

Toronto students protest visit by "Campus Watch" founder

Our correspondent
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Despite snow and bitterly cold conditions in Toronto, some 100 York University students and faculty held a protest Tuesday against a visit to the campus by columnist Daniel Pipes. Invited to speak by the Jewish Student Federation, Pipes is a right-wing Zionist and founder of the "Campus Watch" web site, which witch-hunts academics who question the Bush administration's militaristic policies and its support for Israeli repression in the occupied territories.

The York University administration stepped in to arrange a protected venue for Pipes's planned lecture after both the York Student Centre and York's Centre for International and Security Studies withdrew their sponsorship of his visit, citing concerns over his web site. To ensure that Pipes's speech went ahead, the university transformed the Tait McKenzie gym into a highly guarded lecture hall, barring all access to the students who normally use the facility.

Extraordinary security measures were adopted to ensure that Pipes could speak without facing any dissent. According to the *Toronto Star*, the university and the Canadian Jewish Congress jointly hired Pinkerton private security guards and requested that Toronto police be called in from across the city. At least 100 officers and guards were visible, surrounding the building, blocking all entrances and scanning all entrants with metal detectors.

The protest remained peaceful despite the arrival of mounted police officers, whose presence was highly provocative. Several security cameras were installed to record the identities of protesters.

Entry to the event was restricted to 240 people who had obtained tickets the previous day. When a York faculty member asked for admission in order to challenge Pipes's views, he was refused. Canadian Jewish Congress Executive Director Bernie Farber

claimed there were simply no seats left, but later contradicted himself, saying entry would not have been a problem if there had been no student protest.

Chanting anti-war slogans, students and faculty members denounced Pipes's pro-war views, his attacks on academic freedom and their exclusion from the hall. Later, they marched to the office of York University President Lorna Marsden and sat outside her door to protest the university's intervention in support of Pipes.

Pipes's Campus Watch site seeks to intimidate and silence the mounting opposition on North American campuses to Washington's plans to invade Iraq and its assault on democratic rights, including the arbitrary rounding up of Arab and Islamic residents. The site has targeted professors who criticize US militarism or Israeli violence in the occupied territories, calling on governments and alumni to withhold funding from their universities.

York University is listed among the 33 universities monitored by Pipe's web site. Students and faculty members are invited to send in reports on offending professors. Campus Watch currently features an article by *Toronto Star* columnist Rosie DiManno denouncing those York academics who objected to Pipes's visit as "muzzlers of academic free speech" who are "unfit to teach anybody anything—unless intolerance and totalitarianism are now university credits."

In his speech at the university, according to a report in the *Toronto Star*, Pipes condemned his opponents as "barbarians who would close down civilized discussion." He exhorted his audience to purge universities of such "extremism," declaring, "It is time to take these institutions back."

Posing as a champion of free speech, he said, "This kind of hostility against freedom of speech invariably comes from three forces: not the right but the left; not

the Christian right but the Islamists; not the pro-Israel activists but the pro-Palestinian activists.”

The event itself demonstrated the opposite: that it is defenders of Bush’s war policies, Christian fundamentalists and right-wing Zionists who are increasingly resorting to police measures, as well as blacklisting and intimidation, in an attempt to stifle political expression and silence opposition to US imperialism and Israel’s subjugation of the Palestinians.



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