

Antiwar protests in Canada's principal cities

Our correspondents
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Hundreds of thousands of Canadians joined demonstrations Saturday in protest against the illegal and brutal US-British invasion of Iraq. In addition to a Montreal march that was joined by some two hundred thousand workers and youth, there were major protests in Halifax, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver and Victoria.

Some 20,000 people marched on the Alberta Legislature in Edmonton, making Saturday's demonstration one of the largest in that province's history. The day before, Alberta Premier Ralph Klein had written an open letter to the US Ambassador to Canada, hailing the US attack on Iraq and implicitly condemning the federal Liberal government for not joining Washington's war coalition.

As many as 80,000 people marched from the US Consulate to a rally at Queen's Park, the site of the Ontario legislature. Speeches were given there by peace activists, trade union officials, representatives of the Arab community, and the leader of the Ontario wing of the social-democratic NDP, Howard Hampton.

Particularly noteworthy were the large numbers of high school students, many of them involved in their first-ever political demonstration.

Chris from Oakwood high school, pointed to the fact that the US government and the media repeat incessantly that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction while providing no proof. "It's amazing the way they can get away with this. They're breaking international law. They're going against the U.N." Asked how he thought war could be stopped, Chris said he favored the call made by many fellow protestors for a trade embargo against the US "even though that would be economic suicide. We need an international movement."

Lily, a high school student and native of Iran told the *World Socialist Web Site*,

"The main reason [some people think war is justified]

is our media. Because our media is so-controlled by the government, all we see is their side. They never show us the other side. Especially on CNN, it's like a soap opera to them. They show 'Count-down to Iraq' and there's children actually dying there."

"Even George Bush himself said that it's about oil, [in that he threatened the Iraqis with reprisals if they dared touch the oil]. He doesn't care about the people of Iraq. It's about the oil. That's all its about. We know Saddam Hussein is a bad man. It was the Americans that supported Iraq in its war on Iran and gave arms and artillery and chemical weapons to Saddam Hussein to bomb Iran. I don't like Saddam Hussein but I don't like George Bush either."

After the main demonstration broke up, several thousand protestors returned to the US Consulate. Subsequently, police threatened them with attack by mounted police and pepper spray if they did not immediately disperse. Although the police order was obeyed, four protestors were arrested.

Five thousand people marched to Parliament Hill in chilly, rainy weather Saturday to voice their opposition to the US aggression against Iraq. The crowd was comprised of people of all ages and diverse ethnic origins—English, French and immigrant.

Most of the official speeches did not stray beyond lamentations about the horrors of war and Canadian nationalist critiques of US foreign policy. James Clancy, a trade union speaker, praised the federal Liberal government for refusing to join the US-led war coalition. In fact Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has voiced his support for a quick US victory and has refused to recall Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel and ships from the Persian Gulf region that are actively supporting the US invasion.

Polite silence greeted most of the speeches. But when a representative of the "Code Rose" pacifist group, urged the audience to "support the policy of no

government” and said, “no people want war,” the crowd responded with chants of “solidarity with the peoples of the world.”

A spokeswoman for the Ottawa Serbian Heritage Society said it was important to remember that this month is the fourth anniversary of the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. She reported that birth deformities have soared since the NATO attack and criticized Bush for not being a “genuine Christian.”

Canadian peace activists in Baghdad were supposed to address the crowd by a direct telephone link, but the US bombardment made this impossible. Instead an email from the activists was read out. They reported that US and British planes and missiles were continuing to attack Iraq’s principal city and that they were waiting for the morrow to be able to inspect the destruction.

Following the speeches, the crowd marched to the British High Commission and the US embassy.

Copies of the WSWS statement “Build an international working class movement against imperialist war” were eagerly taken by many of the protesters.



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