. **Affinity Groups.**

This is the basic unit. It's made up of people you know and have known for some time. This builds security into your group. The Affinity group's work is based on trust and consensus. You hash out what you are going to do until everyone agrees. It also means that everyone carries out the action.

### 2. **Clusters**

Affinity Groups make up a cluster. This is the way to get to mass direct actions from small scale affinity groups.

### 3. **SpokesCouncil**

This is the decision-making body for all affinity groups. Sometimes in Seattle it was 300 people. The SpokesCouncil also moves by consensus. An affinity group can "block" an action. Sometimes the spokesCouncil moves by consensus plus one block.

A block, however, should not be a surprise.

### 4. **Non-Hierarchical.**

In principle, no affinity group is above another affinity group or should have more power or authority within the spokesCouncil.

Principle of direct action saves a lot of time.

Also, the police couldn't take "leaders" out & destroy the movement. For example, the Wednesday arrests could not destroy the Council.

Also, everyone felt like THEY did it... that their participation really mattered.

#### 5. **Popular Education**

This took place in the Convergence Space, in the regional forums and conferences, the "loose" propaganda - the newspaper and in the puppetry and theater. Earthfirst printed tabloid at \$30/1000.

#### Strengths (cont.)

#### 6. **Training.**

A four hour Non-violent direct action training was obligatory. People received medical and legal information, as well as a history of non-violent direct action.

A well informed people don't need the "lawyer" or other leaders to act. This training was the basis for the success of the affinity groups and the actions they planned.

#### 8. **Collectives Continue.**

The Medical and Training Collectives have continued their work, as in preparations for Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

#### 9. **Radical Critique.**

The direct action movement provided a radical critique of the system and capitalism as it stands and toward a better.

### Weaknesses

#### 1. **Crisis Operation**

This was a operation in a crisis. There were 50 items on every agenda with money as the last item. DAN was running up and down the coast.

#### 2. **Not Sustainable**

Therefore, there was little time to discuss or develop a sustainable organizing model. This was not healthy. You can do without sleep for a while, but you can't sustain this over the long term.

This doesn't burn people out of participating, but you don't want to do that particular model again. Crisis. Quick. and Big equals Huge Puppets.

#### 3. **Movement Continues in the Same Model**

Post WTO item always was on the bottom of the agenda. What to do after WTO would not get dealt with. Therefore no Plan B and same model gets repeated.

### Weaknesses (cont.)

#### 4. **Action Hopping Divorced from Community Base.**

Action Hopping is what takes place in the absence of a systemic critique and no connection to an organized community base.

Action hopping depends on a mobile constituency and can no doubt be of great assistance to local groups in terms of training etc. But, without the local base to provide it with direct, it is limited.

Earth First	Mobile, but no base.
Ruckus	Great Training, but no base.
Punk Anarchist	Amazingly tight, but limited

constituency.

## 5. **Invisible Hierarchy**

There was an invisible hierarchy that operated and attempted to influence the direction of the Spokescouncil or the movement itself.

This hierarchy was based on age, gender, experience and money.

The conclusion for some of us was that we felt used by this group.

We had no problem with them existing or trying to influence the spokes council, but they need to be in the Council's decision making as an affinity group.

## 6. **Ringers.**

These are people who come from outside the community or outside from the local organizations and attempt to influence on ground decision making.

Note: Some discussion here about background to WTO in Seattle. You talked about resolutions passed by the city council and King county council. The work of Sally Soriano. The Local AFL-CIO affiliate and Ron Judd... action, but not direct action.

## The Movement's Direction.

### 1. **USWA-Direct Action Follow-up.**

The DAN and the USWA planned a joint action at the Tacoma port as part of the USWA's long term lock out from the Kaiser Steel Corporation.

The idea was modeled after the WTO action... a week long series of events, workshops and rallies, plus a direct action training camp.

However, the USWA, probably at the Regional level made a unilateral decision to call it off. The reasons were numerous: the DAN couldn't control those coming to Tacoma, the state legislature was about ready to extend unemployment, a ULP was about to come down against Kaiser, a Kaiser agreement said only strikers could protest on Kaiser property, etc.

It was a clash of two cultures (consensus and hierarchy) and even though it was mediated it didn't work.

Result: USWA and workers still here, but the action hopping moved on.

### 2. **Other target dates and events**

April in D.C. (world Bank and IMF), May Day (Chicago was good), Philadelphia and L.A. party conventions.

### 3. **Media.**

Spectacle creates exposure.

Same Time - commercialization and cooptation to products. M-TV following of Media Sluts. Punks are cute. Erin Brokovich comments.

Radical critique exposed to mass -- energetic to angry.  
Puppets.

4. **Continental DAN**

Affinity groups. No Olympia group. Principles of Institute  
for Social Ecology. Bio=regional confederation.

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"A Revolution is a rush of life through a crack in the  
appearance of things. It roars forward; it staggers; it ambles.  
It is no one's careful plan or, if so, only in retrospect."  
(Armstrong & Shenk, 72)