

**Interviewee: Han Shan**

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**Interviewer: Jeremy Simer**

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**Interview Summary:**

Han Shan of the Ruckus Society discusses his organization's involvement with other groups -- including RAN, Global Exchange, and DAN -- at the WTO protests. He describes the civil disobedience strategies used during the protests, and Ruckus' focus on corporate globalization issues and environment. Shan explains how Ruckus grew out of Greenpeace and sponsored action camps designed to promote grassroots efforts. Shan says that although some labor union representatives were concerned about Ruckus' emphasis on civil disobedience, including tactics of blocking streets and hanging banners, they did work and stay in contact with each other at the protests. Ruckus' goal, says Shan, is to maintain support from smaller, loosely affiliated groups around the country while concentrating on the environment, social justice, human rights and labor issues.



**JS**

So what's going on with Ruckus these days?

**HS**

Well, boy, we're buried. We're juggling. I've been having a lot of juggling dreams, which just shows how uncreative I am when it comes to metaphoric dream weaving. One of the things we're looking at soonest is the World Petroleum Congress, which comes to Calgary in June.

The World Petroleum Congress comes to Calgary June 11-15. We were up in Alberta a couple of weeks ago now for a camp that we co-sponsored, co-trained, with a kind of young direct action training organization called Co-Motion up there. And we've been working with a bunch of different U.S. groups here, like Friends of the Earth and Project Underground and Rainforest Action Network that are hoping to confront "Big Oil" and show them as the poster child for corporate globalization that they are. And that should be an interesting confrontation, because the stage, being Calgary -- it's pretty intense. It's a city and, indeed, a province, wholly propped up by the economy of extractions, particularly oil. So that should be wild.

But that's kind of the next soonest thing on the radar screen. I'm working mostly on the Conventions, looking at both Philly and L.A., or L.A., for sure. And we're presenting 'Democracy Action Camp' in L.A. in the hills of

Malibu above L.A., actually, July 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>. And hope to see it be our most culturally diverse camp yet. Trying to really strategically recruit so that we have a great brain trust there from people with many different issue foci, but whose intersection really is just the corporate sell-out of our democracy, and recognizing that whether you're talking about HMO's taking over healthcare; whether you're talking about the prison industrial complex; whether you're talking about environmental degradation, sweatshops, blah, blah, blah... Really, they all intersect at where corporate lobby, corporate money influences the way democracy happens in this country, or democracy doesn't happen in this country.

And so this camp is really kind of a next huge thing on Ruckus's radar screen, but we're looking at a bunch of stuff and just kind of trying to keep up with this great movement that's kicking ass on so many fronts.

**JS**

Yes, so, talking about that movement. Would you say that a lot of the energy that's going on right now comes from what happened here in Seattle last year?

**HS**

I think, obviously... Many people said this many times, and I think it's very important to understand, that the movement against corporate globalization or against economic imperialism is not a new movement but, in fact, is decades old and it's gone on around the world for decades. It's a very international movement. Indeed, the United States and folks in the U.S. have just joined the fray; have just joined the party. But it's also a very gratifying, hopeful sign. I do think that a lot of this energy that people feel like they're on task, people feel like they're winning. People feel like this movement is burgeoning, it's growing. I definitely think that it has its roots in what happened in Seattle. It's like a death.

**JS**

So when did the Ruckus Society get involved in the WTO protest effort?

**HS**

Well, we started talking about it in the springtime of '99. It was on people's radar screen. We knew it was coming. Certainly, we recognized it as an important target months and months out, but really, it was around the Human Rights Action Camp, which we presented our second annual.... well, not annual anymore. We've just had two. We had a Human Rights Action Camp in '98 and then again in '99 at the same place. I guess that was in May of '99 where we really started talking about the WTO as an impending target, as a confrontation that we wanted to see unfold in a meaningful way, and decided that we wanted to present a camp that would be geared towards this confrontation. It would be geared towards a movement working along globalization efforts, working on corporate power. And we decided that we wanted to do that that fall.

**JS** Now you said that it had been on your radar screen for a while. Do you remember how you first started hearing about? Was it through the major media? Was it through NGO contacts? Was it from the WTO itself?

