

Civilian-Based Defense

Exploring a Nonviolent Strategy
for Deterrence and Defense

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Civilian-Based Defense

ISSN 0886-6015

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Volume 15, Number 2

Summer, 2000



Civilian-Based Defense

ISSN 0886-6015

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Subscriptions: \$15 / year or \$25 / two years; Single copy: \$4.00

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Civilian-Based Defense is published quarterly by the Civilian-Based Defense Association (CBDA) to provide information about civilian-based defense (CBD) as an alternative policy for national defense and to make available international news, opinion and research about CBD. The Association is a nonprofit membership organization founded in 1982 to promote widespread consideration of CBD and to engage in educational activities to bring CBD to public attention. CBD means protecting a nation against invasions or *coups d'état* by preparing its citizens to resist aggression or usurpation by withholding cooperation and by active noncooperation rather than military force. Tactics include strikes, encouraging invading forces to desert, encouraging other countries to use sanctions against the invader, etc. Citizens would learn how to use CBD before aggression starts, which distinguishes it from spontaneous resistance. Prior preparation and publicity would enhance its effectiveness and also make it a deterrent to attack.

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A New Beginning

Norman Solomon

It's a pro-democracy movement. And it's global.

The vibrant social forces that converged on Seattle this week - and proceeded to deflate the WTO summit - are complex, diverse and sometimes contradictory. Yet the threads of their demands form a distinct weave: We want full democratic rights for all people.

Leaders of the U.S. government are pleased to say nice things about some pro-democracy movements - far away. But here at home, their pretense is that the conditions of democracy have already been achieved.

Yes, many of us have sampled those conditions during the last few days, complete with tear gas and pepper spray, thick batons and rubber bullets. The law-enforcement partners of the WTO pursued the goal of routing protesters in much the same way that top officials of the WTO go about reaching trade agreements. They want to do whatever it takes - to maintain control and preserve the power of elites.

The marketeers who are so fervent about the glories of the WTO are determined to preserve the kind of social order described a century ago by writer Anatole France: "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread."

As U.S. Congress member Dennis Kucinich commented the other day, the World Trade Organization has achieved great transparency - we can see right through it.

Genuine pro-democracy movements are always profoundly threatening to those with their polished boots on the necks of the poor. In the United States, corporate-owned media - and corporate-leased politicians - don't see any fundamental

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problem. The system is treating them very well, thank you, and they're returning the favor. (Or is it the other way around?)

America's punditocracy is adept at changing the subject, away from the basics. But the obvious - like the purloined letter in Edgar Allen Poe's classic tale - is often so omnipresent that it goes unnoticed. Every daily newspaper in the U.S. has a business section; none has a labor section. On NPR, even though "Public" is its middle name, there's not even a weekly labor update - while the same network airs an hourly NPR "business update."

The implicit media assumption that wealth creates all labor is simply another inversion of reality. What passes for mainstream journalism is standing on its head in order to serve corporate interests, as we've seen yet again in recent days. Carried in the march through Seattle on Thursday, a huge banner noted: "The Corporate Media Diverts Your Attention from Police and WTO Violence."

"The Capital Gang" is just one of many network TV programs providing an incessant national chorus of corporate-friendly political pundits. It's an apt metaphor: Although we're supposed to assume that the name of the show is a reference to Washington, D.C., my guess is that "Capital" could be more appropriately understood as financial capital.

If a pro-democracy movement is going to grow much more in this country, it must deal with the reality that the news media are hostile to populism that is progressive - but appreciably more hospitable to the right-wing variety.

The first political pundit to appear on national TV seven days a week was Patrick Buchanan. Now he wants the Reform Party's presidential nomination.

Buchanan has become fond of voicing anti-corporate sentiments. He came to Seattle this week, trolling for votes from the anti-WTO bandwagon. Meanwhile, he doesn't support basic union rights of American workers. Significantly, he opposes a raise in the minimum wage. And he scorns the environmental movement as an affront to holiness. "Easter's gone," Buchanan declared angrily a few years ago. "Now it's Earth Day. We can

all go out and worship dirt.”

