

Interviewee: Jim Page
Affiliation: Musician
Interviewer: Monica Ghosh
Date of Interview: May 8, 2000

MG | How and why did you get involved in the WTO mobilization?

JP | I've been watching the behavior of my country for a long time now, and I've been involving myself in a lot of different social movements and aligning myself with a lot of people that do things. The emphasis on globalization for the last several years to me has been very constructive, very positive because in order to do that, in order to, for me, the way I see it, in order to be able to critique the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund or anything, you have to eventually critique capital, which is where we need to go.

I think it's a very positive thing. It also involves the world community, not just Americans. So I think it's totally great. Other people have probably told you, and you know yourself, about what the World Trade Organization and these other organizations actually do, so we don't need to go into that, but for me, I thought it was excellent, because it does bring in capital with a capital "C". You have to do that. It's a big international thing, and it just helps to clarify a lot of what's actually happening. So I thought it was great.

I didn't expect as many people to turn out as actually came. I wasn't expecting that at all. I should have, but I wasn't.

MG | Why do you think so many people came?

JP | Because a lot of people are paying attention. A lot of people are paying attention. There are a lot smart people out there. You read the critiques, hear the critiques of what actually happened, hear people talking. Sometimes the mainstream folks or the right wingers, whatever, they are very condescending and they'll talk about these demonstrators as though they were children and they're throwbacks and they're naive and they're just taking orders from somebody, blah, blah, blah. That's not true. There are very smart people out there, very, very smart people.

MG | What moments of that week had the greatest impact on you?

JP | Excellent question. Two moments come to mind. First was a fluid moment that kind of traveled around from place to place, but it struck me as soon as I got downtown Tuesday morning was...

MG | Where downtown did you go?

JP | I parked down at the Pike Street Market because there's no meters down there, and I figured the parking meter people would have their hands full and they wouldn't be chalking tires. A friend of mine who does ecology activism from the Bay area was up

and she was staying at my house and I was basically ferrying her around, and she had to be downtown at a certain time, so we went down, and she walked off and did whatever she did, and I just walked up Pike Street.

I couldn't believe it. It was like a liberated zone. I mean, it was a liberated zone. It was surrounded by the military. I will use the police as military interchangeably, because that's what we've got in this country. We do not have a separate military and police. They are a militarized police, so it was a militarily surrounded liberated zone. It was a very heady feeling of oh, my goodness! All these people. All these ideas. All these thoughts, feelings from years are here right now and they're bubbling around and people were hanging banners on the sides of Nike Town. They were scaling the walls of The Gap.

It was amazing. There were dumpsters in the middle of the street, so that armored personnel carriers couldn't come through, and so on and so on. It was a wonderful feeling that resurfaced from time to time throughout the entire four days of an actual liberated zone. It didn't last, but it was there.

The other thing that I particularly remembered was Wednesday; yikes, I think it was Wednesday evening, or during the day, maybe. Yes, Wednesday. Wednesday. I had to bring my friend and her literature. She had several boxes of literature, and I was going to drive her over to the church on Fifth Avenue. I can't remember what it is. First Methodist or something. I can't remember, and drop her off.

So, she was eating down at the market. I showed her this little Vietnamese place. She was eating there, and I went up to talk with friend, Joe Martin, who you should also talk to, by the way. He's a social worker at the Pike Market Clinic. Very smart guy and has been involved in the affairs of marginalized people for a long time.

Anyway, I'm in there. The No Protest Zone is in effect, okay? It's a militarized zone downtown, basically marshal law, and I'm in there talking to Joe. And there's a big collection of people down there at Victor Steinbrueck Park, like a rally sort of thing. A whole bunch of people down there, but I'm in there talking to Joe. We're just kind of bantering back and forth.

All of a sudden I hear footsteps and chanting, "Who's streets? Our streets," going up Virginia towards First. So we go up and look, and sure enough, all those people, tons of people, were marching up, into the No Protest Zone. I just got the chills, because they're basically walking into the fan blades. They're walking into a slaughter. They're walking into a boxed canyon. They're walking right into the waiting arms of the Police Department. Oh, my God., but I've got to take my friend over to the church.

So I finish with Joe and I go down and get her, and we get all the literature together in the car. I don't remember how I went. I took the low road down through Western or something and up across First and Second Avenues. As I'm crossing Second Avenue, I glanced north and I see mountains of gas. Mountains of gas going up into the air toward

where the Pike Street Market is, but like on Second. I think, oh, my God. Oh, my God, it's happening.

So I take her to church and get her stuff out, and I've got to get back there. I've got to get back in the emergency. As I'm passing by the reception desk in the church, I hear the announcement on the radio; I've got some radio station tuned in, that the police have chased the demonstrators into the Pike Street Market and have them cornered. Oh, God, they're harvesting people.