**HS** No, it was more through NGO contacts. I think just as far as the way Ruckus works. We try to stay on the crest of the wave to some degree, but we also look to the movement and to campaigning organizations with whom we partner as sources for helping us understand where we should be heading in a direction. I think we've done a good job at being on the cutting edge to some degree, but leading the campaigns and the grass roots who really have their finger on the pulse, because we're unique in that way. We're not a campaigning organization ourselves. We work and support. We work to train and to support people of conscience, organizations of conscience who are picking discrete targets, who are doing cutting edge, important campaigns.

So, it was really through those kinds of contacts that we understood what kind of potential the confrontation with the WTO might have.

**JS** So, how did it get started, because the focus of the research that I'm doing, and I'm in concert with some other people at the University of Washington, is to look at exactly how the different coalitions came together. Who was talking to whom and why and what the issues were? So, can you describe the process? What phone calls were made or what meetings were at? I know it's a year ago now...

**HS** I know, and I think that's fascinating, and I'm so glad that you're doing that. But it's kind of a mystery to so many people that I've talked to. I'm eager to hear what you've figured out so far, because I don't have a great answer for you on that one. It was a very, very organic kind of development. We were planning on doing a camp in the Northwest in the fall. And we were planning on having it be more of a regional kind of watershed environmental camp, because it's been a little while since we've done a really kind of focused camp for the constituents that we kind of grew out of.

**JS** Ruckus grew out of Greenpeace, didn't it?

**HS** Well, no, no. Ruckus was founded by a fellow by the name of Mike Roselle, with some help from a bunch of other folks who were rolling around the Missoula, Montana area doing kind of Earth First! and Greenpeace forest defense. It certainly started as an organization very much rooted in grassroots conservation and environmental stuff. He was one of the co-founders of the Earth First! movement, as well as the Rain Forest Action Network. He worked for Greenpeace for a long time.

So our first bunch of camps really were for Greenpeace and Earth First! activists with a very forest-centric focus and really came out of trying to

support activists who were working on the salvage rider, particularly. And in the way that was decimating forests in the Northwest and the Upper Midwest.

So, it didn't come out of Greenpeace, but the Action Camp curriculum is somewhat modeled on the kind of camps, the Action Camps that Greenpeace presented in the late 80's and early 90's.

**JS** So those other organizations, the other NGOs you partnered with for the WTO, can you mention what some of them were, and what kind of activities you shared in, whether it was conference calls or meetings or...

**HS** Sure. Well, obviously, we have a pretty synergistic relationship with Rainforest Action Network. We talk to them constantly. We share a similar network. There are folks who self-identify as Ruckus and also work for RAN and vice versa. We talk to them about their campaigns all the time.

And in looking at the WTO, we've really talked together in the lead up to that. We certainly partnered in the way that we did our media strategy and looked at our messaging and how we were going to approach the whole thing. We certainly were talking to Global Exchange and some other groups in the Bay area. I was also just going to kind of WTO N30 meetings for months and months in the Bay area that just grew by leaps and bounds.

**JS** Do you remember who convened those meetings?

**HS** They were at Global Exchange. Who originally put them together? I don't really know. Obviously, Dana Hern and Juliette Beck were forces in making those meetings happen. For us, obviously, talking to David Solnit and the original convening of the Direct Action Network was certainly really important. Solnit didn't make Direct Action Network happen, but he deserves a lot of credit for catalyzing that vision and making it a reality, bringing it to fruition.

**JS** What about your relationship with Public Citizen and Citizens Trade Campaign? Did you guys work closely with them?

**HS** We didn't work closely with Public Citizen forces and Trade Campaign, or People for Fair Trade, as you know. But it was more of a recognition that we were working on the same thing, that we had similar goals and we might have different strategies and tactics, but we worked very hard to align and coordinate our efforts, and certainly, we communicated and knew that it was important to constantly communicate. So, I was at the office all the time talking to Dolan, talking to Juliette and her kind of dual role with the Trade Campaign and Global Exchange. So trying to be strategic in the way that we

coordinated our efforts, while also recognizing that we were going to be doing a lot of different stuff.