From Corporate America's vantage point, Pat Buchanan is just about ideal as a national candidate waving the populist banner. Buchanan is hobbled by heavy far-right baggage - which he grips with white-knuckled defiance as he equivocates about Nazi Germany and routinely denigrates people for failure to be white, heterosexual and Christian (as he defines Christian).

In sharp contrast, the progressive forces at work in Seattle this week have boosted momentum for democratic change. We're learning to reach out across borders and many other barriers, finding out how to affirm our common humanity while struggling against corporate power. As hundreds of people kept chanting outside the King County Correctional Facility during a festive celebration of resistance on Thursday night: "This is what democracy looks like."

A global pro-democracy movement. The time has come.

*Norman Solomon is author of **The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media**, and writes a syndicated column. In addition, he is Executive Director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, and co-hosted the daily one-hour program World Trade Watch Radio, which was heard on more than 100 public radio stations during the Seattle actions. Commentary reprinted by permission.*

A Note from the Editor

This is the second of two issues devoted to coverage of the actions in Seattle regarding the World Trade Organization. We have undertaken this coverage because we see the Seattle actions as closely akin to civilian-based defense - nonviolent resistance, employed by a broad coalition of groups in defense of environmental, cultural, and societal standards. Not all of the articles we have used have focused narrowly on the topic of nonviolence. For those readers who are becoming restless, the next two issues will include material focusing more narrowly on CBD, including articles on CBD and the handicapped, a feminist perspective on CBD, two prototype comic strips dealing with CBD and nonviolence, and a good deal more!

WTO Was DOA World Trade Deal Collapses "Inside" Seattle Convention Hall

David Bacon

The World Trade Organization slunk away from this riot-torn city after delegates from 135 nations abandoned their efforts to launch a new round of world trade negotiations.

Demonstrators danced in the soggy streets, celebrating after a week of mostly peaceful protests hobbled the ministerial meeting. But the "Battle of Seattle" that drew 40,000 activists to the streets paled in comparison to the quiet riot inside the barricades.

Working from plush hotel suites nestled high above the clouds of tear gas, WTO Director General Mike Moore and U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky were less troubled by the sea of protesters handing out "practice safe trade" condoms than the trickle of outraged delegates who, angered over how the United States and European Union were monopolizing the agenda, were threatening to pack their bags.

"This is absolutely the worst - the worst - organized international conference there has ever been," said Sir Shridath Ramphal, a silver-haired veteran of more than 30 years of trade negotiations and head of a joint delegation of Caribbean nations. "Mrs. Barshefsky is intent on forcing the process and having a declaration at all costs, almost as if it doesn't matter what the rest of the countries think about it," said Ramphal. "Well, that is not going to happen. The WTO does not belong to the United States."

How the WTO failed

The WTO was set up in 1995 to monitor trade agree-

ments and resolve trade disputes. The Geneva-based group operates by consensus, which means that every member nation must agree to proceed with a new round of negotiations.

In practice, WTO leaders summon small groups of delegates to a "green room" - so named because the walls of the first room used for this purpose were green - where the agreement is hammered out. Once a few key delegates agree on a text, the rest of the ministers are pressured to go along with it in exchange for concessions on other issues.

The fundamentally undemocratic nature of this negotiating process was among the complaints protesters brought to Seattle. It also proved to be the undoing of the ministerial meeting.

Among the fatal flaws

The green room process provided no opportunity for interested parties to monitor negotiations. Neither the proposals, nor the debate, nor even the voting records were visible to the public, as they are in nearly every democracy in the world. This led to comical results in Seattle, where news reporters and representatives from nongovernmental organizations turned to peering through peepholes and sifting through trash cans as they struggled to discern what was going on behind the scenes. WTO leaders stationed additional security personnel throughout the convention center in order to combat such amateur espionage. By the end of the week, the inside of the hall felt as much like a police state as the streets.

Most less-developed nations were also shut out of the process. Delegates from economically powerless countries in Africa, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean spent most of the week wandering the halls, asking journalists and nongovernmental representatives what was happening. The delegates - nearly all of whom are high-ranking officials in their home governments - were humiliated, and grew furious as the week progressed. Making matters worse, the riots prevented them from sampling Seattle's night life and kept them cooped up in

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their hotels. "There's too much behind-the-scene cooking," complained Namibian delegate Nokokure Murangi. "It's as if we do not exist."

