

REVISITING THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE WITH THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE EDUCATION SQUAD

May 5, 2026



Illustration by Olexa Hewryk

Film Screening: *WTO/99*

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By Jen Epstein, for ITES

In an effort to promote dialogue around the issues of trade, globalization and corporate power, the International Trade Education Squad (ITES) is thrilled to announce its first in-person event since the worst days of the COVID epidemic: a screening of *WTO/99* and panel discussion in conversation with the filmmakers and leaders from the trade justice movement. Join us at 1pm on Saturday, June 6th at the Park Slope branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. Details and required RSVP here: dub.sh/WTO99.

**International Trade Education Squad
of the Park Slope Food Coop
FILM SCREENING & DISCUSSION**

WTO/99

The award-winning documentary WTO/99 (2025) vividly chronicles the mass resistance to the World Trade Organization in 1999 through original archival footage. Live post-screening discussion/Q&A with the filmmakers and special guests.

SATURDAY, JUNE 6 at 1 PM

**Brooklyn Public Library
Park Slope Branch
431 Sixth Avenue @ 9th Street**

**Free with RSVP:
dub.sh/WTO99**

Seating is limited.



"A galvanizing historical document that tells us exactly how we arrived on the crumbling ground we're presently standing on." RogerEbert.com

ABOUT THE FILM

On November 30, 1999, more than 40,000 people worldwide across the political spectrum, young and old, from union steelworkers to farmers, faith leaders to college students, assembled in downtown Seattle's bustling shopping district with one unified goal in mind: to shut down the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial conference and prevent decisions impacting the lives of everyday citizens from being made behind closed doors.

DEFTLY EDITED ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE SHOWS HOW THIS QUICKLY DEVOLVES INTO A GRISLY, VISCERAL SHOWDOWN BETWEEN AN OVER-ARMED POLICE FORCE AND WORKING PEOPLE.

Solely using archival footage, the new documentary film *WTO/99* is a chronological breakdown of the events as they occurred in real time over the three-day period that the conference was scheduled to take place. The film is produced in part by PSFC member Debra McClutchy, alongside filmmaking team Ian Bell, Alex Megaro and Laura Tatham. In an article for *Filmmaker* magazine co-authored by Bell, Megaro, and Tatham, the filmmakers note spending more than two years “living” in the footage of the largest U.S. demonstration on record since the Vietnam War. They combed through nearly one thousand hours of material captured by protestors on the ground as events unfolded.

The demonstrations began as peaceful acts of civil disobedience. The protestors wanted to sound the alarm and have their voices heard over increasing fear of environmental degradation. They were also concerned about the erosion of labor protections leading to more U.S. jobs being offshored, and potential violation of international law.

Deftly edited sequential archival footage obtained from a range of perspectives and sources shows how this quickly devolved into a grisly, visceral showdown between an over-armed police force and working people. This is a chilling foreshadowing of the militarized policing seen more recently in the streets of Ferguson and Minneapolis. As the drama unfolds, audiences are offered glimpses of the representatives of the real perpetrators: the suited, briefcase-carrying negotiators for corporate interests. We see this come to the forefront in the documentary, with Niketown and Starbucks franchises serving as the backdrop for the protests.

Only hours into the first day of the conference, political pressure from the Clinton administration contributed to a series of missteps and wayward decision-making from

Seattle Mayor Paul Schell and Police Chief Norm Stamper. They instructed local law enforcement to deploy rubber bullets and tear gas against protestors. Up to that point, demonstrators—through peaceful means—had successfully obstructed delegates from gaining entry to the conference.

In *Filmmaker* magazine, Bell, Megaro and Tatham recount listening to tapes of police radio communications from that week and being struck by how starkly the recorded narrative diverged from the lived experiences of protestors. They wrote, “we heard officers warning one another of protestors wielding chains and pieces of wood with nails sticking out—the footage shows neither.”

News outlets likewise offer a clouded, often stilted perspective. They chose to focus on covering a small handful of looters who vandalized storefronts, rather than the thousands of peaceful protestors clubbed over the head and pelted in the eye with rubber bullets by officers clad in riot gear.

There are no spoilers here: who prevails and who is defeated during an unprecedented moment in U.S. history is an ongoing point of discussion. It’s a conversation that we need to have in 2026, as all of us bear witness to increasing political unrest and polarization across the nation and worldwide. What the film offers is a moving recreation of events as they unfolded. It invites us to reflect on what was gained and lost, on police overreach in service of interests that don’t reflect the will of the people, the latent power of collective action and what that means for us in the present day.

To learn more about the WTO and trade issues outlined in the film, please check out these recommended sources and consider following us on Bluesky.

MORE INFORMATION ON THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION (WTO)

https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/10_Reasons_to_Dismantle_the_WTO.htm

https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/Whats_Wrong_with_World_Trade.htm