

**Lessons from Seattle: Resistance to Globalization, the
Media, and the State's Response**

Joseph Young

University of Connecticut

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Introduction

On November 29th, 1999, Seattle became a focal point for the American, and arguably, international resistance to globalization. Alexander Cockburn in, 5 Days That Shook the World, argued that the week of protests in Seattle marked a turning point in American protest movements. According to Cockburn,

What we saw in Seattle across those tumultuous days stretching from November 28 through Dec 3, 1999, and then in Davos, Switzerland, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Prague was the flowering of a new radical movement in America and across the world, rambunctious, anarchic, internationalist, well informed and in some ways more imaginative and supple than kindred popular eruptions in recent decades.¹

The coalition of people was diverse and represented nearly every demographic category. From race to geography to socioeconomic status, the Seattle protests encompassed a wide cross-section of America. Environmentalists, unions, human rights groups, farmers, consumer advocates, religious groups, and lawyers all took part in some part of the protests. What brought these groups together, according to USA Today reporters James Cox and Del Jones, was “a profound mistrust of globalization—and almost nothing else.”²

The goal of the protests was twofold. First, the protesters embarked on a public relations campaign to alert the public about their concerns regarding the WTO. Second, the protesters actively tried to shut down the meetings among international delegates. Based on these two goals, the results were mixed.

¹ Alexander Cockburn, 5 Days That Shook the World, (Verso, 2000), 1.

² James Cox and Del Jones, “The Weird Jamboree: Teamsters and Turtle Protectors on the Same Side,” USA Today, 1 December 1999.

To inform the public about the WTO, activists in Seattle developed “a week in which concerned scientists, policy makers, business visionaries, [and] labor leaders . . . came . . .to speak out against economic injustice and its impact.”³ Public figures such as Ralph Nader gave lectures that were attended by hundreds and sometimes thousands of people. Victor Menotti of the International Forum on Globalization was actively involved in public education linking the WTO and environmental issues. His goal along with many other scholars and activists who held seminars was to make WTO issues relevant to regular citizen’s lives. Menotti explained that their goal was for people to associate the WTO with things like “the free logging agreement. It’s going to accelerate logging in native forests around the world. It’s going to roll back the raw log export bans, the Endangered Species Act, all these protections that we’ve got, it’ll make things worse.”⁴

In addition to environmentalists, many human rights activists held symposiums in Seattle. Margaret Levi, the former Director of the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington, organized several informational sessions on the link between the WTO and labor issues. For example, Levi organized a public talk involving participants who had contrasting viewpoints on sweatshops and labor standards. According to Levi, “Some of [the participants] were from NGOs, some were from the labor movement, some are extremely left wing, and some were more moderate. But all raised important questions about what the WTO was all about.”⁵

³ Janet Thomas, The Battle In Seattle: The Story Behind and Beyond the WTO Demonstrations, (Fulcrum, 2000), 13.

⁴ Victor Menotti, Interview, 27 October 2000, Interviewer Michael Bocanegra, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

⁵ Margaret Levi, Interview, 21 November 2000, Interviewer Michael Bocanegra, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

To provide an alternative to corporate-owned media, an independent media center was established in the heart of Seattle. Jeff Perlstein came up with the idea to establish a center for alternative media coverage. In collaboration with groups like the Austin based Accion Zapatista, Perlstein established a website, (www.indymedia.org), which served as a nucleus for distributing information concerning events in Seattle. Perlstein felt that “we couldn’t just let CNN and CBS be the ones to tell these stories, and so we needed to develop our own alternatives and alternative networks.”⁶ The Independent Media Center (IMC) differed from corporate media in several important respects. First, they had over a hundred cameramen out shooting the events as they unfolded. Most corporate networks had only one to two teams of cameramen. Perlstein felt that having more eyes on the street allowed for a greater breadth of coverage. Second, the IMC covered events such as teach-ins, meetings, and forums to educate the public about globalization, the WTO, and other issues. Breadth from extensive footage coupled with information depth was the key to Perlstein’s alternative conception of news coverage.