And when many were finally presented with a draft agreement, they were simultaneously subjected to intense pressure to sign. None would discuss the specifics on the record, for fear of further reprisals. But Jamie Love, who has been tracking trade deals for several years as head of the Consumer Project on Technology, said the arm-twisting is frequently unrelated to trade. "It is this really ugly form of colonialism where everything happens behind the scenes."

Love said that when Egypt was contemplating a pharmaceuticals policy that would hurt U.S. drug makers, for example, "They were told in plain terms that they would lose \$500 million in U.S. aid if they challenged the U.S." Brent Blackwelder, head of the environmental group Friends of the Earth, agreed: "Delegates from the south are caving in to United States pressure . . . The violence you see outside cannot compare to the violence being done inside."

By late evening on December 3, the last scheduled day of the conference, it became clear to WTO leadership that there was no way to reach consensus.

"We could have stayed all night, maybe for five more days, it wouldn't have mattered," said a weary Barshefsky, who as host of the failed conference will likely face intense criticism in the months to come. "The WTO has outgrown the processes appropriate to an earlier time . . . we needed a process which had a greater degree of internal transparency and inclusion to accommodate a larger and more diverse membership."

What next?

While the forces aligned against corporate-led globalization won the Battle of Seattle, the war over world trade is far from over. The WTO plans to resume discussions early next year in Geneva. Moore and most of the humiliated trade negotiators believe that the WTO can be fixed - possibly through the creation

of a parliamentary style system - and resume pursuing its free-trade agenda.

But the labor, consumer, environment, human rights, and student groups who marched in Seattle are opposed to the core beliefs of the WTO, which they claim promotes not "free" trade but "corporate-managed" trade policies that threaten health, labor, the environment and basic human rights.

"There's never been an event in American history that has brought together more disparate groups," said noted consumers advocate Ralph Nader. Both sides vow to fight again. The only thing certain is that it won't be in as comfortable a city as Seattle.

When asked where he would schedule the next ministerial meeting, a former top U.S. trade negotiator suggested a location "like Iceland, in January."

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CBDA Mailbox

Why hasn't the idea of a nonviolent, civilian-based defense system caught on? The destruction generated by lethal weapons has resulted in much anger toward the political power brokers of the world. But instead of embracing civilian-based defense as a response to this anger, the world has responded by sending in gun-toting "peace-keepers" or advocating arms control rather than arms elimination! Why? I think few people really believe civilian-based, nonviolent defense systems will work. I also think most people do not feel self-suffering accepted by those engaged in nonviolent defense will change the hearts and minds of their oppressors. I advocate adding another component to the mix of noncooperation, boycotts, and other forms of civil disobedience that are already part of civilian-based defense. That is



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*Photo by Jim Bryant.
Reprinted by permission from Detroit Labor News.*

The New Economic Order

Norman Solomon

The current scene is perversely logical. Relying on heavily armed police and National Guard troops to salvage its ministerial meeting, the WTO is doing what anti-democratic organizations have often done. Militarism may not be the first choice of men like Bill Clinton and Mike Moore. But hey - when you've got a world economy to run, you gotta do what you gotta do.

And so, this week, the happy-face stickers have fallen off the World Trade Organization. The rhetoric will still evoke forward-looking benevolence, even compassion, for the six billion souls who deserve the stewardship only the WTO can provide. But the message between the lines has come into clear focus: Do it our way and no one gets hurt.

That is the message in the streets of downtown Seattle.

That is the message to faraway countries, matter-of-factly informed that - after centuries of colonial and imperial subjugation - the new economic order has its own demands.

That is the message to people like Amparo Reyes, who traveled from her home in Northern Mexico to Seattle so we could hear about the institutional violence perpetrated by the likes of the WTO on countless millions of human beings. "I am a worker in a *maquiladora* in Mexico, near the U.S. border," she said at a rally Monday. "I am a single mother with two children and I work 70 hours per week. My salary is 69 U.S. dollars per week which is only 93 cents per hour, and that is not enough to support the basic needs of a family."