That's actually a bigger conversation and a really important thing. That's something that's new and something that we saw develop in Seattle to a large degree. There are a lot of groups working in very different ways with different constituencies, and maybe different ultimate goals who nonetheless are recognizing that as the right has come together with various goals, but recognizing they have similar adversaries, at least, we've recognized that we need to come together. In Seattle, there were a lot of folks who maybe didn't work super closely with each other in their discrete strategies, in their tactics that they took to the streets, but tried to at least talk and keep the lines of communication open. I talked to a lot of Labor. I talked to folks who were visibly nervous about who Ruckus was and what we might have planned, who nonetheless showed goodwill and recognized that we were allies in this battle. I think that kind of coming together is a rare thing and it was certainly gratifying.

**JS**

I remember hearing from some people in the Direct Action Network that there was some really pretty open opposition. You used the words nervousness, but some open kind of negative feelings coming from organized labor about the more sort of street heat stuff, about the concept of a shutdown and the Direct Action everything. Whether from Labor or from any other organization, do you remember having any kind of direct challenges to what you're doing, and saying, "Hey, you shouldn't be doing this. This is going to mess us up. This is going to get in our way."

**HS**

Honestly, no. I know that there was nervousness and I know that there were some heated debates. I never got a call, and I did talk to Labor. I talked to folks from the King County Labor Council, I talked to Teamsters, I talked to the AFL-CIO, and no one ever told me that they didn't want to see the Direct Action Network out to shut down the WTO. In fact, and I'll say this because I know that no one has tried to pretend otherwise, that in fact there was some kinds of wink, wink, nudge, nudge. "We know that you're doing what you're doing and we actually support it and think it's great. We, because of our constituency, have to do things a different way, but we support you all and we know you support us."

At one point, I talked to some Labor folks who were really nervous about getting their buses in to the big Labor rally who wanted to talk to coordinators at the Direct Action Network and make sure that no highways got shut down that would be important to getting their 10,000 people into the stadium that day who were coming from out of town. But, ultimately, I thought that there was a lot of respect for different strategies, and certainly for different tactics in the streets.

I also think that there's a difference between, and you know this better than anybody, a difference between what people – what the grassroots and Labor and what the leadership are saying, and what they want to do. There was obviously leadership involved in the Labor march that was horrified at what they saw in the streets and in seeing organized Labor breaking off and joining the mass action in the streets of Seattle on the 30<sup>th</sup>, but that was not engineered by the Direct Action Network. It wasn't engineered by the shutdown crowd. In fact, there were huge amounts of rank and file who always had every intention of joining the shutdown action, but wanted to do it from the march. And that was always out there.

Some press claimed later that some rank and file were somehow manipulated or convinced by the Direct Action crowd to join the mass action, when in fact no one acted out of anything but their own free will to join the street party. Organized Labor, as far as the rank and file goes, was as excited as anybody else that the WTO got shut down that day.

**JS**

Of course, in retrospect, everything has sort of been changed by looking back on what happened, but do you remember what the Ruckus Society's goals were in getting involved with the WTO, and what it wanted to accomplish, say, from the Action Camp and also from November 30<sup>th</sup>?

**HS**

Yes. It really did evolve somewhat organically, and I was the "WTO Action Coordinator" going into it. I was really new in Ruckus. Basically my first project full-time for Ruckus was coordinating the "Globalize This!" Action Camp. After that, it kind of rolled right into WTO organizing.

We didn't know what it would look like, and we weren't sure what our role was going to be. We went into it wanting to support the movement. We went into it wanting to offer logistics support. We went into it wanting to offer training for direct action. We went into it wanting to make some kind of framing actions unfold, some high profile action team, affinity group-oriented actions happen, which did.

We didn't go into it expecting to do as much media work as we did end up doing. We didn't go into it planning on being spokespeople, although I did end up being a spokesperson for Direct Action Network frequently.

Really, our intention was supporting a movement that had kind of picked the WTO as a target, and I think wisely so. I've lost my train of thought. I'm sorry.

**JS**

No, actually, that was actually a pretty good statement. You mentioned some of the high profile actions that Ruckus was involved in. The ones that I know of were the ones that ended up in the paper with Ruckus all over, like the

banner hangs, like the crane and stuff like that. Were there any other actions? What else was Ruckus involved in with the WTO?