Diverse groups of activists from organizations like the Rain Forest Action Network and the Ruckus Society organized offices in Seattle weeks and sometime months before the protests. These offices served as meeting halls and vital communication centers for anti-WTO activists. Bill Aal, a member of the People for Fair Trade, described how his group established one of these organizational hubs. Aal stated that,

The office served as a hub . . . for people who wanted to get materials to speak, and there were computer resources that we assembled from basically nothing. We maybe put in a couple of thousand dollars into computer resources that we actually bought, and they got donated computers and a lot of donated services. . . I

⁶ Jeff Perlstein, Interview, 15 October 2000, Interviewer Michael Bocanegra, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

believe we actually ended up getting free DSL-high speed internet connection through Speakeasy. So we were able to leverage a small investment into a . . . functioning [office] that really got the job done.⁷

One aspect of the organization of these groups that increased their effectiveness was lack of centralization. Subdivisions of the major organization called affinity groups were created with 6-10 people involved. These affinity groups worked on a particular task. Some of these tasks related to direct action such as blocking a road or providing support in civil disobedience. Other affinity groups were mobilized to take pictures, educate, or distribute flyers and leaflets.

One more prominent affinity group organized a massive “wrapping” of the Seattle paper, the Seattle Post Intelligencer. A wrapping is a tactic used to distribute alternative viewpoints in a mass distributed paper. In this case, an affinity group organized an insert into the November 27th edition of the Seattle paper that was mock version of the front page. “Elijah,” one of the organizers of the wrapping described the purpose in terms of a “media stunt.” According to Elijah, “There was content and a message. It was also very much speaking about corporate media and how it wasn’t covering any of the issues at all.”⁸ To reach as wide an audience as possible, members of this affinity group wrapped over 15,000 papers. The logistics of the operation were fairly complicated for a non-hierarchical group. Approximately 75 people divided up neighborhoods and districts to cover the front page with their mock version. Elijah described this process in an interview with the WTO History Project at the University of Washington:

You grab your initial stack of papers in the very first one you go to, and then you take off in the car right away, and the person in the back, or the other two people,

⁷ Bill Aal, Interview, 11 November 2000, Interviewer Michael Bocanegra, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

⁸ “Katie and Elijah,” Interview, 18 August 2000, interviewer Jeremy Simer, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

are disassembling the papers, and then reassembling them. It takes awhile to make them look nice. Then you build another stack, and then when you come to the next place, the person in the passenger seat takes the papers and they run out and they do the switch, and then you're off again.

This type of civil disobedience, or direct action, took the police by surprise. While these tactics had been used in other locations, they were honed, refined and combined in Seattle.

In contrast to protesters who came to Seattle to participate in direct action or civil disobedience, some came to Seattle to take part in a carnival-like atmosphere or express their growing concerns with globalization. Anita Roddick, the founder of the Body Shop, kept a diary of her experiences in Seattle. She came to Seattle to “stuff my brain with information, tape the words of every speaker, pick up every leaflet and march with every protester.” In addition, she wanted “the experience of being here to expand my already growing disquiet at what our economic institutions have brought into. I want to find the best way to make a difference. I intend to be sleepless in Seattle.”⁹

Three Faces of Protest—Labor, Anarchists, and Everyone Else

The protests in Seattle can be roughly divided among three groups: organized labor, anarchists, and everybody else. Identifying these three groups is integral to understanding the state's response to protesters in general. Organized labor played a vital role in the Seattle protests. They provided a degree of legitimacy that would have been lacking without them, because labor represented a different segment of society from other protest groups. Over 40,000 union workers gathered on November 30, 1999 to march to downtown Seattle. Unions had been involved recently in debates over other global

⁹ Anita Roddick, “Sleepless in Seattle,” New Internationalist, No. 322, April 2000.

arrangements contrary to their interests. Bob Hasegawa, Secretary Treasurer of the Teamsters Local 174, explained how unions got involved in the WTO protests:

We were involved early in the anti-NAFTA stuff and the ‘it’s not free trade, we want fair trade.’ That theme sort of went from NAFTA to MAI-Multilateral Agreement on Investments. So that was a huge victory to beat down. And then that sort of transitioned into WTO, anti-WTO stuff.¹⁰

The unions had agreed that their march would be peaceful. According to Larry Hansen, Former President of the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 19, “Our position was to be passive. We wanted this to be a show of Union strength, of Union’s opinions and not to be put into a commercial media presentation by seeing Union members, especially the ILWU, rioting in the streets.”¹¹

Unions staged their largest event on November 30th, 1999. At Memorial stadium, members of the AFL-CIO gathered for a rally, then marched with supporters to downtown Seattle. There were an estimated 25,000 to 40,000 people that took part in the event. According to Ron Judd of the King County Labor Council, AFL-CIO, this mobilization was critical to removing the debate from boardrooms and putting it into people’s living rooms. Judd claimed that:

. . . I think from day one our goal was to change the debate. Have such a large presence in such a massive lead-up into the activities, the actions to where we would use Seattle to change the debate about trade and about how people looked at trade and about the problems related with the trading system. And that I believed that you couldn’t do that – by just having the inside strategy of going in and lobbying the administration in other countries about policy changes. Because no one sees that.¹²

¹⁰ Bob Hasegawa, Interview, 28 February 2000, Interviewer Jeremy Simer, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

¹¹ Larry Hansen, Interview, 4 October 2000, Interviewer Michael Bocanegra <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

¹² Ron Judd, Interview, 17 March 2000, Interviewer Jeremy Simer, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

Labor organized a large demonstration to highlight the WTO and globalization and to put these issues onto the public agenda.

Most labor union members were from either Seattle or the West Coast. However, AFL-CIO field mobilizers brought in union members from all over the country. Vinnie O'Brien, the Assistant Director of the AFL-CIO's Department of Field Mobilization organized many of the union members activities in Seattle. He felt that Seattle "was a perfect forum . . . it's a tremendously great union town."¹³ In addition, O'Brien found Seattle an easy place to mobilize protesters. Although like other union members, O'Brien was dismayed by the media coverage of the protests and demonstrations. O'Brien claimed that "there were two events going on. One with the anarchists with the destruction, and a very identifiable, peaceful labor march with 40,000 people. Not one was arrested. Nothing was disrupted."¹⁴

O'Brien along with other members of diverse citizen's groups staged peaceful protests against the WTO. Unions generally chose protest tactics that were legal and non-violent. In contrast, groups such as the Direct Action Network and the Ruckus Society promoted civil disobedience and direct action to demonstrate against the WTO. Nadine Bloch of the Ruckus Society helped train people in different ways of civil disobedience; scaling buildings, building floats, making puppets. Bloch worked months in advance of the event teaching different ways to publicize a protester's message. Although Bloch and many other member's of various organizations aligned with DAN or Ruckus Society broke the law, they all pledged to remain non-violent. In fact, on several occasions protesters actually stopped other protesters from committing violent crimes.

¹³ Vincent O'Brien, Interview, 21 November 2000, Interviewer Jaelle Dragomir, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

¹⁴ Vincent O'Brien, *ibid.*

When Nike's windows were smashed in downtown Seattle, a group of protesters protected the store from vandalism and ran off the perpetrators of the crime.¹⁵

Groups like the Global Exchange, Public Citizen, Earth First!, and others were committed to nonviolence, but also wanted to shut down the WTO talks. Many of the techniques used by these groups had been honed over the previous ten months. Affinity groups were organized and assigned particular tasks. A group of students from Lewis and Clark College, for example, were assigned to a portion of the city to block traffic.

According to Janet Thomas, the author of The Battle in Seattle,

There were three affinity groups working together. The support groups held hands and fanned out; the inner circle went into the lockdown. The inner circle of the direct action groups . . . used chicken wire, duct tape, PVC piping, chains, and padlocks to secure themselves together by joining arms from shoulder to hands. They sat down and took over the intersection, surrounded by the support team. Traffic was effectively blocked in four directions.¹⁶

Direct action advocates were somewhat split on whether non-violent protest included vandalism and property crime. The anarchists, however, had no moral conflict against using violent methods to send a political message.

The anarchist contingent of the protests was very small. Official estimates range from a few dozen to a few hundred. Since well over 45,000 people participated in Seattle, the anarchists were a very small fraction of the total. In spite of this, a disproportionate amount of media attention was directed towards this minor yet militant faction. John Marks, an 82 year old retired psychologist from Seattle, commented after a day of protest that "by the time we got home the media had started with the official versions of the events. They estimated millions of dollars of damage downtown, a clear exaggeration as far as I could see. They talked of masked anarchists from Eugene. I

¹⁵ Janet Thomas, 43

¹⁶ Janet Thomas, 85

had seen one or two individuals . . . but certainly no groups of them organized or disorganized.”¹⁷

Because the anarchists could easily maneuver amongst the large group of non-violent protesters, it was difficult for police to isolate the few perpetrators. Officers perceived a great deal of danger throughout the protests. Norm Stamper, the Seattle Police Chief, said that “[The Anarchists] integrated themselves into peaceful demonstrations. They made it very clear to us that if we were going to get them, we were going to have to come through people who were not destructive or violent.”¹⁸ The initial 400 hundred officers who were dispatched in response to anarchist violence were concerned that the larger protests could develop into a mob.

