

Violent Criminals Riot in Seattle

By Aaron Koleszar

On November 30, 1999, Seattle streets were filled with rioting criminals. These criminals, with masks covering their faces and dressed all in black, perpetrated extreme acts of violence and appeared intent on disrupting the non-violent protests and diluting the protesters' messages. These rioters indiscriminantly broke and stole things while law-abiding citizens watched in disbelief and disgust.

But wait a second... who were these masked criminals? Why were they terrorizing Seattle? They

were the footsoldiers of unfettered capitalism, of global free trade, of elite corporate rule. They broke bones (among other things) and stole citizen's rights (among other things), demonstrating the extent to which the state will go in order to protect business as usual and corporate rule. This demonstrates where citizens' rights stand in relation to corporate rights.

N30 (Day 1)

Just before dawn, hundreds of people gathered in different parts of the city, then advanced toward the Washington State Convention Centre and surrounded the building, blocking all streets

and entrances used to access the conference centre. Demonstrators informed delegates seeking access that the conference was cancelled, that they might as well go home. Throughout the morning they were joined by tens of thousands of other protesters.

This mass civil disobedience was undertaken in order to physically prevent the conference from happening, and was quite successful, as only around 200 of the



3000 delegates were able to gain entrance, and the opening session was cancelled, setting the stage for the eventual collapse of talks, and the failure to initiate the intended new round of trade talks that would have furthered the WTO enforced corporate exploitation of people and the environment. Police violence began that morning with attacks on non-violent demonstrators who were blocking entrances. Blockaders were the first victims, but the violence (including pepper spray, beatings, tear gas, rubber bullets, and concussion grenades) spread rapidly and throughout the day was inflicted on crowds of protesters, and then non-

protestors alike. It had degenerated into a riot - a police riot - where thousands and thousands and thousands [thousands upon thousands?] of citizens were attacked and assaulted. It seemed like a war zone, where civilians and innocent bystanders were expendable. The primary goal was to make the conference happen, and this goal was placed above the rights of thousands of people. The primary action police used to ensure that the conference took place was to attack the enemy - the protester.

In some cases police attacks caused fear



and panic. As the victims tried to escape the clouds of tear gas and the rain of projectiles, a small number of vandals took this opportunity to break a small number of windows. Some people even chose to 'loot' the stores. While this occurred, police stood nearby but did nothing to stop the vandalism. This vandalism ("violence") was later used as justification for declaring a "state of emergency", and also to justify the police violence against protesters (despite the fact that police violence began much earlier in the day). The police attacked people throughout the evening and ran out of tear gas.

December 1 (Day 2)

Day 2 unfolded quite differently. With new National Guard reinforcements and a "state of emergency" to justify their illegal actions, the police arrested hundreds of people for exercising their constitutional rights of free speech and peaceable assembly. These arrests were not for security reasons. They were not even about ensuring that the conference took place, since no one was blocking the entrances. These arrests were solely for political reasons, to punish us for, and prevent us from protesting against the WTO and corporate rule.



Westlake Park Arrests

At around 9:00 AM, about 200 of the people involved in a protest march were arrested in Westlake Park (a small paved park). I was turned onto my stomach and my arms were put behind my back, then lifted over my head as my thumbs and wrists were also twisted into pain holds. While doing this, the police put plastic handcuffs on me. The cuffs were tightened enough to cut off circulation, then they carried me to the waiting bus and

banged my head on the step of the bus.

"Gus" the Bus

At some point during the day our bus was given the name "Gus," and it became our home for the remainder of the day. We arrived at Sandpoint Naval Base for "processing" and we demanded to see our lawyer (our constitutional right). Our demand was ignored, so we refused to get off the bus. Some people were losing sensation in their hands and fingers so the handcuffs were all removed (not by the police). Though a police guard stood at the front door of the bus, we

liberated that space for 15 hours. We chanted "Stay on the bus" when other busloads arrived, and they joined our resistance. While on the bus we sang, danced, chanted, drummed, wrote

songs, read poetry, made signs for the windows, did media interviews, and had consensus discussions about our position, plans, and strategy. Our experience on the bus was a microcosm of the whole week. The feelings of solidarity, unity, celebration, and resistance permeated the air, inspired and empowered everyone, and profoundly changed the lives of many. We clearly demonstrated the strength we have in numbers when we act in solidarity for justice.

At approximately 1:00 AM, the bus was