

Activists struggle to be heard

Myriad noble causes make G-6B agenda

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Ahead of his presentation before 150 people at a University of Calgary classroom, Dave Mussell fumbled slightly with a miniature microphone.

The temporary struggle for amplification seemed oddly appropriate, as he had to be wondering if anyone out there was listening.

A year ago, the G-8 leaders left Genoa after setting the industrialized world abuzz about the Kyoto protocol as a solution to climate change.

Mussell, Gordon Laird, and Steven Guilbeault, three men wearing sandals, attempted on Sunday to reignite that rhetoric flame by drumming up passion for the treaty as a desperately needed "baby giant step."

But the World Trade Center crumbled on Sept. 11, and the grey-suited political army coming to the Kananaskis Summit has turned to more pressing topics: the scourge of Osama bin Laden, renewed turmoil in the Middle East, and, oh by the way, the heart-rendering plight of Africa.

Mussell is an educator with the Pembina Institute, Laird a local writer.

Guilbeault, Montreal-based director of climate matters for Greenpeace, called the recently announced Alberta alternative to Kyoto "nothing more than a scam" as he spoke at the G-6B Peoples Summit.

Canada may have the swing vote on Kyoto ratification and Guilbeault expressed hope other leaders will pressure Prime Minister Jean Chretien to stand be-

hind his Kyoto-supporting words of July 23, 2001.

Because he also knows his voice is but a squeak amidst the powerful oil and gas lobby, he came to Calgary for support — moral, and otherwise.

"The polls say people believe in this, and while there are those who distrust the polls, I go into the church basements and the union halls, and I know the support is there," Guilbeault says.

The G-6B, a conference about global conscience, features myriad well-intended interest groups. In fact, there are so many with seemingly noble causes, it almost makes a detached observer feel sympathy for politicians.

Save the Children wants to stop child trafficking the production of Kyoto.

The Africans ask for debt relief and medical aid. There's the Canadian network to end sanctions against Iraq. A Manitoba-based campaign belongs to a worldwide movement seeking to ban land mines. There are people sitting on the lawn in states of seeming near-paralysis, campaigning silently against China's condemnation of their form of meditation. A guy in an orange life preserver carried a hemp flag around. Women for Women lobbied for the oppressed women of Afghanistan.

The sandal-clad trio gave way on the environment panel to Pam Foster, a transplant from Edmonton to Ottawa whose anger simmered just below the surface of her speech.

She is one of two employees of the Halifax Initiative, the watchdog of Export Development Canada, a federal agency that provides funding and insurance to Canadian corporations for international projects.

Foster spoke out against several projects with Canadian involvement including China's Three Gorges Dam that will force resettlement of up to 2 million people.