

**Interviewee: Paul Richmond**  
**Affiliation: National Lawyers Guild**  
**Interviewer: Gillian Murphy**  
**Date of Interview: April 11, 2000**

GM Good morning. This is Gillian Murphy from the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington. It's the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, and I'm here with Paul Richmond. Good morning. My understanding is that you were involved in the WTO protests under the auspices of the National Lawyers Guild. Is that correct?

PR We did a lot of legal support. We organized a lot of the legal observers. I also played a role in starting up the Independent Media Center as well.

GM When you say we, you were working primarily with which organization?

PR The National Lawyers Guild was the group that started up the Legal Observers Program under whose auspices it ran, individual members is who I worked with.

GM How would you characterize your role with the National Lawyers Guild?

PR I guess I was someone who kind of kept lighting fires under a lot of people, identifying people who, if I didn't necessarily have the skills, who would have the skills to kind of carry through on tasks, and coming up with a large part of some of the strategy and planning.

GM When did you start this?

PR I think the Guild formally became involved around the end of May. John Coughlin was one of the founding members of the Guild, which was started in '37, had recently passed away. There was a memorial for him, and that was one of the things that we discussed afterwards, some of the members of the local chapter and a person who was then the president of the national chapter.

One of the things I had worked on in the past was tracking a lot of police misconduct, principally in the city of Portland, Oregon. Usually with videos is how I had done this in the past. In this case, since I saw that there was probably going to be a need for this with the people beginning to meet for the demonstrations and people anticipating possibly tens of thousands of people showing up, it was just a hole that I saw needing to be filled.

GM So you realized that there were probably going to be tens of thousands of people in Seattle, and there was the potential for police misconduct?

PR There's always the potential for police misconduct at these larger demonstrations. The intent was to, if you have a lot of eyes on them, the police tend to behave a little bit better, so I think we were in some ways kind of more initially a deterrence. I don't think we really anticipated fully the extent with which the police were going to respond.

GM | What had you been prepared for?

PR | Typically on larger demonstrations, and I have probably about a 15-year history of that, you have police maybe singling out individual people, particular incidents where they'll grab someone. The sort of thing where they're wearing these Darth Vader costumes and no numbers and utilizing massive, massive tear gas was something that, to me, was fairly alien to my experience.

GM | You hadn't seen that kind of reaction before?

PR | No, and I've been in major demonstrations in Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., and smaller cities as well. I've been to larger demonstrations than this and smaller demonstrations. It's something that I found very troubling, and I think kind of indicative of a move towards militarization of the police. You have, I think, with the end of the Cold War, a lot of the money that was going into the military-industrial complex, and basically, which was something that was kind of propped up to get us out of the Depression, the military-industrial complex, a lot of that money began kind of going to law enforcement.

The National Guard began to be expanded a lot at the expense of a lot of the military units. You have tremendous growth of, like, the SWAT teams, paramilitary branches. In Portland, you had the Tactical Operations Division go from two to 56 officers in the space of about three years. That's fairly extreme. You have towns with five, ten thousand people having their own SWAT teams. That's crazy.

GM | We certainly had that here in Seattle with units from all around the area. What were the primary activities of the NLG before the WTO?

PR | In terms of preparing for the event, or a history of the NLG?

GM | Preparing for the event.

PR | We did a lot of trainings of legal observers. Hit up a lot of both of the law schools in the area, some of the colleges in the area, some of the agencies that had (inaudible) and some local attorneys. We were able to train in the field somewhere in the neighborhood of about 200 people as legal observers. Most of these were people who had some background in legal.

We also prepared some manuals on people's legal rights which were on the website, information on watching police. Again, part of the idea was to have as many of the people who were there educated on what to look for from the police as well as we could anticipate it.

We met with representatives of the police and other members of our group did as well, basically giving them communications about what the laws were that allow demonstrators to be at events like this.

GM | Those 200 people were on the streets on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November?

PR Principally, and we managed to have people at every event that took place that week, so that was...

GM What was discussed in the trainings?

PR The essence of it was that people are there to be witnesses and to be independent witnesses. If you're there, you're not getting involved in the demonstration. We had exercises where people would kind of learn to observe things.