How the Police Responded

Although ample warning was given to authorities regarding the size and scope of the demonstrations in Seattle, the city was unprepared to deal with such large crowds and intense civil disobedience. Anti-WTO groups had been mobilizing for nearly a year, and had publicly published their intent to shut down the meetings on the Internet. Based on protester accounts police brutality was widespread both collectively and by individual officers. Many reasons attempt to explain the lack of restraint exercised by the police including: poor training, poor event preparation, long hours, confusion, and lack of accountability. However, the mayor’s office was reluctant to acknowledge the general misdoings of the police force. In a statement released by former mayor Paul Schell in response to an ‘independent’ review panel of police activities commissioned by the

¹⁷ John Marks, A letter to friends, 3 December 1999, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

¹⁸ Kimberly Wilson, “Embattled Police Chief Resigns,” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 7 December 1999, <http://seattle-i.nwsource.com>

mayor's office Schell asserted, "As was abundantly clear from the Seattle Police Department's own report and everyone's observations from the week's event, Seattle Police Officers and officers from other jurisdictions – with but a few isolated exceptions - who were called in to help, conducted themselves with courage and professionalism."¹⁹

The mayor's belief that police misconduct was the exception is in stark contrast to interviews of protest participants, a summary report prepared by the King County Commissioners Office, a study done by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and independent media footage. All of these sources confirm that the police were brutal, incited riots, acted aggressively towards non-violent protesters, and used near-lethal force on innocent bystanders.

The ACLU commissioned a report on the civil rights violations committed in Seattle from November 29th to December 3rd, 1999. Over 500 people sent complaints to the ACLU office in Washington DC, and the report includes over 50 eyewitness accounts of police brutality. The ACLU report concluded that "The level of force simply was not proportionate to the threat." Moreover, "The Seattle police department used massive amounts of tear gas against crowds even when such use was unnecessary to protect public safety or the safety of officers. Tear gas was used in heavily populated areas where it inevitably affected large numbers of innocent bystanders."²⁰ Although these collective acts by the Seattle Police department were deemed excessive, some responses by individual police were portrayed as even more brutal. The ACLU study found that since police were in riot gear and lacked identification, officers felt that they could violate civil

¹⁹ Paul Schell, Press Release, "Mayor Schell Releases Independent consultant report on WTO Planning," 28 April 2000.

²⁰ Daniel Jack Chasan and Christianne Walker, "Out of Control: Seattle's Flawed Response to Protests Against the World Trade Organization," ACLU Report, July 2000, 3

rights with impunity. In fact, the ACLU found that “some officers refused direct requests to provide names or badge numbers. Others tried to preserve anonymity by targeting people carrying cameras.”²¹ Most scathing to city officials was the ACLU’s finding that “To date, neither the city nor any other jurisdiction involved in the WTO security has acknowledged that police misconduct was more widespread than a few isolated instances. Until the problem is acknowledged, it will not be solved.”

The King County Commissioners organized three separate review panels to evaluate the actions taken by city officials during the protests. Each panel was chaired by one of the County Commissioners and consisted of prominent members of the community such as doctors, lawyers, college professors, and businesspeople. The third panel reviewed the police response. First, they concluded that the number of protesters engaged in property crime numbered in the dozens and represented a small portion of the tens of thousands of protesters. Next, they cited police reports confirming protesters who stopped other violent protesters from breaking the law. According to the Panel’s report, “We have videos of demonstrators standing in front of windows to prevent breakage.”²² In fact, some costumed protesters returned after the events to help clean up the debris.

This report did conclude that some violent protesters were present in Seattle, and police were at times in danger. In spite of this danger, no police officers were seriously injured. The panel concluded that the police response was too lethal and incited even more violence. In an attempt to be balanced, the Panel Three Report interviewed many of the top ranking law enforcement officials. In addition, the panel requested many documents to support police claims concerning protester violence. Yet, according to the

²¹ Daniel Jack Chasan and Christianne, 4

²² Jim Compton, Panel Three Final Report on WTO Protests, http://www.cityofseattle.net/wtocommittee/panel3_report2.htm, 3

Panel's report, "The response of the police department to our repeated requests for WTO-related documents was inconsistent and, at times, uncooperative."

