

Background

In November 2003, the Free Trade Area of the Americas Ministerial was held in Miami, Florida. This Ministerial brought together thousands of people from across the hemisphere to protest the FTAA and to demonstrate that Another World Is Possible.

There was a broad spectrum of activities. The Root Cause Coalition of local groups marched from Fort Lauderdale and held a People's Tribunal which brought hundreds of voices from impacted communities into the streets. There were also dozens of educational and cultural events; a mass march and rally; a colorful and spirited direct action; a beautiful convergence space, a big community garden, a model grey water system and a Really, Really Free Market.

What we faced was a city taken over by the police. They terrorized everyone into believing that people who opposed the FTAA were violent, bad, scary and unwanted!

The fear campaign, backed up by regressive, anti-protest ordinances created an environment where the police felt impunity. With no real political restraint, they felt free to assault thousands of peaceful protestors.

In what is now being referred to as the Miami Model, the Free Trade Area of the Americas Ministerial marked the worst and most systematic, unjust and brutal attack on civil liberties and human rights of mass mobilizations in recent history by local, state and federal authorities in the US.

- Unarmed demonstrators, local residents and journalists were assaulted with an arsenal of weapons including teargas, pepper gas, pepper spray, plastic and beanbag projectiles, rubber and wooden bullets, pepper ball bullets, electric-shock tasers, electric shields, concussion grenades and wooden clubs.
- Armored military vehicles and helicopters were also used.
- Hundreds of people were arbitrarily stopped, detained, and threatened, and in the worst cases randomly searched, arrested and beaten.
- Demonstrations, rallies and vigils were disrupted while participants of these events were verbally harassed and threatened.
- People were surrounded, attacked and arrested without provocation.
- Undercover police and agent provocateurs were widely used and FBI agents confronted activists in their homes.
- People were routinely followed by undercover police and places of assembly placed under surveillance.
- Churches, synagogues and places of worship were harassed from housing or hosting protestors.
- Hundreds of people in buses, including many senior citizens, were turned away from demonstrations.
- Organizers were harassed and organizing spaces were disrupted. Police engaged in illegal vehicle and personal searches, and personal property was destroyed and thrown in the street. In jail, people were left in handcuffs for over 12 hours--at times cutting off circulation to their hands.
- Many of those arrested were denied water for over 12 hours and food for up to 24 hours. Some were denied access to phones and their attorneys for up to two days.

Certain protestors were targeted and held overnight in freezing cold, sprayed with high power hoses, and in some cases sexually assaulted or beaten.

It is now up to people around the country who value our right to protest to stand up and speak out to stop the Miami Model and reclaim the right to protest as a legitimate act.