

Action Forms & Protest in Seattle

November 30, 1999. Seattle, a city which, thanks to Microsoft, has become



emblematic of the New Economy, saw some 50,000 demonstrators protest the third WTO (World Trade Organization)

conference assembled to launch the Millennium

Round, a new series of negotiations aimed at increasing market liberalization of investment and public services. The protest had been called for a few months before in Geneva by a committee of organizations from various backgrounds that had already *successfully* mobilized to prevent the signing of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). As with the MAI, the WTO negotiations were criticized for restricting individual states' power to intervene on social and environmental issues in the name of free trade. No fewer than 1,387 groups (including NGOs, trade unions, environmentalists, and religious organizations of various affiliations) signed the call to demonstrate against the Millennium Round. Thousands of meetings in many countries and a global information campaign were organized to prepare for the protests. The demonstrators marched to slogans such as "the world is not for sale"; "No Globalization Without Participation"; "We Are Citizens, Not Only Consumers"; "WTO = Capitalism without Conscience"; "Trade: Clean, Green and Fair."

From the morning of the very first day, a series of sit-ins, coordinated by the Direct Action Network (DAN), stopped most of the 3,000 delegates from 135 countries from reaching the inaugural ceremony. Organized into "**affinity** groups" only loosely linked with each other, some 10,000 demonstrators sat tied together in chains on the ground, using so-called "lock down" and "tripod" techniques that made the work of the police in removing the blockages more difficult (Smith 2000). When the police arrived to clear the streets leading to the summit, the demonstrators made no move to resist but

applied the tactics they had learned during courses in nonviolence. In the streets of Seattle, thronged with musical bands and theater groups, Greenpeace activists appeared with gigantic condoms bearing the legend "Practice Safe Trade," while French farmers gave away some 250 kilos of roquefort cheese, subject to customs duties in the United States, in a tit-for-tat measure against the EU's restrictive legislation against "hormone beef." Activists of Jubilee 2000, a **coalition** of groups (including many religious-based ones) whose aim was to cancel third-world foreign debt, linked up in a human chain. A massive march was called by the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations) mobilizing over 20,000 workers, dockers and public-service workers, demanding worldwide application of workers' rights. Farm-worker organizations banded together with consumer activists and environmentalists to demand that food products be kept out of liberalization agreements in the name of precaution.

More than 200 demonstrators dressed as sea turtles – an endangered species – wandered through the crowd with the task of troubleshooting any violence. As Ben White, designer of the colorful costumes and an activist with the Sea Turtle Restoration Project, explains: "Since the dawn of time, turtles have always been a symbol of wisdom. They never fight, they don't use violence. We represent them and we must be their voice ... anyone who acts aggressively, even if it's only vocal, must take his costume off ... we're not only nonviolent ourselves, we're also against the use of violence by others. Wherever the turtles come across violence they try to make peace" (in Reimon 2002: 73). On the fringes of the demonstrations, however, small groups did turn violent, smashing the windows of shops dealing in multinational products such as Nike, Levi's, and McDonald's, accused of using child labor or unhealthy products. Before the anarchists started to damage property, the police stepped in *en masse* against the nonviolent blockages,

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deploying tear gas and pepper spray (Smith 2000: 13). After local authorities declared a **curfew**, blockades and police charges continued for three days and nights until the intergovernmental summit broke up without any agreement having been reached. Among the 600 people arrested were activists from Global Exchange who had used their passes to get into the inaugural ceremony and spoke from the podium to the few

delegates who had managed to get in, criticizing the WTO. A petition being circulated over the internet in protest against the lack of transparency of the talks managed to gather in just 24 hours the signatures of 1,700 groups of various kinds, many from the world's South (Kaldor 2000: 112).
(Extract taken from Della Porta, D. & Diani, M. (2006) *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Black Publishing. 2nd. Ed.

Reading Section

1. Based on the previous text, match the words in bold in column A with their closest meaning in column B. There are THREE EXTRA definitions you DO NOT NEED TO USE. (4 points, 1 each)

COLUMN A

emblematic
affinity
coalition
curfew

COLUMN B

A. an inherent similarity of characteristics for someone or something
B. a regulation forcing people to leave their area and be safe
C. serving as a symbol for something abstract or concept
D. supporting vigorously the special interests of a nation, group, or political party
E. a rule requiring people to remain indoors between specified hours
F. a temporary alliance between groups for specific reason
G. a combination of efforts to defeat the enemy and have control of their territories.

2. Complete the following sentences using information from the text ONLY. Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** in each gap. (7 points, 1 each)

- A. In Seattle protestors raised their voices against an increase in _____ of investing and public services.
- B. The high criticism against the WTO negotiations aimed at the restriction on individual states' power to get involved in _____ matters.
- C. By using a particular form of protests the _____ did not allow the entrance of thousands of representatives into the opening ceremony.
- D. Once the police tried to preserve the order, the activists made no _____.
- E. On the other hand, there were also activists who, organized in a human chain, protested for cancelling the _____ of underdeveloped countries.
- F. A group of protestors wore _____ of sea turtles since these animals have always been a symbol of wisdom and non-violence.
- G. Unfortunately, the destruction of _____ by some agitators stained the peaceful protests, which forced the local authorities to declare a curfew.