Both reports by the ACLU and the King County commissioner's corroborated with many of the eyewitness accounts. Kevin Danaher, the co-founder of the Global Exchange, witnessed first-hand the police response. Danaher claimed that "the police were not justified, it was a police riot."²³ Jane Cover, a legal observer from the National Lawyers Guild, witnessed "people who have been gassed, sprayed and shot at with rubber bullets number[ing] in the thousands."²⁴ Anita Roddick in her journal of the events described the feeling of protesting, then being confronted by militarized police:

[W]ith the whole world watching, everything changes. An armored tank appears clad with police. The row of police bends down and puts on gas masks. They face us and tighten the straps of their masks.

We don't get any warning. But we are running with the crowd, sputtering in shock as the first cloud of tear gas in the Battle of Seattle bursts into the air. Some still sit - covering their eyes in pain. We are momentarily rooted in the spot as we watch a protester being beaten by police across the front of a truck.

According to an anonymous eyewitness account given to the King County Commissioners,

A policeman in riot gear brutally assault[ed] a young woman 50 feet away [from me]. . . This policemen on sweep patrol turned around based on something this petite woman apparently said . . . He followed her and she kneeled on the sidewalk with her back to the officer. While holding her down with his knee in her back, he repeatedly sprayed her in the face with a canister of pepper spray . . . He then returned to the formation of riot police . . . I asked her what she had said. [She] told me she asked why they were marching in our neighborhood."

²³ Kevin Danaher, Interview, 15 February 20001, Interviewer Michael Bocanegra, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

²⁴ Jane Cover, Letter to Friends, 2 December 1999, <http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>

African-Americans claimed that a disproportionate amount of police brutality was directed at people of color. African-American City Councilman, Richard McIver was dragged from his car and detained by police while attempting to drive home during the protests. McIver in a public statement asserted that “I don’t want to aid the hooligans who are raising hell and I don’t want to take on specific officers But there are huge flaws with the officers when it comes to people of color.”²⁵

While the police assert incidents as described were exceptional rather than systemic, eyewitness accounts, reports from the ACLU and King County Commissioners contend otherwise. By claiming that police brutality was rare, city officials did not have to criticize their own lack of preparation for the WTO protests. An independent review was paid for by the mayor’s office to assess the police response. R.M. McCarthy and Associates of San Clemente, California was paid \$100,000 to investigate from a police perspective the actions of law enforcement officials. McCarthy is a former Los Angeles Police department Sargent, and another key member of the team, Robert Loudon is a former New York City detective. Their firm is especially well known for consulting on issues related to riot control and public disturbances. The final report was extremely critical of the Seattle police chief as well as the mayor. RM McCarthy and Associates concluded that lack of preparation and planning led to the police losing control of public order. In addition, they felt the Seattle police department was more concerned with protecting civil liberties than ensuring public order. Some of their recommendations for the Seattle PD included, maintaining a well-supplied inventory of chemical agents, munitions, and riot control devices, and restricting protesters access to meeting locations.

²⁵ “Outtakes: Quotes about WTO, protests,” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 3 December 1999
<http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/wrds03.shtml>

According to the report “Mayor Paul Schell must share responsibility with Chief of Police Norman Stamper and Assistant Chief Ed Joiner for the end result of planning deficiencies.”²⁶

To pacify the critics, the Chief of Police, Norm Stamper, resigned. Stamper was widely considered a progressive police chief that was focused on community policing, or getting local citizens to take active part in law enforcement. One of Stamper’s first acts as Police Chief in Seattle in 1994 was to march in uniform in the Seattle gay-pride parade. Donald Van Blaricom, Bellevue Police chief, as quoted by the Seattle Post Intelligencer believed Stamper’s “heart was in the right place” and thought Stamper was always “trying to do the right thing.” However Blaricom felt Stamper was not tough enough and needed to “knock a few heads.” Although the mayor accepted Stamper’s resignation, no major changes with respect to police behavior were instituted.

Mayor Paul Schell’s conclusion was that “what I’m sure first and foremost will come out of these reviews is this: the City Council and I will develop legislation to ensure that every major event . . . will get such a thorough review that we will never be caught facing protests of the scale Seattle experienced during the WTO ministerial conference.”²⁷ In other words, Schell called for a thorough plan for each event as well as not inviting contentious events to Seattle. Schell was widely criticized by citizens and law enforcement officials for his handling of the protests. Following the protests, Bill Hanson, the executive director of the Washington State Patrol Troopers Association, wrote an open letter to Schell calling for his resignation. Although Schell did not resign,

²⁶ RM McCarthy and Associates, “An Independent Review of the World Trade Organization Conference Disruptions in Seattle,” Washington November 29–December 3, 1999,” Final Report, San Clemente, California, July 2000.