Reyes added: "I work in electronic assembly for limousines and Ford cars, and we do not have any equipment to protect us from the toxic fumes. we have to work standing over

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each other, with 17 people in a space that is about one and half a yards wide. The international agreements like NAFTA and those made by the WTO are destroying our countries in the economic, political and cultural aspects, and also the environment. We receive very low wages. We are suffering exploitation. And all this in the name of profits.”

The standoffs on Seattle streets in recent days symbolize the clash between two totally different concepts of solidarity. One was articulated by Amparo Reyes when she said: “If the transnationals are moving to the borders, from one country to another country, our responsibility as workers is to fight together and show our solidarity across borders.”

Meanwhile, the WTO is exercising its macabre version of solidarity: for elites. But under intense pressure, the mask is slipping. Underneath all the pseudo-civility and diplomatic jargon the world is seeing brute force imposed to move a global agenda of unfathomable brutality.

The credit for the unmasking should go to the vast array of civic activists around the planet - aptly represented by tens of thousands of protesters from every continent who took to the streets here with determined nonviolence.

And while the hotshots running the WTO lose momentum, the parallel activities of global loan sharks like the International Monetary Fund are also sliding into further disrepute.

Corporate globalizers arrived in Seattle hoping for a celebratory event. Instead, resistance spoiled their elite party.

Guardians of the WTO's image got a break when a small group of hoodlums went on a window-smashing spree and drew appreciable media attention. It's easy enough for TV cameras to videotape scenes of random violence in a shopping district. A much more difficult task would be to cover the institutionalized violence that is a quiet part of daily life.

When Western banks collect huge interest on loans to poor countries, the suffering - and the links between wealth and poverty - go largely unreported. That's how 20,000 children worldwide continue to die each day from preventable diseases.

Without visible opposition, reigning power brokers are

glad to pose as tolerant leaders. But at the historic crossroads in Seattle, when the WTO found itself unable to proceed with business as usual, it was time to exchange the velvet glove for the iron fist.

This is logical. After all, the World Trade Organization is supremely undemocratic. WTO officials deliberate in secret and issue rulings that deem local or national laws to be unfair "trade barriers" if they impede the pursuit of profits. This, we are told, is "free trade" - and laws that protect workers or the environment or human rights are supposed to get out of the way.

As I write these words on Wednesday night, a few blocks away police are attacking nonviolent protesters in with heavy batons and new rounds of pepper spray and tear gas. Armored personnel carriers have moved in. Some policemen are arriving on horses. National Guard troops are putting on gas masks. All day, helicopters have droned steadily overhead.

In a grotesque way, all this seems to make sense. While boosters of the WTO keep talking about "free trade," the consequences of contempt for democracy include more contempt for democracy. Elites may insist on the right to rule, but the rest of us should not go along to get along.

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the use of **nonlethal weapons**. Since 1997 the Marine Corps has administered a Department of Defense program called the Joint Nonlethal Weapons Program (JNLWP). The weapons the JNLWP are developing **do deter** opponents physically so they would be less able to harm nonviolent resisters. They are designed to deter in a more humane, nonlethal manner. They do not depend on the "good will" of the oppressors for their effectiveness. These weapons include: nonlethal mortars, vehicle stoppers, slippery foam, boat stopping systems, odorous substances, and chemical lasers. Talking about these weapons will cause some debate. Great! By talking about nonlethal weapons, we can make the idea of civilian-based defense more acceptable in the halls of power.

Randy Converse
Madison WI

Let's Not Miss the Real Stories

Peter Bergel

Linked arm-in-arm, a dozen mostly young folks were lined up across a storefront on a Seattle street. Opposite them stood a furious somewhat older man shouting abuse at them. They responded by chanting "peace and justice . . . peace and justice." Were they blockading the store and preventing access by a shopper? Hardly. It happened in the middle of the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle on November 30, 1999. Far from being a shopper, the middle-aged man was bent on smashing the store's front windows and the younger ones were just as determined to prevent that.

