

'No war for oil,' students say

Across Canada protesters against Iraq war urge that Bush be dropped instead of bombs

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With reports from CP and Reuters

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MONTREAL, TORONTO -- Students across Canada traded in books for banners and bullhorns yesterday as they joined the swelling protest movement worldwide against war in Iraq.

As the possibility of a military conflict grows, so have the voices of opposition.

In Montreal, hundreds of students from more than a dozen colleges and universities marched through the city centre in a late-winter storm to denounce the looming war. Several placards read Drop Bush, Not Bombs.

"We students are the people who are going to run society in a couple of years, and we are against this war," organizer Valérie Leclerc said as she marched along Ste.-Catherine Street toward the U.S. consulate. "We think there are better ways to solve this problem."

At Toronto's York University, students occupied president Lorna Marsden's office after four protesters were detained by police. Pam Frache of the Canadian Federation of Students said a student was released immediately, while others were released later without being charged. Earlier, students braved the snowy weather to hold information pickets outside. Many later joined others at a protest in downtown Toronto.

"People wanted to send a message of concern and a message to the Prime Minister that Canada's role should be one of a peacekeeper," Ms. Frache said at Nathan Phillips Square.

Around the world, tens of thousands of students cut classes to demonstrate in the protest called Books not Bombs, co-ordinated by the National Youth and Student Peace Coalition, a U.S. group.

In London, students chanted "No war for oil" as they staged a sit-in outside Prime Minister Tony Blair's official residence.

The protest by mostly teenaged students appeared to catch security at 10 Downing St. by surprise and overshadowed the presentation of a petition by poets against the war. More police officers were brought in after some protesters tried to scale the gates.

Students were not alone in protesting. From Rome to Rwanda, Buenos Aires to Berlin, Roman Catholics responded to Pope John Paul's call for the faithful to observe Ash Wednesday with fasting and prayer to avert a "dramatic conflict" in Iraq.

"Everyone has to knowingly assume their responsibility and make a common effort to spare humanity another dramatic conflict," the Pope said.

Yesterday marked the first day of the 40-day period of Lent, during which Christians are called on to make sacrifices, usually by giving up rich food for a short period.

The Archdiocese of Montreal responded to the Pope's words as Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte called on Catholic churches to open for services last night.

The church placed a provocative antiwar advertisement in several Montreal newspapers yesterday. The ad features a handgun with its trigger jammed by a tiny cross. "Let's pray to maintain peace," the ad reads.

In Quebec City, 270 Roman Catholic churches rang their bells at noon in a message for peace, and planned to do so every day until Lent is over.

In Ottawa, a coalition of citizen groups and student associations bought a full-page ad in the Ottawa Citizen to denounce war.

The ad says the coalition rejects the U.S. call for war against Iraq and urges Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to "actively object to any aggression against the people of Iraq."