²⁷ Paul Schell, Press Release, “Mayor Schell Releases Independent Consultant Report on WTO Planning,” 28 April 2000

he lost in the primaries in the fall of 2001, and his loss was widely attributed to the Seattle protests.

How the Media Reports

What the public information sessions and demonstrations encountered could be referred to as a mobilization of bias. A mobilization of bias is a set of predominant values that systematically benefit elites or those in positions of power.²⁸ This concept first developed by E. E. Schattschneider explains why some conflicts enter the public decision-making arenas while others are suppressed. Bachrach and Baratz referred to this suppression of action as the second face of power.²⁹ This second face of power confines public discourse to safe issues and actions to ensure non-decisions in favor of elites. That is, decisions are made and actions taken, but they do not lead to any systemic changes.

Whether or a not a news organizations covers a particular protest movement has been a question that has intrigued activists and scholars alike. According to John McCarthy, Clark McPhail and Jackie Smith, protests receive more media attention if they are large and deal with issues that are part of the media's current "issue cycle." Through research of protest movements in Washington DC in 1982 and 1991, McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith identified several factors leading to selection bias in the coverage of demonstrations including the way news is collected, the use of news pegs, and corporate hegemony.

News is routinely gathered by reporters, but the decision on how to run a story and what to run is based upon an editor's decision. Often reporters write stories that they

²⁸ E.E. Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People (Macmillan, 1960), 71.

²⁹ Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, 947-952.

know their editors will run. McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith assert that “the professional incentive structures faced by reporters within large media organizations encourage their reporting of events which provide ‘news pegs’ around which a story can be constructed.”³⁰ News pegs often have common characteristics. These characteristics shared by most stories covered by the mass media are summarized as: *notorious* (a famous person or contemporary topic), *consequential* (the actors are powerful and the event affects many people), *extraordinary* (the event is large-scale, spectacular, and appealing to diverse groups of people), and *culturally resonant* (a theme that resonates across society).³¹ Since reporters are competing with other reporters to have their stories printed, McCarthy, McPhail and Smith conclude that successful coverage of protests should fit within all or some of these pegs.

The ways that news is collected affects what is reported as much as the news pegs. McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith found that “Deadlines, lead times, staffing, and the relative flow of information affect the selection of news.”³² For a protest to make the evening news or the morning paper it must conform to these news gathering routines. That is, the later in the evening the protest is the less chance it will be in the next day’s paper, and the larger the protest the less chance all the issues can be addressed by a few reporters assigned to the story.

In addition to news gathering routines and news pegs, corporate ownership of media has affected the selection of news and contributed to selection bias as news that is contrary to corporate interests has been selected out. As Ben Bagdikian asserts, “it is a

³⁰ John McCarthy, Clark McPhail and Jackie Smith, “Images of Protest: Dimensions of Selection Bias in Media Coverage of Washington Demonstrations, 1982 and 1991,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, Iss. 3, June 1996, 480.

³¹ John McCarthy, Clark McPhail and Jackie Smith, 480.

³² John McCarthy, Clark McPhail and Jackie Smith, 480.

truism among political scientists that while it is not possible for the media to tell people what to think, they do tell the public what to think about.”³³ Most major newspapers, TV stations, and other mass media outlets are owned by one of the same six firms, AOL Time Warner, GE, Westinghouse, Disney, News Corporation, and TCI; this media concentration has led to similarity in coverage and viewpoints. For example, Disney-owned ABC news ran a story criticizing Philip Morris for manipulating tobacco levels in their cigarettes. Since Kraft foods, a subsidiary of Phillip Morris, is a major sponsor of ABC and Disney cable channels, ABC news ran an apology for the Phillip Morris story. A similar incident involving CBS owned 60 Minutes and their burying of an anti-tobacco story led to the making of the movie The Insider.

AOL Time Warner’s empire includes every aspect of media from cable channels to the cable company from Internet service to magazines such as Time and Money. Since the bottom line for these conglomerates is profits, any divergence from this perspective is not promoted nor reported on. Ted Turner in a speech to Harvard University law graduates complained that “You have two of the four major [TV] networks owned by people that have huge investments in nuclear power and nuclear weapons: Both GE and Westinghouse. What kind of balanced story are they going to give you on the news about the nuclear issues?”³⁴ In other words, demonstrations against elite corporate interests will receive scant media attention if the issues at hand are contrary to the interests of those in power.