GM Do you think it made a difference on November 30<sup>th</sup> that there were legal observers there?

PR Absolutely. I think in some of the earlier cases, the presence of observers did serve to prevent the police from spraying some of their tear gas earlier. The police were definitely concerned. There is a radio transmission that came out on December 1<sup>st</sup> in the morning, and you have one of the police officers saying, "If you see any of these people who are legal observers, take their pads and send them out of there." So they were certainly concerned about us.

We served to establish a lot of the record in terms of what took place, as did the people with the Independent Media Center, as well, that I worked with. I also did a lot of the training for the videotape people as well, and wrote some of the manuals for that.

GM Any idea how many people had video cameras?

PR I think that would be really impossible to tell.

GM That you trained?

PR Well, there were the manuals that I sent out, and we had links to every major website. Personally, I know I trained at least somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 or 60 people at the Direct Action Network office and communicated with people through the IMC.

The thing that we also tried to emphasize was that it was good for everyone who was there to bring cameras. If you couldn't afford a camera, purchase a small disposable camera. Just have as many eyes in the crowd as possible. My gosh, there was something like – I think there were probably somewhere in the neighborhood, if you include all the journalists, there must have been somewhere in the neighborhood of 5,000 cameras out there. So, what's that, something like five cameras for every police officer? It was fairly effective. That was a large part of our strategy was to, not only have well-trained people, but to also have as many people in the field doing it.

GM Do you think having legal observers in the field changed the willingness of people to participate in the marches and non-violent direct action?

PR I think it made people feel a little bit more secure that there were some independent witnesses there. The police can tend to single people out. Police are a little bit more reluctant to do that when there are witnesses.

GM | How did the police respond to your communication with them early on?

PR | The police were very interested in sitting in on our training. I thought that was very interesting. We decided against that. We thought it would kind of have a chilling effect on it. We also thought the police were not necessarily being very forthcoming about what they were going to be going through themselves.

GM | In what way?

PR | We weren't getting a lot of information about what they were undergoing with their training.

GM | And you asked for that information?

PR | Yes. Information about what sort of non-lethal weapons they were likely to use. A lot of my concern, speaking for myself, was that, and I guess really most of this is speaking for myself and not really for the guild per se, but a lot of these non-lethal weapons if you use them improperly are potentially lethal. If you fire the rubber bullets, the non-lethal projectiles, at too close a range, you can potentially kill someone if you fire them at the wrong part of the body.

My concern which seems to have been borne out is that a lot of the training was very sparse and was exacerbating the sort of conditions where the police could cause injuries to people on the street.

GM | Why do you think the reception of the police to your asking them to find out more about their tactics, why do you think they weren't very forthcoming?

PR | I could speculate. I think they were, on one hand, wanting to put forward the picture that they were being very negotiating and very willing to negotiate. On the other hand, I think a lot of what was going on tactically would have shocked the activists. If you started talking about non-lethal weapons, I think people got very scared.

There was an incident where I was talking to a college grad, and one of the other activists got very upset when I answered a question about what sort of non-lethal weapons we could expect. As it was, I was actually grossly underestimating what they would be doing.

In the King County Sheriff's report on the action, I think on page 24, there is a statement by, I think, it's Sheriff Officer Griffin, and what he is saying is that the Seattle Police's plan was anticipating 50,000 demonstrators, and their plan was to use tear gas, and lots of it. That was never communicated to us. You're given the impression that it was just a complete anomaly that tear gas was used. Well, when I start looking at their documents, which I'm doing now, they thought they had enough for a day of heavy use of tear gas. It's not that they didn't have enough because they...

GM | They planned to use it all along, just not as much as they actually did.

PR They didn't know how much to use. The conditions had been – it had been a long time since it had been deployed. There's a lot of institutional memory gone from the Police Department. One of police even actually stated to me, "We'd like to learn from you because you activists have more of an institutional memory than we do."

GM And yet on November 30<sup>th</sup> it seemed that a great many activists were prepared for tear gas. There were a great many masks on the streets.