It was not an uncommon scene. Throughout a long day, the protesters repeatedly prevented property damage and violence by chanting "nonviolent protest . . . nonviolent protest" and placing themselves in the way of those whose anger had slipped the bonds of control. The next day, many were out early picking up trash and scrubbing graffiti off storefronts. It was lucky for Seattle that they were so overwhelmingly and actively nonviolent because the police were completely swamped. If the crowd had wanted to tear up - rather than merely take possession of - downtown Seattle, the police could only have prevented it by massive use of armed force. I saw large crowds in practically every intersection near the facility at which the WTO was meeting.

The attention paid by the media to the relatively few acts of property destruction obscures the main news stories. These are:

The violence being perpetrated INSIDE the building by the WTO - violence which damages or destroys the lives and environments of people around the world and which is committed

out of lust for financial profit. This violence, which far exceeds a few broken windows and overturned dumpsters, is virtually never mentioned, even though it is the protesters' main point.

The phenomenal bridges being built through these protests between labor, environmental, human rights and peace & justice advocates - bridges which have not existed before.

The tremendous knowledge, commitment and discipline shown by the many thousands of young people involved.

The restraint shown by police and demonstrators alike 99.99 percent of the time. Let's keep in mind that civil disobedience, which includes obstructing a meeting at which dangerous decisions may be made, is part of the American tradition, beginning with the Boston Tea Party in revolutionary times. During this century, no major social change movement has succeeded without a civil disobedience component. Examples are women's suffrage, unions, civil rights, anti-nuclear power and weapons, and forest protection. Civil disobedience does not make change by itself; we must always return to the political process for legislation. However, the effect of civil disobedience is to create what Martin Luther King called "a moral crisis" which pushes people in power toward those changes.

Already we see that the turnout in Seattle, including the unionists, peace people, civil disobedients and everyone else, has made public figures from the mayor of Seattle to the President of the United States give at least lip service to the protesters' concerns.

That's how social change takes place.

Peter Bergel edits The Oregon Peacemaker in Salem OR. He is also a nonviolence trainer who often helps prepare people to demonstrate responsibly. He was formerly editor of Civilian-Based Defense.

Props in an Amorality Play

Norman Solomon

The *Seattle Times* printed a provocative headline across the top of the front page Monday: "HOW CLINTON WILL USE PROTESTS IN TALKS." But the story underneath provided more fog than illumination.

"Instead of ignoring the protesters outside, Clinton will try to use them as leverage in the talks going on inside the meeting halls," the newspaper reported. And so, "by pointing to the demonstrations," Clinton and other negotiators "may be able to promote strategic positions on such issues as worker rights and environmental standards among trading partners."

Clinton Feels Protesters' Pain?

Like many drumbeats that reverberate inside the national media's echo chamber, this one is in sync with a simple fable: the notion that President Clinton is eager to get his hands on "leverage" against corporate power. Such media coverage has been encouraged by the White House. Back in mid-October, Clinton told a news conference that he welcomed the protests at the WTO summit in Seattle because he shares the concerns motivating them.

The plot line that has Clinton looking for ways to put people over profits in the global economy may sound vaguely reassuring. The only trouble is, it's a fairy tale that inverts the overwhelming record of his presidency on a wide range of trade policies.

A half-dozen years ago, the White House pulled out all the stops to gain congressional approval of NAFTA. Later on, it

did the same on behalf of the GATT pact that set up the World Trade Organization. But President Clinton has never bothered to expend much political capital to fight for economic justice, environmental protection or human rights.

In fact, his energies continue to tilt in the opposite direction. This fall, after getting the AFL-CIO to endorse Al Gore for president, Clinton quickly announced his administration's support for admitting China into the WTO. Yet many news accounts in recent days have been telling us that Clinton yearns to fight the good fight for progressive causes.

Props in an Amorality Play

When the champion "triangulator" arrives in Seattle, all indications are that he will strive to treat the tens of thousands of anti-WTO activists in the streets as mere props in his amorality play.

According to the script, Bill Clinton is eager to navigate the jagged shores of domestic politics as he pushes to advance the prospects of humanity for the new millennium. Such theatrics tend to enthrall the huge numbers of supposedly political reporters doubling as drama critics - who, in turn, give the public a nonstop supply of pseudo-journalistic fairy tales that bear little resemblance to global realities.

