

Protesting the WTO in Montreal

From the 27th to the 30th of July, Protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) took place during the pre-ministerial meeting held this year in Montreal. After concern surrounding the upcoming protests, the hotel in which the meeting was to be held backed out at the last minute, forcing a new meeting area to be found. In the end, it had been decided that it could be held at the Sheraton in downtown Montreal, and the incident simply showed just how worried they actually were over this protest. And really, I'm just curious, but if you're that worried about a protest, might it not hint at what people think about the issue, and that perhaps they don't quite like what's being done with it? But I'm just curious, aren't you?

The first day of protests began on July 27th, which was intended to be a peaceful demonstration in which all could attend, including children. Peaceful it was, and children there were. This protest included a large number of signs of various sizes carrying a host of different messages, and arranged speeches were given (where) to mark the beginning of the three days of dissent. During these speeches, persons of various race and ethnicity represented themselves by means of a speaker. One quite memorable speech was given by a Palestinian man - a stateless Palestinian man - who, upon noticing police helicopters circling the crowd in the sky, became slightly agitated, explaining that the last time he'd seen or heard a helicopter he was back in his home country where they were being bombed, and where many people were dying. I'm sure it was full of nostalgia for this stateless individual, and stateless is an important word here - stateless human beings, refugees - human beings who have nowhere to go and nowhere to live, and

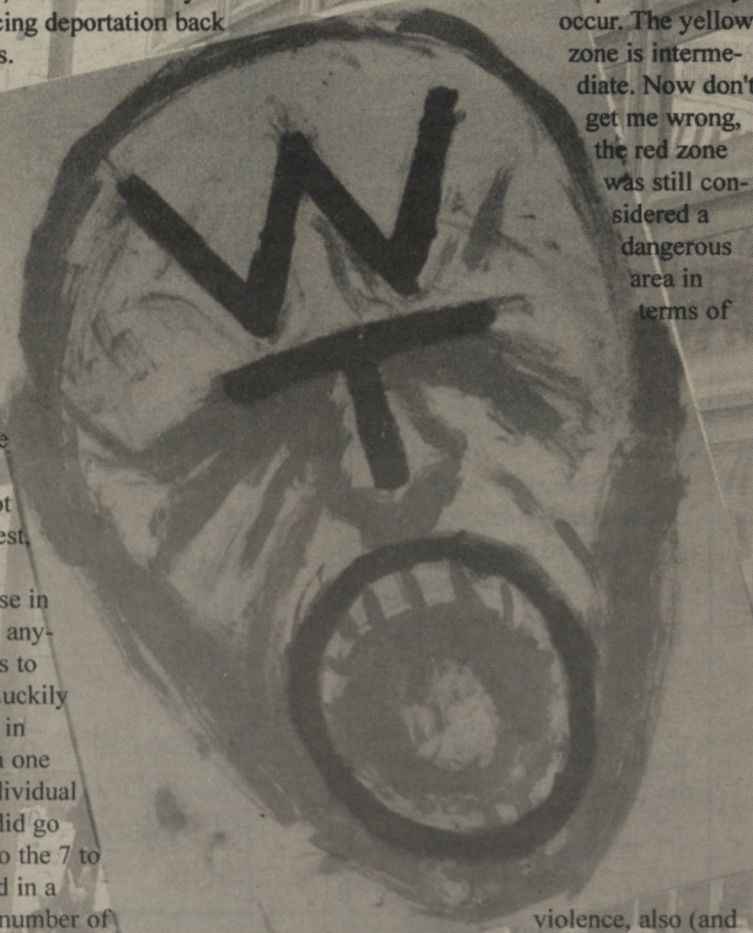
who face danger for their lives if they are to return to their home countries, due to a new federal policy, are refused entry into Canada, others facing deportation back to unsafe countries.