Okay, so I take the car down. I park it down below the market. I don't figure I'll be able to get in there, so I park below. I run up into the market, and the whole place smells of gas, but the gas has basically, for the most part, dissipated by now. There's a few demonstrators sitting down by the pig, which is at the corner of the market, inside. They're chanting, "We've done nothing wrong."

And there's these goons, these militarized police, all along First Avenue there, and I just kind of nonchalantly try to walk up in there. The clubs, and, "You can't go there." "Oh, okay. No problem." So I sauntered down through the market, I walk all the way down, I get to Virginia, I go east up Virginia to First Avenue. I go up there and I stand. There's a line of cops blocking Virginia, and I'm just standing there looking at them.

I didn't see her coming, but this lady about 70 comes walking along behind me. She's just going home. She's not a demonstrator, she's just simply going home. She goes to cross Virginia, and the cop with this big, long club, about four feet long, (pounding sound), like that, hard, in her shoulder. That's my mother he just hit, right?

So I'm there. I see him do this. There's this other man, who I didn't actually notice before, but there he is, and he's a very kind of mainstream-looking guy, like maybe he operates a computer software company or something; very mainstream. He just loses it. He just starts yelling at this cop.

First he asks the lady, "Are you all right? Are you all right, ma'am?" And then he asks the cop for his badge number, and we noticed that none of them have their badges visible, so I'm asking, like, "Where's your badge number?" He says through his gas mask, "I don't have to show that to you at this time."

Every time we confront him with, like, "Where's your badge number," or "How dare you hit this old lady with your club?", he goes for his can of pepper spray, like he's going to spray us for asking him questions. This guy, mister mainstream computer guy, whatever he was, I'd love to find him, he's fearless. He's fearlessly yelling at the cop, "Don't you even point that crap at me. I'm so sick of you people around me with your crap. I'm so sick of you." Amazing. It was totally amazing.

Then, all of a sudden, they all got their orders, because they have little ear things, you know. They all got their orders, because he stopped, completely stopped paying attention to us and he came to attention, straight up, and he faced right down at the water, and the whole line of them marched down Virginia toward Victor Steinbrueck

Park. As they marched, they slapped their shin protectors with their clubs, and it went (pounding sound), all of them, walking down the street, with this very scary sound.

MG This was the morning of November 30th?

JP No, this was Wednesday, December 1st, long about, I don't know, 3 o'clock, 3:30, something like that, okay? They were replaced by a second line of cops who also marched goose-step basically down Virginia towards Victor Steinbrueck Park, also slapping their shin protectors and making sounds. Then they got to the bottom and just stood there. Then they received orders again, and they began to march north.

That's when I ran up to the IMC, the Independent Media Center, to tell them what I had seen. I was interviewed by like three or four different people with tape recorders at the same time. I was all out of breath, and I'm like, "Oh, my God. They're basically attacking old people, with no provocation. This is a local citizen who lives there who was just walking home, right, and they're doing it with impunity. There's no badge numbers. There's no face. It was very, very scary."

Those two things stand out in my mind. Complete kind of a liberation, and complete mass dis-authority.

MG What happened to the lady who hit? Did someone help her home?

JP She was okay. She might have been bruised, I don't know, but she was okay. And there was no talking to these people. There's nobody to complain to. The only people to complain to is, in fact, the Police Department. You have no badge number. You have no face. You have nothing. You are powerless, completely, totally powerless in the face of it. Those two things stick out in my mind.

MG What did you do on November 30th?

JP On November 30th? Well, I just kind of showed up.

MG Where did you show up to?

JP Well, like I said, Pike Street. I was expecting, you know, I'm kind of cynical, I guess, over the years, and I was expecting the usual collection of signs and puppets and chants and then the people who voluntarily get arrested and blah, blah, blah, and then it's all over. I'd heard people boasting that they were going to shut down the WTO, but I just figured that that was talk, and to see that they actually did.

Then I started wandering around and seeing all these people walk down, and I started recognizing them from Earth First gatherings that I'd gone to and various different places where people had been doing this sort of thing in the woods to save trees and stuff, and there they were. It's like, practice, all these years, practice, and now we're getting good at it, and now we actually know what we're doing, and we're starting to figure out why we're doing it.

This thing that comes out to meet us is the face of the stick, and it's coming up to meet us so that we get to see what we're resisting, what it actually looks like.

I went to Washington, D.C. a couple of weeks ago. I was down there to. There were probably six to ten times more police down there. There were a lot of plainclothes, just ordinary Joe Blow people walking along that had plastic handcuffs in their hands. It was very, very scary. They were arresting people preemptively. They probably had 400 to 500 people arrested before the demonstrations even started. They were just picking them off right and left.