**HS**

We coordinated an action with Global Exchange that was a banner hung on Old Navy's flagship store that said, "Sweatshops – Free Trade or Corporate Slavery?" Basically, wanting to tackle an issue that would make sense as far as what the WTO does, but a sub-focus, really. But put a human face on what kind of globalization the WTO really means. People have said, and I don't know if it's Global Exchange's slogan or if it's against sweatshops as a whole, "The road to free trade is paved with sweatshops." We thought that was an intriguing target, and we'd hopefully kind of tear it down and make it make sense to some folks. When we talk about the WTO, we're talking about forests being cut down. We're talking about sea turtles. We're talking about sweatshops.

We thought that the context was there. The stage was set on many levels, and we felt like we could hit a lot of different subjects before the big day. And so we partnered with Global Exchange and it was their campaign but really our action team that put that action together.

**JS**

What about on November 30<sup>th</sup> itself?

**HS**

On November 30<sup>th</sup>, there was kind of a large affinity group made up of folks from Ruckus, from Rainforest Action Network, some of whom would self-identify with Ruckus as well, folks from Global Exchange, and a bunch of other unaffiliated folks; people from Amazon Watch. We had a lot of different roles.

One of the things that we had tried to do with Global Exchange was organize kind of a mass CD (civil disobedience) action that would be kind of an orchestrated line crossing of these different delegations of people who were there, representing different issues, that all really intersect at the WTO - a delegation for human rights, a delegation for democracy, a delegation for the environment.

In the end, we just joined the larger blockade around the convention center, but we went into it playing a lot of different roles as far as the tactical maneuvers in the streets on the 30<sup>th</sup>. There were Ruckus folks involved in the communications, involved in helping to guide the tactics for the shutdown, and in media work, and at the IMC interfacing with the media working group doing media from the street.

**JS**

The Direct Action Media Working Group? In speaking of helping guide the actions and such, I think I remember hearing this attributed to Ruckus that there had been some negotiations between Ruckus and the city or the police or something, and that the police had said that non-violence on behalf of the

protesters would be met by non-violence on behalf of the police. Did I get that story right?

**HS**

Yes.

**JS**

Can you describe that? Is that a conversation that you've had or someone else in Ruckus had?

**HS**

I did. Yes, I started meeting with the police a few weeks out. John Sellers and I met with a couple of different cops on a couple different occasions. We actually had dinner one night with the Commander of the police response to the protests.

**JS**

Is that Joiner?

**HS**

No, not Joiner. I am so fried. I can't believe I'm not remembering this guy's name. What the hell was his name? I have no idea why I'm forgetting it, because I talked to him about 400 times during the time. I'm just spacing out. Jim Pugell. Captain Jim Pugell, who was basically the Seattle P.D.'s Commander in Charge of the police response to the WTO protest overall, as well as a lieutenant of his who was in charge of the Convention Center itself, and I forget what his name is, too. But I met with them. I also met with Joiner. I spoke with Joiner at a press conference.

Yes, we were repeatedly assured that non-violence on behalf of protesters would be met with non-violence on behalf of the police, which obviously was thrown out the window. We were very clear, forthright and open with our intentions. I declared on 50 different occasions in front of police, to police, that we were going to shut down the WTO, that we were going to non-violently put our bodies in the way, that we were going to blockade delegates from getting in. I described it in detail, on the radio while Dave Reichert was sitting next to me doing a radio show. He's the King County Sheriff.

I stood at a press conference, with Joiner to my left and the mayor to my right, and stood at the podium and told the whole world that we were going to shut down the WTO. We were going to do it non-violently. We expected a non-violent response from the police. And that was when Joiner said he was going to kill us with kindness. He obviously defines kindness a bit differently that I do.

So, yes, it was unbelievable. We made every effort to be very open and forthright about our plans to conspire in public as it were, to be transparent as we demand the WTO to be. And all that was promised to us was completely disregarded come the morning of November 30<sup>th</sup>.



