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The demonstrations go on as the clothing comes off

Calgary braces for more serious morning march through downtown core

By Jim Rankin
Staff Reporter

CALGARY — This is a city waking to an uncertain morning. With promises of a protest march — by groups that "respect a diversity of tactics" including vandalism — the streets will be filled with police and private security guards.

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The lead-up to the G-8 Summit, set to begin today in the heavily fortified mountain village of Kananaskis, has been peaceful. But a snake march is expected to begin at 6 a.m. this morning, (8 a.m. Toronto time) and wind its way through the downtown core. Police have erected a metre-high fence around the downtown hotel where media and delegates are staying and shop owners have hired extra security staff. Many downtown workers are expected to simply stay away from work all together. Marika Scwandt, an anti-capitalist activist from Edmonton, said the march has been organized with "the intention of economic disruption." And she called the erecting of the small fence an "expected" escalation of police intimidation. Yesterday, a number of groups competed for media attention as the first of the world leaders arrived. Oxfam representatives handed out packages of peanuts — what they contend is all the G-8 nations are truly prepared to give Africa. Other groups used street theatre to make their points. Soon after Prime Minister Jean Chrétien arrived and was whisked away to Kananaskis by helicopter, a group of protesters took off most of their clothes before a lunchtime crowd of amused Calgarians. About 75 uninhibited protesters took part in the peaceful demonstration against the labour practices of retail clothing giants. Another 300 vociferous yet more modest protesters and about 1,000 curious office workers gathered on Stephen Ave., a downtown pedestrian mall outside an indoor shopping mall that is home to one of Calgary's Gap stores, a clothing retailer. Protest organizer Mary Bull, a San Francisco activist with Save the Redwoods/Boycott the Gap Campaign, told the crowd that the Gap exploits cheap, Third World labour to make its clothes, The retail clothing giant uses 300 "sweatshops" in 55 countries, she said.

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The Gap has disputed the claims, saying it has made a policy of dispatching staff and independent inspectors to factories worldwide to make sure owners were living up to safety, environmental and labour standards, Reuters reports.

Among the first of the protesters to show up was Calgary's Corey Brealey, 20.

With duct tape over his mouth and a sandwich board sign stating, "If you aren't fully outraged you don't completely understand." Brealey was the first to admit he himself didn't completely understand the very labour and human rights issues he was there to protest.

Kylie Van Horne of Cambridge, Ont., who came to Calgary to attend the coinciding People's Summit, stripped down to a running bra for the cause. "It kept them quiet, and hopefully some people got information and they'll change the way they do things."

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