Although researchers in political science do not claim that the media shapes preferences, experiments have shown that television news stories can “frame” the

³³ Ben Bagdikian, The Media Monopoly, 6th ed. (Beacon Press, 2000), liv.

³⁴ Don Hazen and Julie Winokur, eds., We the Media, (The New Press: New York, 1997), 8.

issues.³⁵ The way that the news is presented can help identify the boundaries or frames that bound certain causal explanations for events. In the Seattle case, violence could easily be attributed to a mob like mentality or loss of order.

In Seattle the second face of power was most prevalent in media coverage of the protests. Since elites such as large corporations and wealthy stockholders stand the most to gain from the negotiations in Seattle, they mobilized bias through the mainstream media against the groups who opposed the WTO. For example, nightly news coverage of the event was largely focused on what postmodernists might call a spectacle. A spectacle is a sophisticated manipulation of images by the media to divert the public's attention. The purpose of a spectacle is to "gloss over the real event."³⁶ In Seattle the spectacle was the sporadic violence surrounding the protests which detracted from the substantive issues raised by the protesters. In response to the question of how the media portrayed the events in Seattle psychotherapist Brian Moss asked: "How would a sports enthusiast feel if he tuned in to see the big game, and the entire coverage was focused on the guy selling peanuts in the stands?"³⁷ Moss continued to describe the local Seattle coverage of the protests in which he took part in as "a veil that missed or minimized every substantive issue."³⁸

One substantive issue that local and national news generally avoided was police brutality. Overall, protesters in Seattle were nonviolent. A documentary entitled This is What Democracy Looks Like was made that included independent media footage of the

³⁵ Shanto Iyengar, "Television News and Citizens Explanations of National Affairs", American Political Science Review, Volume 81 Number 3, September 1987, 815-832. Daniel Kahneman, "Choices, Values, and Frames", American Psychologist, Volume 39, 1984, 341-350.

³⁶ DeLysa Burnier, "Linguistic Devices for Strategic Representation," Lecture, 25 February 2002.

³⁷ Janet Thomas, 69.

³⁸ Janet Thomas, 69.

protests.³⁹ One of the purposes of this film was to show the world that the protesters were nonviolent and had been unnecessarily assaulted by the police. Damon Krane, a senior at Ohio University who was in Seattle during the week of protests, maintained that the police fired rubber bullets, tear gas, and pepper spray at nonviolent protesters who were in violation of no laws. In fact, Krane claims that on the third day of protests people were arrested in downtown Seattle who were simply wearing anti-WTO pins.⁴⁰ Images from This is What Democracy Looks Like support Krane's claims. In the film, several incidents are depicted where peaceful protesters are beaten with clubs, sprayed with pepper on the face and genitals, and shot at near point blank range with rubber bullets.⁴¹

The use of a spectacle as a tool of the mobilization of bias was exemplified by the media's coverage of the anarchists. On November 30th, 1999, the second day of protest, a Starbucks was broken into and the windows of Niketown were smashed in. With over 70,000 peaceful demonstrators protesting these were clearly isolated incidents largely perpetrated by the anarchist contingency of the anti-globalization movement. These small isolated violent events easily became media spectacles. For example, the New York Times devoted an entire full page spread to the anarchists complete with menacing photos of boys in black covering their faces with bandanas. The article is full of dark imagery and the heading is entitled "Street Rage." To complete the good versus evil imagery the article is named "Dark Parallels With Anarchist Outbreaks in Oregon."⁴² In a separate article on the front page of the paper, the New York Times explains "how the

³⁹ Jill Friedberg and Rick Rowley, This Is What Democracy Looks Like [Video], 2001, (Cambridge, Big Noise Films).

⁴⁰ Damon Krane, "Experiences in Seattle," Interview, 20 February 2002.

⁴¹ Jill Friedberg and Rick Rowley, *ibid.*

⁴² Sam Howe Verhovek and Joseph Kahn, "Dark Parallels With Anarchist Outbreaks in Oregon," The New York Times. 3 Dec 1999, A12.

thin line was crossed from nonviolent protest to urban disorder was being dissected here today as the World Trade Organization got down to business. The conclusion: the anarchists were organized.”⁴³