We never met with them to negotiate because we had no position to negotiate. We were going to do what we believed was right, and what we set out to do. The intention was to make sure that people were safe and make sure that they knew what to expect, and to declare that we, indeed, were nonviolent. But yes, there weren't any negotiations.

JS

To sort of jump back a bit, when we were talking a little bit about the "Globalize This!" action camp before, but I forgot to ask, what was accomplished with that action camp? Other than training people, obviously, for not nonviolent direct action, was there any other kind of impact that you think it had?

HS

Yes, I think there were a few impacts. First of all, from a media standpoint, there had obviously been a growing amount of attention to the impending protest, but as far as major media attention, that camp seemed like the shot over the bow for me and for a lot of other people, I think. We were swarmed by media -- international media, in fact. There was a front-page article in the *Wall Street Journal*. It was in the *USA Today*. It was on the front page of the *Seattle Times* and the *Post-Intelligencer* some three times during that week. It was the first notice the public got at how organized we were.

JS

How intentful were we?

HS

Yes, how intentful, how organized, that, in fact, we weren't a bunch of freaky, ne'er do wells as the media would have liked to portray us. That, in fact, we were people from many walks of life, with a lot of very valid and grave concerns about what the WTO and continued economic globalization means to our lives; whether we are concerned about the environment; whether we were concerned about human rights and labor standards, sweatshops, genetically-modified organizations in the food we feed our children.

That all came out of that camp, because there were so many people there from so many different kind of issue-foci, so many different organizations represented. There were Steelworkers. There were Tibetans in exile. There were Earth Firsters from Encino County. Everyone was there together, and we showed that we can speak in a unified voice, that, in fact, the WTO was who we should thank for bringing us together because, indeed, this larger issue of corporate globalization affects us all, regardless of how we self-identify, as human rights activists or social justice activists or environmentalists or just citizens who care about the future of this planet.

The other thing that it did -- it was the first place where the Direct Action Network really was able to come together, not just in Seattle but from a lot of different places. And we had Direct Action Network meetings actually at the camp. Action camps are always inspiring. Just to bring that many people together to dream a night under the stars and party together and talk about all

these different things, I can't imagine how I would have felt going into Seattle without that camp.

**JS**

Right. It's interesting that you mentioned the DAN meetings happened, because that was the next question I wanted to ask. Although it seems that Ruckus and the Direct Action groups that came together in that network tend to share sort of a similar spirit, the tactics and organizational structure that the two sets of groups use is pretty different, right? So what was the relationship like? What were the interactions between DAN and Ruckus in terms of making decisions about the action camp and other actions? I'd imagine there might have been some challenges to that. Were there?

**HS**

There were certainly challenges. There always are in any kind of coalition work, as you well know. The camp itself was Ruckus's deal, and when we present a camp, even though we may try to really partner with a group or constituency that we want to help shape the focus of a camp, that we want to help shape the campaign brain trust at a camp, help shape the tone of a camp, nonetheless, bottom line is that it is Ruckus's camp and it's what we do.

Now when it came to the Direct Action Network, we were just one participant amongst many, and decisions were made on consensus. We were no more important than anybody else, and absolutely comfortable with that role, because a lot of us come out of organizing in that kind of capacity and with that kind of hierarchal structure. Ruckus is actually a strange animal as far as that kind of organizing stuff goes anyway, because there are three distinct parts to Ruckus.

Mike Rozelle who works with us still and our founder, as I mentioned before, has defined it for years in this way. There's this organization that has an office and has staff people and John is the Director and I'm the Program Coordinator and Becky, here, is the Operations Coordinator. We've got this headquarters. All this information flows through here, and we act like an NGO to some degree.

Then there's this network of some 150 people or 1,000 people, depending on where you gauge it, that is made up of people working on a lot of disparate issues and who are running around the country self-identifying as Ruckus, doing trainings and pitching in to different things that's Ruckus. We love that. Ultimately we can't exert much control over it, and we wouldn't. We trust those people and there are a lot of great people of conscience doing incredible work under the Ruckus banner.

Then there's this kind of family and this community that makes up Ruckus that's something else entirely. So interfacing with Direct Action Network, there were challenges, but really in the end we recognized ourselves as just one group amongst many. When we were there with DAN, we were DAN.

