

York U. war protest turns violent

Jewish student accosted

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A protest at York University over a possible war in Iraq ended in violence yesterday when opposing groups crossed paths.

Miriam Levin, a Jewish student, said she was intimidated and roughed up by the protesters. And a group that had a U.S. flag at its booth said members were attacked by demonstrators who marched through the university.

Levin said she was accosted when she tried to drive on to school property first thing in the morning. The protesters were picketing entrances to the school grounds and blocking traffic: "I told the guy, 'Making me 20 minutes late for class isn't helping the people in Iraq,' and then he started calling me a terrorist and an occupier."

She said she could not understand why the man was shouting anti-Semitic remarks at her until her friend, Hannah Wortsman, observed she was wearing earrings with a Star of David design.

Police were eventually called to break up the picketers for unrelated reasons.

Cim Nunn, spokesman for York University, said protesters contravened an agreement not to block traffic. York has as many as 35,000 cars passing through its property every day, he said.

"We asked they not set up a difficulty for people trying to get on campus or to work and that's what we found out was happening."

Three protesters were arrested, but released without being charged. A group of protesters then attempted to occupy the university president's office.

Levin said she and Wortsman were also heading to the president's office to file a complaint when protesters again confronted her. Wortsman said student demonstrators surrounded them.

"The floor was completely full of protesters, who weren't letting us go anywhere," she said.

Levin pulled out her camera to take photographs of the scene and the group tried to take it away from her, she said, adding a security guard did nothing when she and Wortsman called for help. "I asked why he didn't do anything and he said, 'Well you shouldn't have been there,' " Levin said.

It was only after she called 911 that they were able to escape.

She said she would be pressing charges against one woman who allegedly assaulted her.

Later, the protesters entered classes for a few minutes to talk to students, said Joel Duff of the Canadian Federation of Students.

It was when the line passed a booth set up by the Young Zionist Partnership and the Canadian Alliance that a confrontation occurred. Students who ran the booth claim protesters shouted insults before charging them.

"Hundreds of people basically swarmed three people," said Paul Cooper, president of the Zionist group. He said only a few people were confrontational, but everyone else "watched and did nothing to stop it "



CREDIT: Peter J. Thompson, National Post

A students' anti-war protest yesterday in Nathan Phillips Square proceeded without incident as demonstrators made a peace symbol in the snow.

nothing to stop it.

Duff said his group did not instigate the incident, saying it began with name-calling from the booth. "We attempted to keep moving. Our message was we shouldn't be distracted, but the goal of those people who set up the booth was to disrupt and distract us today."

Yaakou Rath, campus president of the Canadian Alliance, said the protesters initiated the confrontation and ended it by pushing him and others: "They chose to attack me and I'm identifiably Jewish, but they didn't attack Paul [Cooper], who's not, and that's scary," Rath said.

He said the group also stole the booth's U.S. flag and tried to set it on fire.

Grant Hill, deputy leader of the Canadian Alliance, condemned the protesters: "Canada is supposed to be a country of peaceful expression and tolerance. Our fundamental freedoms are violated when self-proclaimed pacifists take it upon themselves to assault strangers because of their perceived political views," he said.

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