After the WTO protests in Seattle

Police build up anti-riot forces in US cities

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City governments and police officials around the US, concerned that the demonstrations against the World Trade Organization last fall in Seattle may presage the revival of a protest movement, are drawing the conclusion that police powers need to be beefed up. Preparations include increasing training in crowd control and the purchase of riot equipment.

During the WTO protests, the courts upheld the right of Seattle officials to carry out what amounted to a suspension of constitutional rights. A federal judge ruled during the WTO convention against a request by the ACLU to nullify a 25-block “no protest zone,” asserting the city had sufficient justification for “reasonable restrictions on public freedoms.”

City officials in Los Angeles and Philadelphia, sites of the upcoming Democratic and Republican Party conventions respectively, have taken particular note of the Seattle protests. Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordin has expressed concerns about possible demonstrations at the Democratic convention this August. He is reportedly dissatisfied with security preparations for the event and recently asked his staff to work with convention organizers, the FBI and the Secret Service to settle on a security plan.

Philadelphia Police Commissioner John Timoney has asked for an additional $5 million for his department to cover overtime, training and expenses and the Pennsylvania State Police is asking for $1.9 million to purchase new riot equipment for its troopers. “Seattle has got to be a part of what we need to do here,” said a spokesman for Timoney. “There is going to be a whole host of training for police ... depending on the nature of their assignment at the convention.”

The International Association of Chiefs of Police reports that attendance has doubled at courses it offers on “critical situations," which include training in crowd control. Last month police officials from Las Vegas, San Diego, Minneapolis, Tulsa and Washington DC attended a conference at the FBI Academy in Virginia to assess the lessons of the Seattle protests.

“We're reviewing all our policies and procedures,” said one Nevada lawman. “We recognized in Seattle that there was an entirely new approach by protestors.... It's not that they're heading here, but we need to know if there is a new shift in what we should expect.”

On March 8 the American Civil Liberties Union filed a new action in federal court claiming Seattle officials violated constitutional rights by banning protests in a wide area surrounding the venue of the WTO meeting last fall. Mayor Paul Schell imposed a 25-block “no protest zone” and police carried out indiscriminate arrests. "The city made it a crime to engage in perfectly lawful acts of free speech," said staff attorney Aaron Caplan of the Washington ACLU.

Since December the ACLU says it has received 500 complaints from protesters about the treatment meted out by police. One person was harassed for passing out copies of the US Constitution. Another was arrested for distributing a political cartoon from the *New York Times.* Police tackled him from behind as he attempted to give a flyer to a passerby.

The ACLU complaint seeks damages and names the city of Seattle, Mayor Schell, former police chief Norm Stamper and two police officers who carried out arrests of protesters.

One plaintiff in the ACLU suit was a WTO delegate who said he had been talking with a group of protesters before his arrest. “I glanced over my shoulder and saw the black capes flying and batons twirling,” he said. “The only thing in my mind was that they didn't want us to stand together. They grabbed me, put me in a hold, confiscated my report and my WTO credentials. I

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spent the night in jail.”

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