



Protesters Shut Down NATO Meeting A Year Early !

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[The Martlet](#)

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Victoria won't be transformed into a war zone after all. To the delight of some local anti-war activists and to the dismay of others, the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association has decided not to hold its October 2001 conference in Victoria. Mayor Allan Lowe received a letter Oct. 5 from George Proud, Liberal MP from Prince Edward Island and chair of the NATO association, to the effect that the Canadian arm of the international cop "has reluctantly decided to address [Lowe's security] concerns by moving the 2001 meeting to another location." The site of the conference remains a mystery.

From Oct. 11 to 15 next year, 600 delegates from the defense ministries of 35 member-countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were to converge on quaint Victoria, presumably at the city's Conference Centre behind the Empress Hotel. Not any more.

Lowe apparently requested over \$3 million from the federal government to cover anticipated policing costs. Where the feds balked on the request, Lowe asked Proud to pull the plug. "The security of our community and its financial well-being is the priority," Lowe said. The decision to request federal funds was made "in light of the recent experiences of other North American cities who have hosted 'globalization' conferences, and who have incurred significant costs as a result," Lowe said.

On Sept. 5, Const. Paul Battershill, head of the Victoria Police Department, submitted a report to Mayor Lowe, members of City Council, and members of the Victoria Police Board. The report highlighted four international conferences that were targeted by "globalization protest actions": the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle in November 1999; the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Washington, DC, in April 2000; a meeting of the Organization of American States held in Windsor, Ont. in June 2000; and that of the World Petroleum Congress, held in Calgary last June.

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In all four, Victoria activists joined citizens from across the world in expressing what they consider to be the economically and environmentally exploitative practices of these organizations. "It is within the context of the above four events that we are now considering what may happen in Victoria with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly meeting in October 2001," Sgt. Battershill wrote in his report. Battershill's prognosis was grim: "We have collected enough information to advise Council that we have concerns that there is potential for a very significant level of protest directed toward the assembly and individual members of the delegations."

This was aggravated by "the ongoing NATO presence in the former Yugoslavia and the adverse reaction from different groups in the wake of the NATO-led bombing in the region," Battershill advised. The conference had already appeared on several "internet globalization protest sites," including that of the UVic-based Vancouver Island Public Interest Group (VIPIRG). Print-outs from these Webpages were included in Battershill's report. Further, "local protest groups have indicated a desire to protest and are organizing a planning meeting later this month." This meeting took place Sept. 26 at the Fernwood Community Association. The hall was packed with roughly 100 people, many of whom came across from the Mainland to take part in the organizing effort. Victoria's proximity "to cities with large potential protester populations, including Vancouver and Eugene, Oregon, the centre of the anarchist 'black bloc' faction" was another cause of concern raised by Battershill. As a result of this perceived risk, the police chief warned that downtown Victoria would have to be converted into an armed camp. His report outlined a proposal for an onsite "detention facility," the employment of a "relatively large number of police officers" (1500 were used in Calgary and Windsor), and the creation and enforcement of an "exclusion zone" around the conference site, which would possibly require a municipal by-law in order to be legal. "Victoria has a unique character and tourist-oriented downtown," Battershill warned. "If the NATO Parliamentary Assembly occurs the City will look very different for a 10 day period in October 2001. This will include an exclusion zone in prime tourist areas, barriers, fencing and large number of police officers."

An officer in charge would be assigned in November 2000 to oversee the operation. In April 2001, an "intelligence group" involving CSIS and NSIS (two national intelligence bodies) would be such tasks as "targeting" and "group I.D." The cost for the entire operation? "It is certainly possible that the \$3.4 million is within the magnitude we may have to consider," Battershill suggested in his report, citing the policing figure for the Windsor conference. According to Mayor Lowe, Calgary submitted a bill of \$4.7 million to the federal government. The immediate cost to Seattle for the WTO exceeded \$9 million, Battershill wrote, and that didn't include "over a hundred million dollars in potential liability" stemming from outstanding lawsuits against the police department. It appears as though it was too much for pristine Victoria to handle. On Oct. 5, the plug was pulled and the excitement, anticipation, and fear were suddenly gone. "It's a victory for the anti-war, peace movement," says Bruce Wallace, the research coordinator and acting director of VIPIRG. "Many people in Victoria don't want the war machine here. We weren't welcoming and so they moved." Summer McFadyen, chairperson of the University of Victoria Students' Society agrees. "I think it's fabulous. I'm happy. It means we've been successful." Others have mixed feeling about the announcement. "I think it shows that they're afraid," said Shane Caulder, a fourth-year social-work student and VIPIRG's conference coordinator.

"They're like a typical bully: they're cowards. And they're not willing to face the type of protest necessary to dismantle the war machine." Caulder fears the conference may be moved to a locale that lacks a "population willing to teach them a lesson" and address what he calls "the social and

environmental costs of NATO." Wallace agrees "that's the risk." Plans for the Victoria mobilization were well under way. Both Wallace and Caulder, like many others in the region, planned to spend most of the next year organizing against NATO. Speakers from several different countries had already been contacted, and a parallel 'global peace forum' was in the works. "The momentum was building for, I think, an enormous protest," Caulder said. "We were getting support from all over the world."

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