

POLICE AND PROTESTER INNOVATION SINCE SEATTLE

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As the title of this special issue of *Mobilization* suggests, “Seattle” has become a rich signifier that embodies not merely a place but also a time, a series of historic events, and a moment of significant social change. The demonstrations targeting the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in Seattle were a coming out party for the global justice movement in the United States. When direct action demonstrations engineered by the transgressive wing of the movement forced the WTO to cancel the opening day of the meetings and the Seattle police responded with a barrage of less-lethal weapons in an effort to retake control of the downtown streets, a new cycle of contentious politics had found its emblematic moment. For those who study social movements and the police response to them, it was the moment in which “street politics again became visible” in the U.S. after a quarter century of relative peace between mass demonstrators, their targets and the state (della Porta, Peterson, and Reiter 2006: 1).

Like many such moments, however, the meaning of Seattle—and the groups, events, and actions that it symbolizes—is a matter of perspective. Watching the WTO protests unfold, many political activists believed they were witnessing the “flowering of a new radical movement” (Cockburn, Sekula, and St. Clair, 2000:1). Over the next two years, during which mass demonstrations were staged in numerous North American (Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Ottawa, Quebec City), and European (Gothenburg, Prague, Davos, and Genoa) cities, they appeared to be right. Emboldened by the WTO demonstrations, a critical mass of protesters in each city insisted they had a right to disrupt their target events, leading to repeated clashes between police and protesters. Seattle had become an aspiration for activists across the globe, a new standard for effective protests against which demonstrators measured their subsequent efforts (c.f.: Wood, this issue; Neale 2002; Kahn 2000).

Police interpreted Seattle in terms as dramatic as those of protesters. According to Terrance Gainer (2001) who, as the executive assistant chief of the Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department, was responsible for dealing with a number of post-Seattle protests in the nation’s capital, the WTO demonstrations marked “the start of a new genre of protests” with which they, after several decades of honing their skills at the negotiated management style of policing protests, had little experience. Seattle, therefore, was a symbol of the worst-case scenario, the kind of situation they needed to retrain and retool for so that it did not occur in their city, on their watch (Gainer 2001; Fisher 2001). As one Philadelphia police official we interviewed put it, for police the WTO protests were “parallel to Pearl Harbor to some degree” (Fisher 2001). In the year following the WTO protests, not wanting to be caught unprepared again, U.S. police forces spent millions of dollars on new riot gear and sent representatives to seminars sponsored by the National Association of the Chiefs of Police and the U.S. Department of Justice designed to “provide public safety agencies with (the) skills, knowledge, strategies, and tactics necessary” to control a new breed of protester (Beasley, Graham, and Holmberg 2000; Burgess 2000; Montgomery 2000).

The WTO protests and the global justice movement caught the attention of social movement scholars, as well. Jackie Smith (2001), for example, examined the pre-existing

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linkages between organizations involved in the Seattle protest, noted the distinct division of labor among those organizations, and identified signs of protester innovation, including the political integration of global and local issues and the explosion of information technologies.

Considerable attention was paid to the distinctiveness of the global justice movement, from its organizational forms and protest tactics (Gillham and Edwards 2003; Smith 2001; Fisher, et al. 2005) to its development of transnational networks and communication (Doucet 2005; Sassen 2004; Smith 2001). An early analysis of the interactions between police and protesters in Seattle can be found in Patrick Gillham and Gary Marx's (2000) study of how the unintended consequences of police actions contributed to their failure.

As is often the case, some of the earlier claims of distinctiveness did not stand up to closer scrutiny. Sidney Tarrow (2005) and Gillian Murphy and Stephen Pfaff (2005), for example, have convincingly raised questions about how global the Seattle protests had actually been, introducing the concept of "rooted cosmopolitans" and exploring the transfer of resources from organized interest groups to the local activist community. For those who study the policing of protest, however, the process has been somewhat reversed. Initially, the police response to Seattle seemed to be considered an aberration—a temporary, situation-specific step away from the deeply entrenched negotiated management style of policing protest. But as more transgressive demonstrations occurred and further evidence accumulated on the police response to these events, it became increasingly evident that the police approach to political demonstrations was changing in important ways (Noakes and Gillham 2006; Noakes, Klocke, and Gillham 2005; Vitale 2005).