PR There were some. I don't think there were huge amounts. I think the amount that the police are estimating were grossly overestimated from the videos I've seen of the event. You've got occasional sprinkling of people with gas masks, but I think there were more cops with gas masks than there were demonstrators. Given that the demonstrators outnumbered the police by maybe a factor of one hundred to one, what is that? Less than one percent?

GM Right.

PR A lot of the gas masks that the protestors used were simply inadequate. I guess the level of knowledge was not at that level.

GM They have to be used properly.

PR There are some that are meant for different conditions. There are some that are meant for active duty. There are some, if you are already in a sheltered area, such as the ones that come from Israel, I guess, and those were the ones that were principally used.

GM Are you happy with the results of the legal trainings and having legal observers on the streets?

PR I think there are obviously things that we could have learned from. Obviously, the level of response is something that we have to anticipate in the future. There's communication now, and ways to more effectively compile information.

GM During the event?

PR During the event, after the event, there are always ways that we can coordinate better. Now there's that report that Los Angeles County consultant Odenthal came up with that talked about the amazing way that all the activists were so coordinated. I just thought that was just... He must have been at a different demonstration than all the rest of us were, the activists. He had a very specific motive, and we've seen that in the recent news by the Police Department to increase their intelligence-gathering capabilities on activists, to basically pop up what the activists can do and then you have the grounds to do that. It was very non-hierarchical, very disorganized and very ad hoc in a lot of ways because it was principally volunteers. They weren't people getting paid to do this.

GM For the most part, you're saying that the activists were unorganized and there wasn't a clear hierarchy, not clear plans?

PR I think what tends to happen is they tend to have more kind of groups, groups of people who know each other, work together, and that there was a central guiding activist strategy. I think there might have been some communication, but I don't think it was anywhere near the level of organization that Odenthal suggests. That's just completely bizarre. That's absurd.

GM Did the Guild work with other organizations?

PR Yes. We spoke with most of the people who were holding demonstrations. That was one of the ways we assigned observers.

GM Which ones?

PR Virtually any organization that set up a demonstration during that event that requested legal observers we were in communication with. There was some communication with groups like the Independent Media Center where we realized there were complementary tasks that we were performing in terms of coordinating, keeping track of what was going on in the street.

There's been also a lot of gathering of information afterwards, and there's been some coordination with that as well, within the communities as well.

GM How would you modify your trainings if there was to be another large meeting in Seattle?

PR I think the thing about the officers not wearing badges is something that has to be dealt with. We would certainly, I think, try and push for some sort of a resolution on that before the event occurred. We really didn't do a lot – as much as we could have on that, I think, again, probably in part because we're a volunteer organization.

GM How many people were working with the NLG?

PR Probably a little over 200 or so.

GM That's mostly the observers?

PR Principally that's what we did. There were other groups that we had coordinated to some degree with, the DAN legal team, referred people for the Public Defenders Office. There were other agencies that were more equipped to be giving people legal help, help dealing with people in jail, so we kind of specialized on having a street presence and gathering information.

GM Was the Guild less involved after arrests had been made?

PR There were some attorneys who were associated with the Guild, I think, who did individual things and worked. I don't know if it was per se under the banner of the Guild that they were operating, although there were some referrals that came when people called that we helped connect them up with attorneys afterwards.

GM Do you have any idea what kind of resources the Lawyers Guild committed to the trainings?

PR It was very bare bones. We had a lot of knowledge. There were people who had done a lot of work observing police in the past. That was principally what we utilized. It wasn't very cost intensive. It wasn't something that would have been cost intensive really per se.

GM So your main resource was people?

PR People.

GM People putting in time. Were you responsible for the website?

PR I did a lot of the things that were on there and helped coordinate a lot of it. There were documents that other people did more in terms of writing than I did, but what I wrote principally has my name on it.

GM On November 30<sup>th</sup>, some of the plans for direct action had been blockades, for example, and people expected to be arrested. Did you anticipate that that might not happen?

PR Again, we were anticipating mass arrests. That was kind of what we had expected. We weren't expecting the police to come out with large amounts of teargas. I guess in retrospect you could say we might have, but it really wasn't something that I'd seen happen in the U.S. before.

