

## Blatchford's appearance at UW derailed by protesters

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WATERLOO — A small group of protesters managed to silence one of Canada's most outspoken journalists after a planned appearance at the University of Waterloo was cancelled by organizers.

Globe and Mail columnist Christie Blatchford had planned to speak and field questions Friday evening about her new book on the aboriginal land dispute in Caledonia. But protesters — some representing the group Anti-Racist Action — had other ideas.

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As they were waiting for a fog-delayed Blatchford to arrive at Hagey Hall, a handful of people occupied the stage, some of them chained together with bicycle locks. Others unfurled banners and shouted from the audience.

At issue, protester Dan Kellar said, is their contention that Blatchford's book *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy, and How the Law Failed All of Us*, does not explore issues central to the aboriginal occupation, such as historic land claims and treaties.

"You can't take these things out of context," Kellar said Sunday evening. "To ignore the history is a dangerous thing to do, especially when she is so well-regarded."

Blatchford — who says her book was intended to look at the situation in Caledonia through "a very narrow prism" around the rule of law and lawlessness — said she was disappointed that she wasn't given the opportunity to speak.

"It was a profoundly frustrating experience," she said Sunday.

None of the stops on her Canadian tour promoting the book — even a recent appearance in Caledonia — had been marred by protest, she said. Some hard questions have been asked, "but that's how you play the game, the democracy game," Blatchford said.

Organizers at the UW event knew it might attract protesters, given posts on the internet ahead of time. And once Blatchford arrived, they brought her in through a back door. But officials admit that what transpired Friday night caught them off-guard.

"We hadn't anticipated, obviously, the extent of this," said UW's assistant director of media relations, Michael Strickland, who was to introduce Blatchford and moderate a question-and-answer session. "We encourage people to come and share a wide range of perspectives, but to do it in a respectful way."

Strickland said it was clear there was no way the protesters were going to allow Blatchford to come out and speak. "We also had no interest in providing a photo op of our security dragging three people off the stage."

Blatchford said she wanted to go out, regardless, but her publicist and campus security expressed reservations about whether they could protect her.

"If it had been my university, I would have had the police remove them from the stage," Blatchford said. "But I understand the university's dilemma, I do ... The last thing the university wants to do is to be seen as a heavy-handed institution."

So, shortly after arriving, Blatchford got back in the car and returned to Toronto, with an assurance that she would be invited back.

Kellar said UW is not the place for Blatchford's talk. "It would be hard to have a civil discussion with someone who's ignoring history," he said.

Although police were called Friday night, no charges were laid.

Strickland said the university will be ready for Blatchford's return visit, even in the face of protest. "If we do have to worry about that next time around, we'll be better prepared."

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