For those protesters willing to cooperate with authorities, police still employ negotiated management tactics. But for the emerging critical mass of demonstrators who are committed to engaging in direct action protests and unwilling to negotiate away their ability to disrupt the operations of their target, police had adopted new tactics to control them. These changes include increased police use of barricades to separate and control protesters, the deployment of less-lethal weapons to disperse uncooperative demonstrators, and the use of mass arrests to incapacitate large numbers of protesters during demonstrations (Noakes and Gillham 2006). Given the nature of these tactics, their use alters the terrain for all protesters, contained and transgressive alike.

The period since Seattle can be characterized as one of reiterative innovations, with police and protesters responding to the other's changes in tactics with their own innovations, thus spurring the other to innovate once more (Oliver and Myers 2003). In order to capture some of these reiterative processes, the articles in this special issue are arranged in a rough chronological order. The issue opens with Patrick F. Gillham and John Noakes's exploration of the Seattle Police Department's failed attempt to control the transgressive demonstration that shut down the opening day of the WTO meetings. In "'More Than a March in a Circle': Transgressive Protests and the Limits of Negotiated Management," Gillham and Noakes compare the intersections of the SPD's commitment to negotiated management tactics and the tactical repertoires of two prominent groups in Seattle, the AFL-CIO (a contained protest group) and the Direct Action Network (a network of transgressive protesters). While the actions of the SPD during the WTO protests have been the subject several after-action reports (ACLU 2000; Seattle City Council 2000; Seattle Police Department 2000) and post-Seattle police innovations have been the subject of several sociological analyses (c.f.: della Porta, Peterson, and Reiter 2006), the limits of negotiated management in Seattle have not been systematically explored. Gillham and Noakes show how, for example, the organization of transgressive protesters into a loose, leaderless network of small affinity groups made it difficult for the police to monitor protester preparations, to negotiate agreements with demonstrators, and to predict protester's actions.

The protester's victory in the "Battle in Seattle" was followed by a "year of global justice protests" across North America and Europe. The optimism felt by political activists during the WTO meetings seem warranted. In the United States, the Spring 2000 demonstrations

targeting the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank (WB) were larger and more combative than previous such protests and the global justice movement added new energy to protests at national political conventions in Philadelphia and Los Angeles that summer (Gillham 2003). By the end of 2001, however, the global justice movement had lost considerable momentum. Two articles in this issue explore what happened to the global justice movement and the spirit of Seattle. In “Spillover or Spillout? The Global Justice Movement in the United States after 9-11,” Jennifer Hadden and Sidney Tarrow address this question head on, exploring several factors that contributed to the paradoxical decline in the movement. At a time when many would anticipate the expansion of transnational protests in the U.S., Hadden and Tarrow convincingly argue that the global justice movement in the U.S. faltered as a result of the high costs of police repression, the Bush administration’s framing of transnational activism as akin to or facilitative of terrorism, and the ‘spillout’ of activists into anti-Iraq war activities. By situating their analysis in terms of September 11th instead of Seattle, they also introduce an alternative framing of the processes of social change for both police and protesters.

Complimenting Hadden and Tarrow’s broader lens, Lesley Wood’s “Breaking the Wave: How Repression Stopped the Diffusion of the ‘Seattle Tactics’” focuses on the post-WTO interactions between police and protesters in Toronto and New York. Drawing on her rich interviews with activists in these cities, Wood documents their initial identification with the WTO protests and their excitement about imitating “Seattle tactics” in local protests. The activists in both cities, however, soon discovered that police had developed tactics, including the use of force, to prevent transgressive protesters from replicating the success of the WTO protesters. Wood’s interviews reveal how the street-level frustration experienced by activists during demonstrations led to a reassessment of both their identification with the Seattle demonstrators and their commitment to some aspects of the Seattle tactical repertoire. In the face of police repression, activists in both cities rejected specific tactics, such as the use of black bloc organizing, protest puppetry, blockading, and jail solidarity, reclassifying them as the privileged practices of the white, middle class protesters in Seattle.

The three remaining articles examine the policing of protests in three different locales: Gotenborg, Sweden; Sheffield, England; and New York City. Mattias Wahlstrom’s interviews with Swedish police and his access to their training programs in the wake of clashes between the police and protesters at the 2002 European Union summit in Gotenborg, provide a rare window into police attempts to move from a reactive to a proactive approach to the policing of political demonstrations. In “Forestalling Violence: Police Knowledge of Interaction with Political Activists,” Wahlstrom describes a police retraining program in Sweden, aimed at increasing police knowledge of protesters in an effort to avoid clashes with protesters, in which officers were instructed to interview a political activist to uncover the protester’s views of police and police tactics. Wahlstrom shows how the Swedish police officers had difficulty getting past their stereotypes of protesters. Despite the efforts made to understand the other side, tensions remained around the respective constructions of concepts such as provocation and dialogue.