A report came out a week or so ago that the Washington, D.C. Police Department had been given orders to shoot to kill. That's all I know. I don't know any more than that. This is serious. This is real serious stuff. We've gone into a serious stage.

So I wandered around. I freelanced, because I write songs, and I'm looking for... My contribution, my thing that I do is the music, is the song, is the ballad. So I walk around and I talk to people and see where, if I can help here or there, and I'm brainstorming. How can I ... What can I do with what I see to put it into music that I can carry stories of this to other places? That's my job. That's what I do.

I had two gigs on Tuesday and I had two gigs on Wednesday. I had a gig of Friday. I've got a gig on Sunday, so I was like playing all over the place, too. So I just wandered and freelanced. That's what I did.

MG Is that what you did for the Media Center?

JP Yes. I was in and out of the Media Center a lot. I knew a lot of people in there that were working. The media is an eye opener. It is so organized, so incredibly organized. Real smart people really getting organized. I was really impressed. I was really impressed. Made me feel stupid for having doubted in the first place.

MG What was the role of art and music in the protests?

JP It was everywhere. I didn't see them at the time, but, oh, you should talk to... Someone else you should talk to. Maybe you already have; there's a group called the Anti-Fascist Marching Band. Oh, goodness, yes. They show up at a lot of functions. Horn players, drummers, guitar players, everything.

I laid down basic tracks for that song I gave you at a studio in town about a month ago, something like that. I wanted to play it with people that had actually been there, and I scored. I actually pulled it off. I got a drummer and a bass player and a saxophone player who were all there. The drummer got pepper sprayed so bad he had to go to Emergency. The bass player was, like, right there at the top of the steps of the Paramount. A big line of cops comes up and starts shooting off all those stuff, so they were all right there.

There was a lot of music. There was a lot of music. When I was there, I saw mostly drummers, like freelancing drummers marching around, like in formation with the gas masks on. Totally wonderful. Totally wonderful. I'm serious.

Music has always had a big part, you know? Like in the 60's, singing the freedom songs and stuff in the Civil Rights Movement. Things have changed, but music still has a big part in it. If there's no music involved, I don't think things are right. When there's a lot of music, then things are right.

MG Did you have past experience with massive demonstrations and civil disobedience?

JP Not massive stuff. No, I missed the 60's. I'm too young for that, I wasn't paying any attention. When I started paying attention in the 70's there, I got involved in, oh, peripherally in kind of some of the AIM stuff, the American Indian Movement stuff. But the big struggles had all kind of been destroyed by the time I came along, so this is the beginning of something that I'm beginning to see now and I'm just excited. It's scary, but exciting.

MG What do you think it's the beginning of?

JP We'll see. I think it's the beginning of a really good mass movement which has a critique of capitalism in it and a militancy that we haven't seen in a long time.

MG Who do you think the big players are in this new movement?

JP I have no idea.

MG You have no idea?

JP I have no idea. I think the big player is an idea. I don't think the big player, the person, has evolved yet, has come out yet, but the big player is an idea. There's a lot of constructive anarchism in it that wasn't there in the 60's. The 60's was heavy on the church and the left wing kind of Marxist sort of thing, and anarchism has a lot more fun to it and a lot more direct action, actually shutting things down and being directly right there.

The bravery is astounding that I've seen. The bravery is just ridiculous. What these people do and will put themselves in the face of, it's incredible.

MG What role did people of color play in the protests?

JP There weren't as many of them as you would like constructively to see, but I think it will happen over time. I remember clearly a woman, a black woman walking down Third Avenue on Tuesday, I think, about, I don't know, 45, 50, something like, that, talking loudly, saying, "It's all white people. It's all white people. If they were black, they'd have shot them by now." She's got a pretty good point there, I think. But I think it will come about. We've been all so divided.

We've got to start understanding that America is a thing, it's not a person. It's a thing. It's a construct. It divides people. It was founded on slaughter and slavery, the original, "We, the people." We, the people, was an incredible minority. We, the people, was white male. We know this. The percentage is something like ten percent of the population actually was, we, the people.

Through school we're taught all this wonderful we, the people stuff, and it's baloney. It's nobody's fault that's alive now, but it is your fault if you know and you keep supporting it. Then it's your fault, but nobody alive now actually did that, so I think we should just sort of relax and say, okay, it's a mess.

The Constitution, you know, let's just kind of think about maybe almost starting over, I think. It's not a terrible thing. We need to admit what it is and then go on to something else.

MG What role did you see students play in the protests?

JP Oh, a big role, big role. Huge, huge role. I did not go to the labor march, so I don't know about that.