If the first day was relatively quiet and upbeat, the second day turned into a mess when the police mass arrested non-violent protesters, including 21 of the 27 street medics who were there not as part of the protest, but simply to give medical aid to those in need of help, be it anything from tear gas to heat exhaustion. Luckily such help was not in great need, though one individual - an individual from the island - did go unconscious due to the 7 to 8 hour wait stuffed in a police van with a number of other arrestees, without water or washroom, and had to be rushed to the hospital. A few tourists were also arrested, and simply because they were assumed protesters. Beautiful!

The interesting thing about this was that the area where many of the protesters were arrested was also the area which had been legally issued as a safety zone for injured protesters, "street hospitals", and various workshops designed to teach and inform. This area was known as the green zone, an area in which undercover police officers could and did roam, but also an area in which permission for a "chill zone" for the protesters had been granted. The green zone was also 10 blocks away from where the dispersal of protesters occurred

An interesting detail here is that there are three general areas during a protest of this sort, and during the second day those areas basically reversed roles. First off, there is a "green zone", a "yellow zone", and a "red zone". As can be assumed - noting that the green zone is

the safety area - the red zone is the dangerous area where potential clashes with riot police usually occur. The yellow zone is intermediate. Now don't get me wrong, the red zone was still considered a dangerous area in terms of



violence, also (and mainly?) from police, but in terms of arrests, the majority occurred when the police surrounded the green zone forcing it in half over and over again in order to cut it down for easier management, and then closed in for the kill, where approximately 150 arrests were made.

At one point during the second day, after reaching the final set of barricades lined with riot police, a string of officers ran along the protesters left side as they were stuck in a dead-end area, attempting to block the group from behind. Along with this, the police, with the use of helicopters and advanced communications technologies, were able to coordinate in such a way so as to follow the protesters one street over, parallel, and on each side. Upon realizing what was happening, the group shifted and began to quickly turn and move back down the street, taking a left up another street... and meeting more police. Luckily however, there was an alley to the left of this street, which was used as an escape - it pays to know your way around the streets before

heading off to a protest, and even to do some scouting the nights before-hand.

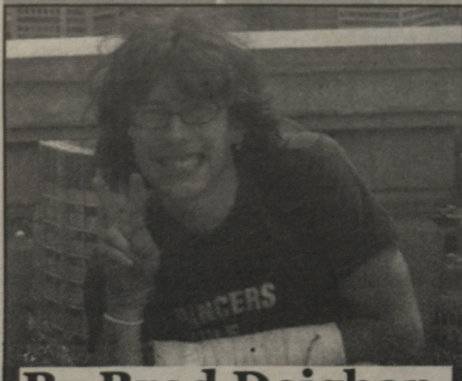
Once this occurred the protesters had been split up into smaller groups, making it easier for the police to snatch them, but also easier for these smaller groups to hide and sneak, and coordinate their movements - through a mess of excited and unsure protesters, which can actually be quite confusing at times. The police then basically began arresting anyone and everyone who may have been a protester. This did not stop after the protest had finished either.

For the rest of the day and night

After what had happened the day before we were worried it was simply a mouse-trap of arrests for us, and it felt like the group consisting of four of us were walking into a trap as we crossed the lines of police and riot squads

walking the streets was dangerous, one could be arrested, as the police had been taking pictures during the protest in order to single people out and make it easier to catalogue who was there. While talking in a telephone booth a friend was arrested when a police vehicle pulled up and two officers jumped out, reached into the booth, and hauled him off. It was approximately 7:00 pm and just getting dark out. He was also simply a street medic, and I believe I have mentioned that a street medic is not actually a part of a protest?

On this subject I could fill a whole paper, especially after my experience hiding and plunging through the woods for over an hour and a half on Mont St. Laurent with a group of other individual protesters. Snatch squads, consisting of 16 passenger vans containing riot police in full gear, had been spending the remaining time roving the city streets looking for smaller groups of protesters who could be surrounded and carted off to a holding cell, which we'll talk about later. We were lucky (ha). After watching a friend from the island get jumped by four officers from behind, along with the fact that he was also... well, a street medic (and visibly) heading to the washroom



By Brad Deighan