

Interviewee: Margaret Butler

Affiliation: Jobs With Justice, Portland, Oregon

Interviewer: Jeremy Simer

Interview Summary:

Margaret Butler and other members of Jobs with Justice mobilized Oregonians Against the WTO by coordinating transportation for activists to travel to Seattle and by reaching out to Labor unions and community groups in Portland, Oregon. Butler believes that Jobs with Justice was the only organization in the United States to mobilize people for both direct action and civil disobedience and the Labor march. Butler lists a number of Portland organizations and individuals that were key in planning the WTO protests, including the First Unitarian Church, several Portland State University professors, and Portlanders Against WTO. Butler also speaks enthusiastically about the role played by Portland students in the protests.



JS

Could you please give me a sense of the kind of organizing that happened here in Portland getting ready for the WTO last year?

MB

Sure, it was pretty amazing. My coworker Nancy who helped found the Direct Action Network was really excited about doing stuff as soon as we found out that the Ministerial was going to happen, so that was early in the year, and had several meeting just to plan both our involvement and sort of broader... So there was a group called Portlanders Against the WTO that came together I think in August. Not sure. And then there were two teach-ins that happened; one in the Unitarian Church in October and one at Portland State the week before Seattle. And both of those teach-ins were incredibly well-attended. There were, I think about a thousand people at the Unitarian and the PSU one was actually noon and then in the evening and there were over a thousand people at the teach-in in the evening.

So, it was really clear that this was activity on a whole different level, with a whole lot of groups that were just sort of coming together. So, our involvement, J with J activists took on major responsibility for transportation, coordinating transportation for Portlanders Against WTO. We did the busses.

JS

How many busses did you organize?

MB

Well, the labor community organized the train. I think 350 people went on the train and then a bunch of unions also had busses so we all sort of coordinated

and I think there were maybe about 15 busses total that went up together.

So we did outreach to a bunch of unions and community groups, went to membership meetings and talked about it. As far as we can tell, we are the only organization in the country that turned people out for both the direct action and civil disobedience and the Labor march. The bulk of our recruitment was for the Labor march. But we have this whole group of young activists who do a lot of work with us, doing civil disobedience.

JS What were the reasons behind your bus strategy? Why did you decide to promote both?

MB We wanted to give people the option and because we are sort of niches, Jobs With Justice and the Labor movement is about direct action and militancy and creativity and all of those things that the Direct Action Network was doing. So, the materials we put out said you can do all or any of these things. There's something for every kind of activist. But mostly our role was for people who wanted to do civil disobedience was to put them in touch with the Direct Action Network.

JS Who and what would you say were some of the key organizers and organizations in the Portland area in the month leading up to the ...

MB The Unitarian Church, the First Unitarian Church. Portland State, I don't know, there were a bunch of professors. Bill Resnik, who's a J With J activist who sort of teaches at PSU, pulled together the teach-in there, and there were a lot of sort of left professors from a bunch of disciplines who participated in that. There were some young activists who got very involved in Portlanders Against the WTO that we hadn't really been connected with before and Paul Sklar played a key role and Ann Kaylor-Rawling. Nancy would be much better at answering this question than me. Nancy and Chris Fordy were, and Lori and Dave King were all key.

JS Was there a particular goal that Portland J With J had in getting out... did you have that sort of firm about, 'this is what we want to get out of it' or was it just like...

MB Well, people had different goals I think. As an organization probably, we wanted to activate and educate rank-and-file union members around the global economy. What an incredible opportunity it was to do that, and people did. Ralph who's the political guy here at AFSC, came in the day after and said, "You've gotten calls from these AFSC rank-and-file people who had gone up on the bus and were just thrilled and wanted to do more and it was so great just to be with that large group of people out on the streets. So, people's lives changed on all kinds of levels. So, that and then, you know, the goal put out by the Direct Action Network, to shut it down. As Chris Fordy said, "We

never in our wildest dreams believed that was possible but...”

JS Do you have a sense of how many people from the Portland area went and were involved in...?

MB Well, our guess for Oregon is five to six thousand.

JS How many of those do you think were from the Portland area, how many were from other places?

MB The bulk of them were from the Portland area, so probably 4,500 people from Portland. So, the other exciting thing was all the students. I know a hundred Lewis and Clark students went. High school students from Franklin High School went and are raising hell since they've been back.

JS Is that right?

MB Really fun.

JS That's happened in Seattle too. The student groups have been really energetic. Yeah. Well, thank you very much.

End of Interview

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