In short, the anarchists were made into a spectacle by conventional media to detract attention from the substantive debate that was occurring. Issues such as the transparency of an international organization, environmental standards, labor standards, and rights of indigenous people were not given ample coverage because they did not fit the desired news pegs, and the participants were not famous or powerful. However, a culturally resonant theme is that of public safety. Since the anarchists and violent protesters were a threat to public order, it was easy for news organizations to fit stories about violence within existing news pegs. Dave Lougee, the station director for King 5 news, in an interview about his station coverage of the events explained why violence figured prominently into their coverage. According to Lougee, “[November 30th’s] tear gas and violence ended up pushing coverage of the labor march and rally off to the side. That gave viewers a distorted view of what was going on downtown.”⁴⁴ Lougee believed that his station “dropped the ball” in their unbalanced coverage but felt that they could not adequately cover the peaceful labor rally while a few people were perpetrating acts of violence in the center of the city. In another example, the local ABC News station decided that it would “not devote coverage to irresponsible or illegal activities of disruptive groups’, adding that ‘KOMO 4 News is taking a stand on not giving some

⁴³ Timothy Egan, “Black Masks Lead to Pointed Fingers in Seattle,” The New York Times, 2 December 1999, A1.

⁴⁴ John Levesque, “News directors take a swing at critiquing WTO coverage,” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 7 December 1999, <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/tv/tv075.shtml>

protest groups the publicity they want.”⁴⁵ John Levesque, the Seattle Post Intelligencer TV critic, questioned the logic of KOMO’s decision. Levesque in an editorial asked, “So if the Boston Tea Party were happening this week, KOMO wouldn’t cover it? Or if Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus this week, KOMO would ignore it?”⁴⁶ In addition, the news director for the station “described civil disobedience as ‘illegally disrupting the commerce of the city.’”⁴⁷ Clearly, the media and corporate elites used the spectacle of the anarchists to first alarm the public, then as a means to return to business as usual.

Conclusions

Although the mobilization of bias mitigated the protesters’ goal of wider public awareness, they did achieve their more tangible goal. According to the Seattle Police department’s final action report regarding the WTO protest, the protesters were better organized and prepared for tactical successes than the police.⁴⁸ The WTO talks in Seattle were greatly disrupted. Protesters formed human chains and precluded delegates from meeting. The opening ceremonies and the closing ceremonies were both cancelled due to protester disruptions. The talks eventually broke down and the delegates left without any agreements or plans for future rounds of talks. However, the mobilization of bias by mainstream media even attempted to stifle this victory. In an editorial, Ron Sherer, a staff writer of the Christian Science Monitor, acknowledged the effect of the protests but

⁴⁵ Alexander Cockburn, 58.

⁴⁶ John Levesque, “By taking the high road, KOMO ends up on low road of journalism,” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 30 November, 1999, <http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/tv/tv305.shtml>

⁴⁷ Alexander Cockburn, 58.

⁴⁸ Timothy Quenzer, “After Action Report: November 29 - December 3, 1999, World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference.” Seattle Police Department, 4 April 2000.

concluded that, “in the end, the trade talks fell apart because the key players—the United States, Europe, and Japan—refused to budge from their positions.”⁴⁹ In other words, the media tried to blame the collapse of the talks on a lack of policy cohesion among important state actors rather than the actions of the organized protesters. Most likely, the collapse of the WTO ministerial in Seattle was due to several factors. First, trade rounds have grown extremely complex as the issues surrounding trade include items such as intellectual property, non-tariff barriers to trade, and services. Although trade rounds throughout history have proceeded slowly, the issues in the Seattle round and now the Doha round are even more complex and difficult to reach consensus among over 100 nations. Second, the developing world found new bargaining strength during the Seattle Round. Aided by the thousands of protesters, media coverage, and interruption of talks, developing countries were able to pursue their agendas and block developed countries from reaching agreements that developing countries found unsuitable.

Finally, the protesters were able to shut down talks, frustrate the delegates, and bring public scrutiny to the World Trade Organization. A Harris/Business Week poll taken a few weeks after the protest found the public supportive of the issues raised by the protesters. Over 50% of people polled felt sympathetic to the protesters in Seattle. In addition, most of the poll respondees felt business had too much power in America and implicated the WTO and globalization in this power imbalance.⁵⁰ Ultimately the split between developed and developing nations, the actions of the protesters and the complexity of trade issues led to a complete collapse of the Seattle talks. However, without the actions of the protesters, it would be difficult to assume that the developing

⁴⁹ Scherer, Ron, “WTO Failure Portends Limits to ‘Open’ Trade,” Christian Science Monitor, 6 December 1999.

⁵⁰ Michelle Conlin, 52-55

world would have been able to exercise as much power during the negotiations or that the issues raised during the meetings would have been as deeply scrutinized and thus contentious.