

# Canada: Thousands protest against occupation of Iraq

Guy Charron  
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Thousands of people marched Saturday in cities across Canada to protest against the US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The largest demonstration was in Montreal, where some 20,000 participated. This was far less than had attended either the February or March 15 antiwar mobilizations. But a protest of twenty thousand is by Montreal standards a major political event. Moreover, those who marched were acutely conscious that they were doing so in defiance of a propaganda campaign of shock and awe and lies and deception aimed at portraying the imperialist conquest of Iraq as “liberation.”

Although Canada’s Liberal government formally refused to join the US-led “coalition of the willing,” it and Canada’s corporate media have more and more faithfully repeated the Bush administration’s claims about the causes and progress of the war.

Unlike at the previous Montreal antiwar demonstrations, its organizers—the Collectif échec à la guerre (Stop the War Coalition)—widely distributed signs Saturday bearing political slogans. These included, “No to the US occupation of Iraq,” “Convene an emergency UN Assembly,” “For the self-determination of the Iraqi people,” and “Recall the Canadian troops.” The latter slogan is reference to the fact that Canada has officers embedded, as part of an exchange program, in US and British military units in Iraq and that the Canadian navy is part of an “anti-terrorist” task force that is working in concert with US military vessels in the Persian Gulf.

Among the marchers were large numbers of working-class and student youth, trade unionists and professional workers. There were few union banners and placards, however, and no union speakers. Jack Layton, the newly-elected leader of Canada’s social-

democratic party, led a small delegation of New Democrats. Conspicuous by their absence were any prominent members of the pro- *indépendantiste* Parti Québécois and Bloc Québécois.

The anger of the crowd was palpable. Whenever US President George W. Bush or British Prime Minister Tony Blair were denounced as war criminals there was enthusiastic applause. But perhaps the most heartfelt ovation was when one of the speakers denounced the media for collaborating with the Pentagon and repeating its lies.

Demonstrators eagerly snapped up copies of the *World Socialist Web Site* statement “Political lessons of the war in Iraq.” Many of those who spoke to the WSWS conceded they had been shocked by recent events and are unsure how to proceed.

Raymond Legault, spokesperson of the Collectif échec à la guerre, accused the US and British militaries of presiding over an orgy of destruction—beginning with their bombardment of Iraqi cities and the massacre of Iraq’s mainly conscript soldiers and continuing with their indifference to the looting of Iraqi hospitals, museums and other governmental institutions.

“We think reconstruction is a nice word,” said Legault, “but it should be done at the expense of those who destroyed Iraq,” [i.e. the US and British].

While Legault forthrightly condemned the occupation of Iraq as a colonialist enterprise, he and the march organizers continued to advance the perspective of placing pressure on the federal Liberal government and the United Nations to contain and constrain US imperialism. “Our task ,” declared Legault, “is to change the foreign policy of Canada.” Françoise David, the former president of the Quebec Women’s Federation, demanded the Canadian government “revive the Iraqi question at the United Nations.”

In fact, the Chrétien Liberal government has indicated it is ready to assist the US in getting UN sanction for its occupation of Iraq and, should that be denied, is nonetheless eager to cooperate with Washington in creating a pro-US regime in Baghdad. Already, Prime Minister Chrétien has suggested that Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers could be dispatched to Iraq to assist in creating a new police force.

In Ottawa, two thousand people gathered on Parliament Hill Saturday to oppose the war. Antiwar marches were also held in Halifax, Winnipeg, and Vancouver.

In Toronto, artists from many disciplines staged an antiwar concert, speakout and festival in the city's Nathan Phillips Square. The "One Big No" event, organized by Artists Against War, featured spoken word, art installations, kids pavilions, theatre, music and clowns. Hundreds of people attended the all-day event, which ended in the evening with a concert performed by musicians such as Lillian Allen, Cowboy Junkies, Jian Ghomeshi, Sarah Harmer, Jacksoul, King Cobb Steelie and Lowest of the Low.



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