With oft-requested adoration, President Clinton has consistently put the interests of Wall Street first - while, with the encouragement of White House spinmeisters, the news media routinely portray him as one conflicted individual. The story often goes that Clinton wrestles with thorny dilemmas as he (in the words of yesterday's page-one *Seattle Times* piece) "tries to satisfy core left-leaning constituencies and embrace free trade at the same time."

Media Wary of Social Movements

In a wide range of communities, millions of progressive people do not realistically expect to be satisfied by the actions of a president who has proven his faithful fidelity to corporate

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interests. Meanwhile, overall, the U.S. news media remain wary - at best - about social movements that mobilize mass protests for economic justice. When those movements grow stronger, disquiet is evident among elites and the news media they own, advertise in, and "underwrite."

Throughout our lifetimes, mainstream media have made a habit of disparaging protesters while historic battles for social change were underway. Later on, with convenient revision, the struggles are sanitized, watered down and mythologized.

From Radical to Wistful Dreamer

If Martin Luther King, Jr. were alive today, there's no doubt he would be protesting in Seattle. But modern news media have done much to transform him into a wistful dreamer, a martyr on a postage stamp.

Along with countless other politicians, Clinton is fond of paying tribute to King - while selectively praising his legacy. You can bet that Clinton won't step off Air Force One and proceed to quote some of King's less palatable statements.

For instance, in a speech exactly one year before he was assassinated, King denounced "capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries." And he said: "A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth."

That revolution of values is taking big steps this week in the streets of Seattle.

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Advocates for labor rights had good reason to view Moore's latest performance as yet another exercise in the arrogance of global power. Hours later, an Associated Press story quoted the claim in his speech that "trade is the ally of working people." The AP reported that Moore "has made a point of reaching out to critics." But in the case of both Moore and the Associated Press, saying it doesn't make it so.

Get the Real Stories

Peter Bergel

Your editorial "Senseless in Seattle" about the World Trade Organization protests claims ". . . the faceless (hooded) marauders who spray-painted Nordstrom and Nike Town stole the show in the streets." I don't think so. Rather, those whose job it is to tell the world what happened in Seattle gave them the show. Over and over.

As you said, the news media were "ready in an instant to turn their cameras away from the peaceful masses toward the raucous few." You excused this by confessing sheepishly that "the media are inherently distractible by drama." Why "inherently?" There were a number of magnificent stories in Seattle. They included:

The violence being perpetrated *inside* the building by the WTO - violence which damages or destroys the lives and environments of people around the world and which is committed out of lust for financial profit. This violence, which far exceeds a few broken windows and overturned dumpsters, is virtually never mentioned, even though it is the protesters' main point.

The phenomenal bridges being built through these protests between labor, environmental, human rights and peace and justice advocates - bridges which have not existed before.

The tremendous knowledge, commitment and discipline shown by the many thousands of young people involved.

The dramatic commitment to active nonviolence shown by a huge majority of the demonstrators.

Why not focus on the demonstrators' willingness to block window-breakers' access to windows by blockading storefronts with their bodies? I saw it happen. How about the crowds who chanted "shame, shame, shame" at a graffiti artist, stopping him

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in mid-brushstroke? Saw that too. Isn't that "dramatic" enough?

In Eugene, you seem particularly obsessed by the "anarchist" element. With a mixture of honor and pride, your navel-gazing concentrates on whether the property-destroyers actually came from your city or not. They aren't stealing the show, folks. You're handing it to them on a silver platter.

Property destroyers no more deserve the name of "anarchist" than they would the name of "pacifist" or "banker." If they chose to call themselves either of those, you would never let them get away with it. Yet, though they clearly violate the tradition of responsible anarchism - which holds that humans can avoid the need for laws and rules by simply taking care of each other - you cede them the "anarchist" name. The thoughtful anarchist understands that if you're going to eschew laws, you must be determinedly civil. Otherwise anarchism is nothing more than the law of the jungle, an old story which does not deserve to be called news.

