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Stouffville residents hear pleas for peace, war

ENZO DI MATTEO
Staff Reporter

The reality of war seeped a little deeper into the hearts and minds of Whitchurch-Stouffville residents last weekend.

At a somewhat surreal public meeting, more than 150 area residents gathered at the Markham civic centre Saturday to hear the views of an expert panel on the escalating war in the Persian Gulf.

Three York Regional police officers and at least one plain clothes officer kept an eye on the proceedings, which were punctuated by impassioned speeches, lively debates, and some tears.

The heated political debate that dominated the meeting, however, was overpowered by the more emotional calls for world peace and opposing concerns about the lack of support for Canadian troops in the Gulf.

"My younger brothers didn't join the armed forces to attack anyone or die because of our leaders' ineptitude," said Gormley resident Kimberly Sutherland, with her young son in her arms. "Canada's international reputation has always been one of a peacekeeper and that's the role we should be playing now."

Jacque Cushing-Dill, manager of the Markham peace garden and an opponent of the war, called for the withdrawal of troops from the Gulf.

Nihil Shearman, a machine gunner and instructor in the Canadian Armed Forces, spoke from a different point of view. His comments, delivered in quiet, even tones, held the audience's rapt attention.

"I'm a Canadian soldier and I teach people to kill. I'm angry with the peace activists spitting at and burning our flag. What Canada is doing is a very good thing, and our boys deserve our support." Members of the audience approached to shake the soldier's hand as he made his way back through the crowd to his seat.

Terry Goodwin, a former air force bomber pilot, said the sentiments being expressed at the meeting are not unlike

those heard in Canada at the outbreak of World War II.

"The argument being used then was, why pull British chestnuts out of the fire? Everyone wants peace," said Goodwin, "but at any price? That sends the wrong message."

Markham Whitchurch-Stouffville Tory MP Bill Attewell, who called the meeting to hear residents' concerns, was criticized for not holding a meeting to gauge residents' views before the federal government decided to go to war.

But Attewell said a decision by the Allied forces not to go to war after the United Nations imposed deadline for economic sanctions "would have sent the wrong message to aggressive nations for decades to come."

However, Zafar Bangash, the editor of The Crescent International, a Markham-based Muslim newspaper, said the Allied forces have been forced into the war by the U.S., a country once aligned with Iraq against Iran.

"Where was the United States when Hussein was gassing his own people and when he was using gas against Iran in 1983?"

He said that, according to his sources in the Middle East, there have already been 150,000 to 400,000 civilian deaths in Iraq.

"This war won't bring stability to the region," said Bangash. "If anything, we will see the Middle East in perpetual turmoil."

Ben Prossin, a leading member of Metro's Jewish community, said "there comes a time to fish or cut bait," in his support for the Allied cause.

Prossin said Hussein is trying to distract attention from his invasion of Kuwait by raising the question of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza strip.

He said the Iraqi leader is trying to obscure the truth.

"I know it may sound like right-wing rhetoric," said the admitted political moderate, "but we cannot afford a repeat of the 1930s when the democracies of the world caved in to the same type of terror."



Photo/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Kimberly Sutherland of Gormley made an emotionally-charged plea for peace as she held her young son Alexander. Sutherland attended MP Bill Attewell's town hall forum on the Persian Gulf war.

Stouffville gets full-time firefighters

TRACY KIBBLE
Staff Reporter

Two full-time firefighters have been hired for

Whitchurch-Stouffville, and the move will provide "in-house cleaning" at the department, said Fire Chief Bill Brown.

The final approval to hire the

full-time duo came after the passing of a bylaw Tuesday night and after a two-year process.

"This is going to help improve the maintenance of our equipment, the station and will upgrade our training and health and safety knowledge," Chief Brown said.

The two full-time men will be responsible for checking and servicing firefighting equipment and will attend various seminars, bringing home the information to the rest of the volunteer brigade, he added.

"It will sure help pick up some loose ends that we haven't been able to accommodate," Chief Brown said.

He said he will go before council again in 1992 and "try for more" full-time additions to his staff.

Charges laid against bomb threat suspect

York Regional Police arrested a young offender this week in last December's rash of fake bomb threats to several local schools, said Sergeant Norm Miles.

Sgt. Miles said police charged a 16-year-old Claremont boy who attends Harwood Secondary School in Ajax. He cannot be identified under the Young Offenders Act.

The charges were laid after reports that four bomb threats were called in to Whitchurch-Stouffville schools Dec. 12, 1990 between 1 and 2 p.m.

According to police reports, a youth visited friends in Stouffville on that day where he went through York Region's phone book. Eight calls were made to area schools.

A youth telephoned Stouffville District Secondary School, Ballantyne Public School, Summitview Public School and Orchard Park Public School Dec. 12 threatening that a bomb was located in the school.

The schools, including several phoned in Markham, had to evacuate students, Miles added.

The youth is charged with eight counts of sending false messages and public nuisance and will appear in Newmarket court Monday.

A LOOK INSIDE

