

TAKING STAND AGAINST RACISM



Heritage 5/12 29: 6: 93

The downtown area from Gerrard and Parliament Sts. up to Wellesley St. is a sea of signs at last night's demonstration to protest racism and show support for Tamils who have immigrated to Toronto. Protesters were well-disciplined, and sang chants, including "Hey, Hey, ho ho, Heritage Front has got to go."

2,000 join peaceful march

By Gail Swainson and Peter Small
TORONTO STAR

More than 2,000 marched on downtown Toronto last night in a peaceful protest against racism and the recent attacks on Tamil immigrants in the city.

A spokesperson for Metro's Tamil community warned politicians they are "sitting on a powder keg ready to explode" unless Canada's hate laws are enforced.

"If there are no laws to punish these hate-mongers, then enact laws," Sitampalam said in a speech before the march from Gerrard and Parliament Sts. up to Wellesley St.

"If there are laws then use them to eradicate this cancer," Sitampalam said.

At one point, mounted officers blocked the path of Heritage Front members who were videotaping the demonstration. Someone put a hand over the camera being held by a Heritage Front member, one witness said.

Members from Anti-Racist Action marched with their faces covered to prevent identification in the rally sponsored by more than 60 groups, including labor, anti-racist and community groups.

Dudley Laws of the Black Action Defence Committee told marchers that racism is on the rise.

"But your very presence here is an indication that we will not permit these racist bigots in Canada," he said.

Among the hundreds of Tam-

ils demonstrating were Jeyavathana Vivekananthan, 39, and her son, Viveik, 6.

"In our country, Sri Lanka, we had problems," she said. "Then we came here and we want to stay."

The attacks are making it harder for Tamils to live here, she said.

"Before we could go anywhere with no problems but now we are afraid to go anywhere by ourselves," she said.

Demonstrators carried signs saying, "Canada is not for Nazis," "Hate is not hip" and one carried by a masked demonstrator said "Die Nazi."

Passersby, including dozens of Tamils, watched calmly. Some said they couldn't demonstrate because they had to watch their stores.

One man shouted, "Send them all back home."

Among those showing support for the demonstration was Judy Rebick, past president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

She said racism and the anti-feminism backlash are linked.

Tim Murphy, Liberal MPP for St. George-St. David, the riding in which the march was held and which contains a large Tamil community, was near the head of the throng.

Yesterday he asked Attorney-General Marion Boyd to adopt a zero tolerance policy toward racism.

"I don't think she's giving enough direction" to law enforcers to enforce existing anti-hate laws, he said.



STRONG IMAGE: A demonstrator hoists his message while a weary toddler is dwarfed in the throng marching last night to protest racism in Toronto.