David Waddington and Michael King provide an in-depth analysis of strategies and tactics used by local South Yorkshire police to manage local protesters demonstrating during the G8 meetings in “Understanding ‘Operation Octagon’: Police Public Order Tactics and Strategy During the G8 Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial Meeting in Sheffield, England, June 2005.” Waddington and King report on police efforts to balance and prioritize several factors in deciding how they would police the demonstrations. While South Yorkshire police were prepared from the beginning to use both negotiated management and strategic incapacitation tactics, Waddington and King emphasize the importance of the local nature of the protests and the historical context that exists between police and protesters. Specifically, they show how police strategies and tactics were affected by the presence of VIPs; a legacy of in-the-job troubles related to using excessive force during previous public order events, most

notably a famous and popular miner's strike; and the numbers of protesters that were local and or committed to using contained tactics.

Finally, Alex Vitale examines the response of the New York City police to six demonstrations at one protest episode in "Command and Control and the Miami Model at the 2004 Republican National Convention: New Forms of Policing Protests." Drawing on his first-hand observations and secondary-source reconstructions of the individual protests, Vitale provides an empirical test of the relative presence of two different kinds of policing, a soft hat (command and control) and a hard hat approach (the Miami model). In so doing, Vitale provides evidence to support the argument that a new form of policing protests is emerging in the U.S., shaped by the same new theories of crime and punishment that have reshaped policing in general. Though he categorizes most of the policing of protest in New York as soft hat and argues that the use of force is limited and the number of injuries to protesters relative few, Vitale convincingly argues that a kind of "zero-tolerance" protest policing that relies on mass arrests and long detentions as a means of incapacitation rather than retribution successfully contained the protesters in New York during the 2004 Republican National Convention.

Taken together these articles make several contributions to our understanding of recent transitions in policing and protesting. First, Vitale, Waddington and King, Wahlstrom, and Wood make a strong argument for the importance of the local in the understanding of the police response to political protests. Much of the most prominent work in the subfield of policing protests is organized by nation, a strategy that has resulted in rich comparative arguments (della Porta and Reiter 1998; della Porta, Peterson, and Reiter 2006). The work in this volume, however, suggests that understanding how national and international transitions play themselves out at the local level provides considerable insight into how tactics diffuse, movements develop, and police and protester knowledge is created. These articles also make a strong case for the importance of qualitative research in uncovering and analyzing the processes underlying broader social changes.

The articles in this issue also provide further evidence that a new style of policing protests is emerging in North America and Europe. Though it may be too early to definitely categorize this new means of controlling protests, it is not too early to begin detailing and analyzing new police strategies and tactics. Evidence from several articles in this volume supports Noakes and Gillham's (2006) arguments about the role of police tactics aimed at strategically incapacitating demonstrators. How widespread this transition is remains an open question. Studies of the policing of protest tend to analyze large political demonstrations, skewing our understanding of the policing of protest. Wood's work suggests that much can be learned by studying local protests, as well.

Tied to the question of tactical innovations by the police is the question of what has spurred the changes we are seeing. In previous writings we have traced back the process of tactical innovation by police and protesters to Seattle and the underlying ideological influences on tactical changes for both police and protesters much further (Noakes, Klocke, and Gillham 2005; Gillham and Edwards 2003). But there is no doubt, as Hadden and Tarrow suggest, that the events of September 11, 2001 had a significant affect on police and protesters. This does not seem like an either-or question; there is much work that could be done on the effect Seattle and 9/11 on protester tactics and on police tactics in response to political demonstrations.

Finally, the work of Waddington and King, Wahlstrom, and Wood indicate that police knowledge is an important and understudied aspect of police and protester relations. Wahlstrom's detailing of the Swedish police's explicit efforts to increase their knowledge of protester's social construction of reality suggests that such programs may be more commonplace. Or, more cynically, it raises the question of how police have accumulated and constructed their knowledge of global justice protesters, particularly in reference to rising

security concerns, which political authorities are prone to link rhetorically with mass demonstrations (ACLU 2007).

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