

# Canada: Protests in more than 50 cities

A WSWWS reporting team  
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Canadians in more than 50 cities and towns demonstrated Saturday against the illegal US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The largest protest was in Vancouver, where at least 20,000 heard antiwar bands and speakers. In Montreal about 7,000 trade unionists, other workers, youth and unemployed joined a demonstration called by the *Collectif échec à la guerre* (Stop the War Coalition) to oppose the “so-called ‘war on terror,’” express “solidarity with the peoples of Iraq, Afghanistan, [and] Palestine against occupation,” and demand more funding for public services, rather than the military and the “totalitarian surveillance of citizens.”

In Toronto more than 5,000 people turned out despite pouring rain and in Ottawa some 2,000 demonstrators braved a snow storm to march from Parliament Hill to the US Embassy, then to the British High Commission and the headquarters of the Ministry of National Defence.

Olivia Chow, a Toronto municipal councillor and prospective candidate for the social-democratic New Democratic Party in the coming federal election, was among those who addressed the Toronto demonstration. Chow criticized Prime Minister Paul Martin for having appointed David Pratt, a Liberal MP who broke with the government to support the Iraq war, as his defence minister and for signalling that Canada will participate in the Bush administration’s missile defence program. In keeping with the Canadian nationalist perspective promoted by the NDP, Chow repeatedly touted “Canadian values” as a progressive and pacific alternative to US militarism, although Canada is itself an imperialist power and its ruling class was an enthusiastic supporter of the British Empire and a major belligerent in the world wars of the last century.

Chow’s husband, federal NDP leader Jack Layton, sent a message of solidarity that was read out to the crowd. Ignoring the UN Security Council’s complicity

in both the occupation of Iraq and the US orchestrated coup against Haiti’s democratically-elected president, Layton urged Canadians to put their faith in international law and multilateral institutions. “It has never been a more important time,” declared Layton, “to be on the side of peace, on the side of the United Nations, and on the side of international law—the only way we are going to have international laws with teeth, laws that bind every nation to peace, is through public pressure to respect these laws like we’re doing today.”

Also addressing the Toronto demonstration was Jerry Heintzmann, a US soldier who deserted from the 82nd Airborne Division to escape deployment to Iraq and is currently seeking political refugee status in Canada.

“Although I am no longer [in Fort Bragg],” said Heintzmann, “I am thankful for having had the experience because without it I believe I would have lived the rest of my life unaware of my country’s aims in the world and how it uses its young to naively fulfill them...”

“As a soldier the only way I could stop this was by taking myself out of the equation. That’s why we are here today. The Canadian people overwhelmingly said no to the war and your government listened, to a point. They said no to a war based on false pretences. It was evident before America even attacked Iraq that Iraq was not home to weapons of mass destruction...”

“I refuse to be a pawn in such an imperialist game and an act of aggression with no defensive basis. I think most of the American people would have refused as well had the Bush administration not exploited their justifiable fears regarding terrorism in the wake of September 11.

“Yes Saddam Hussein was a tyrant, however the responsibility of overthrowing him belonged to the Iraqi people.... The only democracy likely to emerge in Iraq is an oligarchy of puppets that will impose the miracle of privatization on the Iraqi economy thus

making it a feast for multinational corporations.”

Fahim Kayani faces deportation after being falsely accused by the Canadian government and press of being part of a terrorist conspiracy. Fahim told the Toronto demonstration, “I am one of the 23 Pakistanis who were arrested under allegations of terrorism. It was totally a brutal act and totally insane because they had nothing [as proof]. We were shackled, put in a maximum security prison. We were tortured mentally and emotionally. Simply, we were treated like animals.... I am not a terrorist and I was never charged with any terrorism.... Now they want to deport me just to hide the facts and their mistake.”

A highpoint of the Ottawa rally was the speech by Haitian journalist Jean St. Vil. He provided details of the role that the Martin Liberal government played in last month’s ouster of Haiti’s elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. St. Vil noted that Port-au-Prince airport was under the control of Canadian troops when US and French officials were hustling Aristide out of the country in what the deposed Haitian president has called a “political kidnapping.” Earlier Canada had joined with the US and France to block CARICOM (the association of Caribbean states) from assisting Aristide in confronting an armed rebellion led by thugs of previous Haitian dictatorships. In the Ottawa crowd, there were several Haitian immigrants demanding that Canada immediately withdraw its troops from the Caribbean-island country.

WSWS supporters distributed hundreds of leaflets at both the Montreal and Toronto demonstrations.

Rob and Sarah, workers from the industrial city of Hamilton, told the WSWS they feared the Martin Liberal government was seeking to tie Canada ever more closely to the Bush administration. Sarah said, “I’d like to see Canada withdraw all troops out of any occupied territories and support peace. Maybe send medicine, send clothing; all the essentials rather than sending guns.”

Chris Dwyer, an artist, was at the demonstration to oppose the occupation of Iraq and press for an international inquiry into the events of September 11, 2001. Part of a group that is campaigning for such an inquiry, Dwyer said the Bush administration’s explanation for 9/11, including the numerous security breaches, is implausible.

“I believe that somebody somewhere, or a group of

people, turned a blind eye, more or less silently guided people through the gates,” Chris commented. “These guys had ridiculous amounts of errors on their visa applications, but they all got in. They were all under surveillance by the FBI, the CIA.... It’s just not possible. I think that 9/11 was really a milestone as far as the new world order. It’s the tool the US is using to implement something they’ve wanted to implement for years according to their own documents.”

Mike, a freelance writer from Hamilton, is a regular WSWS reader: “I think the writing is extremely good and the analysis clearly brings out the truth of the situation in Iraq and elsewhere. Demonstrations like this are great, but clearly they’re not enough. We need to do more to capture the hearts and souls of people to really build this movement and to oppose war and the policies of the Bush administration.”



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