GM You don't quite seem to buy the story of the police that they're putting out now?

PR You want to just restate what the story is so I can make sure we're...?

GM It seems that there are kind of conflicting stories. It didn't have enough information. They said at sometimes they hadn't really planned to use tear gas, but that it did happen.

PR In terms of the information, again, basically their wanting to repeal the law that prevents them from gathering information on activists, a lot of the decisions that were made, I think, were not necessarily made by the Seattle Police, even though Norm Stamper has fallen on the sword. I think they were made at a federal level.

As it's been noted, once the state of emergency was declared, every press conference was held at the Federal Building, which was provided, I guess, by the FBI. The FBI from the planning documents I've seen played an equal role with the Seattle Police in terms of command, probably even, I would say, a higher role in a lot of those. I'm sorry I am losing my train of thought.

I think the obvious fact in terms of it being in response to broken windows, they began using pepper spray and tear gas hours before there were any windows broken or

property damage, so that's obviously fallacious. Basic tactics, according to any of the old studies that have been done on the riots that took place in the 60's and 70's, is if you've got people... you may have people who are going to be doing things like that, you dedicate some police to go in there and pull them out; most basic tactic. They couldn't even follow that.

Everything that they did was a measure of ineptitude. A lot of it has to do with this push to community policing. You have just a massive amount of new hires. The training level has gone down the tubes. One out of every three officers, according to Ed Joyner, has been hired within the last two years. The level of experience there is completely minimal, and who is training these people? There are not enough experienced officers to train them, so basically what they are coming in with is they've got the picture they've learned on TV from shows, like Cops, and tv shows about go in there and kick ass. The sophistication of the weaponry or the lethality of the weaponry has increased many-fold.

GM I realize I didn't ask quite enough about the training that I've mentioned. On November 30<sup>th</sup> and the following days, what kind of communication with the legal observers was there? What kind of coordination during the event?

PR There was an office that we had downtown. There were leaders for each one of the different marches or events that we were covering, and they basically became autonomous groups, sort of then, with some attempts to communicate with the main office. There were some attempts to use things like cell phones. I don't know really how successful they actually were. I think a lot of the cell phones stopped working at different points during the thing.

A lot of it was also that the physical location was so small. It's not like you were dealing with a huge, really a huge geographic area, so once we kind of had people dispersed, they could kind of keep track of their zone, basically, as it were.

GM I've made it through my list of questions, actually. Is there anything that I didn't touch on that you think is missing that I should have, and before you answer, I think I should flip my tape, as well. We'll pause for a moment.

GM Returning to the interview with Paul Richmond.

PR In a lot of ways, I think what happened on the streets was very indicative of the policies of the WTO itself and the policies of the created organizations like the WTO. For years, the largest corporations in this country have run roughshod over the rights of people in most of the poor countries and used very heavy-handed, paramilitary tactics. To an extent, you've seen that locally. There have been incidents like what took place, oh, say, for MOVE in Philadelphia, Pine Ridge, Wounded Knee, some of the Black Panther headquarters that were hit by FBI, Waco, Ruby Ridge, but those have always been populations that were very geographically or economically isolated.

What happened at the WTO, particularly, I think, when they began marching into the densest urban neighborhood, densest center of urban population north of San Francisco

and attacking the residents there, in Capitol Hill, they basically were saying the Third World has gotten a lot larger, and this is the policy and here's a chance to experience that very (inaudible).

I think in a lot of ways, there is an excellent article that ran in the *Atlantic* some years back by Robert Kaplan, I think, called "The Coming Anarchy," that is supposed to be a larger book coming out soon, talking about how as this planet is just getting so overtaxed, the ecological base of this planet is getting so overtaxed, the economic base is going to get overtaxed. As a consequence, the people who own most of what it is that can be owned are going to have to utilize, basically, more heavy-handed tactics to keep themselves in power. I think in some ways that was very indicative of what we saw, and could be very indicative of things that will occur.

GM Do you think that message has gotten through to the larger population?