I helped train direct actionists in nonviolence for days in Seattle before the protests began. Every group we trained agreed to the action's nonviolence guidelines:

- ◆ We will use no violence, physical or verbal, toward any person.
- ◆ We will carry no weapons.
- ◆ We will not bring or use any alcohol or illegal drugs.
- ◆ We will not destroy property.

Not only did the overwhelming majority of demonstrators agree to these guidelines, they impressively helped each other enforce them on the street. Indiscriminate use of tear gas makes people angry. Yet every time I saw a scuffle or disagreement break out, one or more people moved immediately to break it up peacefully while the crowd around the incident chanted "nonviolent protest... nonviolent protest." Isn't that a story?

Look deeper, please.

WTO Media Watch

Norman Solomon

No one can accuse the U.S. news media of downplaying this WTO summit. Quantity of coverage won't be a problem. But what about quality? The spin, already frenetic, seems to be approaching warp speed.

So far, many influential media outlets have been inclined to portray opponents of the WTO as simplistic naysayers who want to spoil the corporate party in Seattle. A front-page *New York Times* article Sunday reported that the WTO talks will "test support for freer trade in both rich and poor countries, especially since delegates will face a giant, 1960s-style protest campaign meant to mobilize worldwide opposition to new trade efforts."

Just to make sure readers got the (stereotypical) point, *The Times* explained in the second paragraph of another prominent article Sunday that protesters "are planning to turn what initially sounded like the yawner of all international meetings - a gathering of trade ministers from 135 countries to start the 'Millennium Round' of trade liberalization talks - into the Woodstock of the era of globalization."

Aside from reliance on such cliches, of course, there's plenty of policy-wonking in the press. And the paper-of-record *Times* is supposed to be about as good as it gets, with lots of ink devoted to intricate tangles of trade, economics, politics, and nationalism. But the edifice of coverage is mostly constructed on the bedrock assumption that the WTO has been helping to enhance the future of humanity.

The overall *New York Times* tone on Sunday reached a crescendo with an editorial that flatly declared: "Lost among the disputes is the fact that open trade promotes prosperity." Such assumptions, usually implicit in U.S. media coverage, are rarely exhumed for critical examination - least of all in the media outlets

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propagating them.

For instance, how is the WTO fostering "open trade" when it sets about rigorously imposing rules that are protectionist for multinational corporations? And what is the meaning of "prosperity" when huge numbers of people are poor, income disparities are outrageous, labor rights are trampled, and rampant environmental destruction continues?

Mainstream media routinely tell us that the basic mission of the WTO is a noble one. When that's the presumption, complacency prevails. "The goal of trade talks," the *Times* editorial concluded, "is to guarantee that countries that want to export can find countries willing to import - a goal that can start to be met if the trade ministers drop proposals that cannot yet be resolved by consensus and focus on the few that can."

Like other big media, *The New York Times* is eager to see the WTO staying afloat and steaming ahead. To guard against any dangers that might cause it to capsize, the WTO is being urged not to do much on behalf of the rights of working people around the world. "Rich and poor countries are nowhere near a consensus on fair labor practices," *The Times* editorialized yesterday, "and the Clinton administration wants to set up a working group to study the issues. That makes sense."

Among those who seem to agree is the president of the AFL-CIO. At a news conference Sunday afternoon, I asked John Sweeney to explain his support for the White House position that the WTO summit in Seattle should merely set up a working group to do a report on labor standards. Sweeney replied that the AFL-CIO is in this "for the long haul" - an apparent euphemism for patience that dovetails with the labor organization's endorsement of WTO-booster Al Gore for president.

Sweeney appeared in front of journalists here in Seattle at a conference of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, just after a speech to the group by WTO Director-General Mike Moore. Union officials from all over the world greeted Moore's presentation without enthusiasm. Several spoke up to challenge his fervent defense of WTO policies.

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State and Zip Code

Nation

Telephone

- I want to join the Association:
- \$25 Basic
 - \$5 Low Income
 - \$50 Supporting
 - \$100 Sustaining
 - \$500 Lifetime
 - \$50 - \$1,000 Associative
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Note: Membership includes the Association's magazine, **Civilian-Based Defense**.

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