

Canada Report by Marcia Merry

Anti-U.S. protests growing

George Bush's Persian Gulf war and the U.S.-Canada free trade pact are fueling hatred against Washington.

While Canadian parliamentary leaders vacillated on backing U.S. warfare on Iraq the day after the U.S. bombing assault on Baghdad, thousands of Canadian citizens are being more resolute. They are taking to the streets to show their opposition—to war and to Washington.

In the past few years, Ottawa politicians have cravenly supported U.S. demands for a U.S.-Canadian free trade pact, for the failed U.S. proposal for a global free trade treaty in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks, and for backing war in the Persian Gulf. Like Americans, Canadian citizens are bearing the brunt of these errors.

An estimated quarter million Canadian jobs have been lost in the two years since January 1989, when the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement went into effect. This is the estimate of Nancy Riche, executive vice president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

Federal and local governments have resorted to drastic measures in an attempt to deal with crumbling economic conditions. A new federal GST—goods and services tax—has been slapped on transactions. In Quebec, this will be added to a provincial tax for a combined rate of 15.6%. The levy on services isn't to begin until 1992, to supposedly make the pill less bitter.

Long before then, the economic situation is set to blow apart, unless emergency pro-production measures are implemented. On Jan. 3, Daryl Bean, the president of the largest (170,000-member) public service union, said, "Unless something is

done to deal with morale and the fears over job security in the federal public service during this round of negotiations, there is no question in my mind that, come late summer, there will be a strike." Public employees are being forced to work overtime. Verbal assaults on them are also increasing as the public takes out its rage over government policies on the closest government representative at hand. Bean said his members were showing "intolerable levels of stress."

On Jan. 1, 90% of the 10,500 nurses in Manitoba hospitals went out on strike, leaving 1,000 nurses to perform critical functions. The nurses demanded a 27% wage increase over two years, as opposed to the government's offer of a 20% increase over three years.

This job action is the first province-wide strike in Manitoba. Of nurses' wages in Canada's ten provinces, only those in Quebec and Prince Edward's Island are lower. Kathleen Connors, president of the National Federation of Nurses' Unions, said that unions in five provinces besides Manitoba will renew their contracts this year. She claims that the Manitoba strike will "set the tone for what happens elsewhere." Ontario nurses, whose contract expires March 31, are demanding a 50% pay increase.

CLC official Riche charges that the economic recession in Canada was "planned as part of the free trade agreement," which the Brian Mulroney government denies. But no one is debating the fine points anymore. Anti-Washington sentiment is aflame.

Even media polls show the mood. A Jan. 16 poll showed that 56% of

Canadians are against the U.S. Persian Gulf war, with the highest support in Ontario (46%), and the lowest in Quebec, where 70% oppose George Bush.

On Jan. 12, a 5,000 person rally was held at City Hall Square in Toronto, protesting the war, and protesting the Soviets firing on Lithuanians. In Ottawa, there were 3,000 demonstrators on Parliament Hill. At least 30 other anti-war demonstrations were held across Canada, involving a total of well over 25,000 people. On Jan. 13, a 6,000-person anti-war rally took place in Montreal.

On Jan. 15—the deadline date set by Bush—college students and younger pupils marched out of schools in Quebec. About 1,000 high school students demonstrated at the National Assembly at Quebec City. In downtown Montreal, 250 McGill University students rallied at the McGill Arts building. Over 200 students left their classrooms at the Ecole Secondaire St-Luc to spread the word to other students. A similar protest took place in northern Montreal at Ecole Secondaire Calixa Lavallée.

On Jan. 15, Jean Chrétien, the newly-elected head of the Liberal Party, entered parliament and immediately attacked participation in the war: "A long, dark shadow, a shadow of death, hangs over hundreds and hundreds of Canadian women and men in the Middle East." Liberal External Affairs Critic Lloyd Axworthy said, "You don't bring about peace by putting a gun to somebody's head."

Chrétien tried to back-track shortly after the U.S. attack on Iraq began Jan. 16, saying in Parliament that Canadians should "stand united" to support their "men and women in the Persian Gulf." But more and more Canadians are demanding that politicians support them by opposing Washington's insanity.