PR I think most of the people who were there were very much radicalized by what took place. It was interesting if you've seen some of the testimony that took place before City Council in either of the two hearings, you have people who were very conservative talking about just how, people who had served in the Gulf War, just how incredible this was that this was happening, taking place in this country.

Obviously, there is a tremendous amount of spin. That's one of the reasons we are seeing this sort of response from the police and the different government agencies that we couldn't help this happening. It's bull. If you look at the redacted plan of the Public Safety Council that's available from the Police Department, they were talking about instituting no protest curfew zones at least almost a month before the event took the town. That was part of their plan.

So you've got the curfew zone, you've got the plan to use tear gas. I've seen these order forms for just tremendous amounts of these non-lethal weaponry, and they had no idea what was going on? There were the articles that they had come up from the sort of training the groups like the Ruckus Society were going through. They were upfront about what they were planning to do. They knew, and these articles found their way into the Police Department's archives. They knew what was going on.

GM So what should activists do in this climate?

PR In 25 words or less?

GM I just flipped the tape.

PR One thing is addressing this head-on and naming it for what it is and recognizing what's going on. I think that's the first step, realizing that we are facing this much higher level of response. Obviously, activists have to kind of break down the barriers and unite with some of the different groups that have been facing this sort of level of oppression beforehand. Again, marginalized groups, economically marginalized groups.

People that have been affected by the war on drugs where you've seen the use of National Guard against civilian populations in rural areas of Northern California and Southern Oregon. I think we have to even, as when GATT and NAFTA were being fought in the Congress, we have to look to some of the real alliances that have to be formed and not just have this be necessarily a left wing alliance.

This country was initially supposed to be a collection of individual, autonomous states bound together, and as long as people can respect each other's rights to live life their own way, I think we can have all manner of ideology effectively functioning together. When you start getting too heavy into what sort of ideology we should afterwards, all you basically are doing is setting people up for schisms and division and infighting.

GM How to address the police reaction?

PR Well, I think we have to look at who is really in charge. I think that's one thing, and we have to look at the level of what took place, and we have to do everything in our power to make sure that this never happens again, hold as many people as possible accountable. Let people know what took place here. Not let them do any of the counter-spinning that they are trying to do about this being them having to react to some violent Anarchist.

From all the accounts I've seen, these so-called anarchists barely had enough people to field a football team, that hundreds of trained police officers in full riot gear couldn't have handled them? That's absurd.

GM Do you recommend that activists do work with police?

PR Well, obviously, I think there should be lines of communication in terms of what the laws are and the police should be made to respond to the law and to obey what the law is. In terms of working with police in what way?

GM Possibly informing the police of the tactics, asking what each side can expect. I believe there was a certain degree of that. Police did know that there would be tens of thousands of people marching. I believe they were aware that there was going to be some direct action, possibly blockades.

PR I would like to see more openness by the police before they start asking us to be open. They are the ones on the streets who have guns. They have the power to issue subpoenas on us. We are very limited in terms of what we can do to them. There is this tremendous move, getting back to what's called community policing, which is, basically, the rhetoric is get the police to work with the citizens.

What, in fact, is going on is that the police have under this rhetoric tremendously increased their ability to gather information on citizens, including what property they own, and inevitably the person in charge of community policing, at least the study I did in Portland, becomes the person in charge of the Tactical Operations Division, that is, the SWAT team, the division that's able to go into people's houses, knock down their door, and steal their property.

There are lots of funding issues that have to be addressed if the police are going to be, that if there is a crisis, police funding goes up, that the police could seize property and keep some of the proceeds. They have vested interests that are not necessarily often those of maintaining law and order. That there have been so little prosecutions of police for misconduct, mistreatment of activists, that the behavior that was noted by many activists in the jails has been going on for – to poor people who have gone to jails for years. If it was ever (inaudible) that didn't take place in the city.

They are not being open. They have an agenda, and it's not to work with us. It's not to serve the people. It's basically there to... I think by law it's by court decision. They are more there to protect property than they are even to protect life.

And that's speaking for myself again, not especially for the Guild.

GM I think with that very strong quote, that'd be a very good place to close. Thank you.

PR Thank you.

**End of Interview**