

Hundreds of students at Berkley protest U.S. bombings

Sandra Gonzales
Knight Ridder Tribune

SAN JOSE, Calif. -- One day after the United States began its counter-attack against the Taliban, Berkeley college students, true to form, rallied against the bombing.

And, as usual, there were opinions everywhere as faculty and students gathered at Sproul Plaza on the University of California-Berkeley campus where a noon rally organized by Berkeley Stop the War Coalition encouraged students to walk-out of class.

Though organizers said they expected thousands of students, police put the crowd at about 500 people.

"We mourn the loss of innocent lives," said Ly-Hong Nguyen, with the Asian and Pacific Islanders Coalition Against War. Nguyen urged the crowd to stand in solidarity with the Arabs, Muslims and Middle Easterners. "We demand the U.S. stop bombing Afghanistan," Nguyen shouted.

One by one, speakers spoke out for peace and against war, while a

smaller, albeit loud contingent of students in the crowd, drowned out some of the anti-war protesters with jeers and a competing chant: "Hey, hey, ho, ho, the Taliban has got to go."

His voice hoarse from debating anti-war protesters, Patrick Davidson made no secret where his sentiments lay as he held a sign high over his head with a banner that read "They are fighting for you."

"They're not bombing innocent people, they're bombing the Taliban military operations. The Taliban has chosen to be our enemies," Davidson, 19, told an anti-war protester.

His protestations did little to persuade the woman, who eventually left in apparent disgust. But Davidson continued as anti-war protesters debated him one by one.

Meanwhile, John Behrs, 20, a fellow student who shared Davidson's sentiment waved a flag. "You usually just hear one voice out here, we wanted to show the other side," Behrs said.

By far a larger contingent of students denounced the war with the

fervor typical of Berkeley students. "I think the bombing by the U.S. government is going to create more of a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan," said Hoku Jeffrey, 24. "It's going to worsen an already bad situation and we're going to see more racial attacks on Arabs."

Many wore green arm bands that stood for solidarity with Arab, Muslim and Middle Easterners, and identified those that would come to the aid of any of such person facing racist harassment or attacks.

Though the crowd dwindled after the noon hour, with small groups still singing, and debating one another, protesters promised more anti-war rallies to come with yet another planned for later that evening at a downtown Berkeley BART station.

No arrests were reported at Monday's noon rally.

Meanwhile there are other peace demonstrations in the Bay Area.

A small group of Fremont, Calif., activists said they will participate in a vigil for peace from 6-7 p.m. daily through Friday at the intersection of Fremont Boulevard

and Mowry Avenue.

"I think this is the most important place in the nation to have a peace vigil because of the Afghan community here," said vigil organizer Monica Vincent of Fremont's large Afghan population.

The Peninsula Peace and Justice Center will also participate in daily

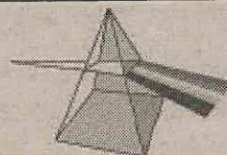
peace demonstrations at 5 p.m. every evening this week starting at the intersection of El Camino Real and Embarcadero Road.

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