



## POSTCARD FROM SEATTLE

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS > SAM WILD

"WTO, Seattle 99 - it was a gas!" The t-shirts were in production, both sides of the political divide struggling to gain the upper hand in an on-going PR war. The violence which unfolded on the streets of a city more famous for its cappuccino than its history of political activism, has left a tangible after-taste. Tear-gas, smashed windows, and a deep sense of betrayal among a sizeable section of the American public, have ensured that this North West city has become a byword for the anti-WTO movement.

In the coffee shops and on street corners, conspiracy theories were common currency: "I saw those anarchists in black masks smashing shop windows and I told the police - they just stood there," said Seattle Times newspaper vendor Debbie. "I think they were paid by the WTO".

Around the normally sedate and economically prosperous town - home to both Microsoft and Boeing - the people and the town looked haggard. Protesters, police and the great American public had all been awake for too long, and there was not a fresh-face in town. With the mud still settling, a deep rift between communities was clearly evident. Seattlites were quick to condemn the 'black mask' group - said to be responsible for targeting multinationals such as Nike, Gap and Starbucks - but remained united with the broader aims of the anti-WTO movement. Service Employee's International Union member Curt Williams, and a Seattle resident, came out the day after the November 30 showdown and helped remove graffiti. "This is a beautiful city and we

don't want the beauty of that to be tarnished by people who want to do graffiti. But violence to property is different to violence against people".

Curt's sentiments could be heard across the city where residents and visitors were discussing nothing else. The violence meted out by police officers against non-violent protesters, who seemingly defied police intimidation and aggression, made its way out on television broadcasts. Anchormen struggled with callers demanding to know why so many seemingly inalienable rights were violated.

With hundreds of people in prison, the pressure mounted for their release and, four days after the 'N30' protests began, protesters were still mounting day and night time vigils. The commitment was impressive. The 'battle for Seattle', as it has been termed, was certainly won by heavily-armed authorities, but the war against the WTO seems far from over. In a moving speech by Massachusetts farmer Helen Wallace, crowds heard about the impact of GM seeds and corporate policies for small-scale farmers across the world. Speaking with a rich rural accent, she made a point which had deep resonance with her receptive audience: "WTO is the blue print for a world-wide caste system". The crowd erupted and it became apparent from the multicultural composition of the gathered masses, that the WTO has brought together more than global corporations - it has united activists from across the world. ●

For web links to N30 organisers go to [www.limbbylimb.co.uk](http://www.limbbylimb.co.uk)