MG Why did you choose not to go to the labor march?

JP Because you either had one or the other, and the direct action downtown sounded a lot more interesting to me, so I just kind of made a choice. I didn't want to sit in the big stadium and listen to speeches. I wanted to see what actually happened, what was actually going on. I knew that people were going to be downtown early in the morning actually doing things, and it was primarily young people, and a lot of students. I mean, young people, like 19 to 25. Not young people, I mean, younger and really, really brave. Really, really brave people.

There were some older people in there, but the ones that were locked down were primarily youth. That does it for Generation X, doesn't it?

MG What issue did you identify most with?

JP Capital. People capital.

MG Can you talk about how you wrote the songs that you... Kind of what process did you go through to write that song?

JP Sure. That's my area. I didn't write anything right away, because I wanted to see if it actually would amount to something. I saw that the IMC kept going on. I saw that the reports were coming in from all over the world, that it had been on the front pages, like, in Mexico and Italy and Germany and India. I started watching some of the film footages from different places and I thought, okay, this is not only going to be something that lasts, but it's a victory.

So I decide to myself, okay, if you're going to sing the actual song of those four days, it's going to be four days long. You can't do that. Nobody's going to listen to a four-day long song, so you have to pick an angle. There's all kinds of angles. So what I decided to pick was victory. That was the angle I decided to pick, because I wanted to sing something that would be encouraging, encouraging, keep going. Okay, it's got to have little pictures of all the parts of it, but it's going to be encouraging as the bottom line. So I didn't quite know how to stop.

Then, I don't know if this will make much sense to you, but a band I know played at the Show Box like two weeks after the WTO, three weeks, something like that. They're called Leftover Salmon. They're kind of a hippie, bluegrass, jam rock band. I toured with them. They're great people. If they're in town, I always get up and do an improv with them. We start a chord pattern going, and I'll just kind of rap.

So, we did that, and I set up this three-chord thing to go over and over and over again, and I did a WTO rap. That's what opened my brain up. I thought, "Okay, great. I'll do it like that." That's what opened my brain up, but I went home that night and started the song and finished it, I think, the next day or something. You think about it and you want it, and there's certain things you want to get in there, and there's other certain things that you know are just going to be revealed if you keep following your train of thought.

I got two coups in there, I mean, intellectual coups for me, anyway. One is the David and Goliath slingshot, and the other one is, "I don't want to save the world; I want to change it." Because it's always kind of bugged me when people say they want to save the world, because it's a mess. What do you want to save it for? I don't want to save it. I want to change it. So I got to put that in there, too. I thought, all right. I got my line in there.

It's a bit long, but, I don't know. I think it works. I think it works for me. It's only got four chords to it, so...

MG I'm anxious to hear it.

JP Yes, it's cool. It's pretty cool, especially with the other players in there.

MG That's the kind of the end of my questions. Do you have anything you'd like to say in closing?

JP Yes. It's dangerous. It's very dangerous. I think we have a police state emerging. I think we have a very serious, very real police state emerging.

I don't know if you followed any of the reports that came after the WTO, but Delta Force was here. They are the military force that specializes in rescuing hostages and blowing up things, right? They were down here, helping the police do what they did. The Philadelphia Police Department was here. Hello? Why are they here? They were here because they monitored everybody's email and they read everybody's stuff, and

they know the plans. There are plans, like, to go to the Republican Convention in Philadelphia.

Okay. So they were here. They take pictures. Delta Force was here with little cameras in their lapels, so that everywhere they went they could take pictures of people. They have everybody pegged. There were people in Washington, D.C. who were stopped on the sidewalks and the cops showed them a picture of themselves taken in Seattle. This is real scary. This is police state stuff. They're doing it. It's real.

If you pick up the current issue of *Real Change*, which is the homeless paper in Seattle, Joe Martin, the same guy that I mentioned, interviews a woman who was from Philly who was at the WTO, and she was arrested the day before it started. She was arrested on Monday. She figured she would be arrested anyway because the Philadelphia cops were here, and they had her picture. They were on the lookout for her. They arrested her before things could even get going. So this is what we're looking into. This is what we're looking for. This is what we're going to be able to expect as things kind of go on.

We're building more prisons than any other country on the face of the earth. We have mandatory sentencing. We have all these three strikes you're out. All you have to do is look on the two coasts, like what's going on in LA with those cops down there. What's going on in New York with those cops there. What's going on with Mumia Abu-Jamal. All this stuff, this is very real. It's a can of worms which is opening up. The worms are coming out and the lid is going to swallow people and take them inside. It's very scary. It's very scary and it's very real, and that's what I would like to say, because I think that's what's happening. But there's no turning back. I don't think there's any turning back.

End of Interview