When I spoke at a press conference, I spoke as a person working with the Direct Action Network like any other, and really tried to approach my work with DAN as an individual. And I think most of the Ruckus folks really approached their work in the same way as an individual who was part of the Direct Action Network like any other.

**JS** One last question. Do you think that the experience of being involved in the WTO protests affected Ruckus's outlook, or did it change it in any way?

**HS** Deeply.

**JS** Really?

**HS** Yes. There is still concern about it. We are still going back and forth. We're nervous about this new movement that we're part of. We're excited as hell about it, too. It certainly is something that fills us with hope, that there is this burgeoning movement, that there are young people with incredibly sophisticated critiques of global capital and people who are looking at their roots and not just the leaves, to quote Thoreau. I just put it on my new email signature. He says in Walden, "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil for every one who is striking at the root."

That disparity is closing a bit. There are people recognizing that we need to work on symptoms, for sure, but as we treat the symptoms, we need to also be treating the underlying disease. So what the WTO symbolized for Ruckus and for a lot of people was, "Yeah. We're going to work on these environmental struggles. We're going to work on these labor struggles. We're going to work on human rights and social justice," while also recognizing that there are underlying economic paradigms, that there are international financial institutions. There are unaccountable bureaucrats and governments that are driving this stuff. That loggers don't cut down trees; multi-national corporations do. That it's deeper, and I think we're all really excited at that kind of change in the way that people look at campaigns, at grass roots organizing.

And so it's why we were in D.C. or in the World Bank and IMF meetings. That's why we're going to be in L.A. and in Philly, looking at these conventions, trying to work on the roots as much as we ever have, on the branches so to speak.

At the same time, of course, it's been challenging for us because it's been a quick and sometimes sloppy evolution. Where we come from is doing action camps, primarily, and some special projects, basically partnering with organizations to help them pull off direct actions at important moments, strategic moments for a campaign.

But to get involved in these big, mass mobilizations and do these convergences and pitching in with folks that are unknown quantities to us and helping to support campaigns that sometimes we don't think are the most strategic in the world, but we want to help because we also recognize they're important.

It's difficult. It's trying. It scares us, but as I said before, it's also the best thing going on out there. It's really the first global movement that I think has ever existed. The anti-colonial, anti-imperialist movement that liberated a lot of developing countries from their colonial governors was a third world struggle, not a first world struggle. Now we are really building solidarity between the grass roots and the majority world, which would be the two-thirds world as it were.

Folks here in the U.S. and in Europe where the decisions are being made, where these international financial institutions and these economic policies are being made in our back yard, and that's fucking incredible.

**JS**

For people in the future who are trying to understand how the coalitions came together, how the actions came together in Seattle, and what its impact was, do you have any final things you'd like to get across that we haven't talked about?

**HS**

The only thing that I would say, and particularly it's just on my mind as we move into this summer with these conventions, talking about working on the root level - treating the disease while we treat the symptoms is one of the most challenging things in the world to do because when folks hit the streets in L.A. around the conventions this summer, there's going to be people outside screaming about healthcare, screaming about three strikes, screaming about Mumia, screaming about Redwood trees getting cut down and so much more.

And you know what? They're all right and they're all incredibly important, and I wouldn't ever attempt to quantify or prioritize the importance of any of those issues. But what's going to be challenging and what I think is so important is that we are able to recognize where these issues intersect so that we can speak with one voice about where the roots lie and make sure that while we are treating the symptoms and recognizing how important the symptoms are, particularly when they affect communities in such profound ways, how can I expect somebody from South Central whose all their friends and relatives who happen to be young black men are being criminalized by a prison industrial system that is being driven by corporate money and lobbying on the legislative level in our government. How can I expect them to want to work on rain forest destruction, right?

But what we need to do is recognize that there is a place where the rubber meets the road, and it's corporate power. It's the hostile corporate takeover of

our democracy. It's unaccountability and non-transparent decisions being made by bureaucrats on Wall Street and Washington. That's really the most challenging thing, but the most important thing about this new movement is indeed the fact that it's a new movement that exists.

**JS**

Well great, Han. This has been really helpful. I appreciate it.

**End of Interview**

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