Throngs demand peace in gulf

□ Between 12,000 and 15,000 attend an anti-war protest in downtown Portland

By HOLLY DANKS
of The Oregonian staff

On a day of nationwide rallies against war in the Persian Gulf, the biggest crowd in the country gathered Saturday afternoon in Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square.
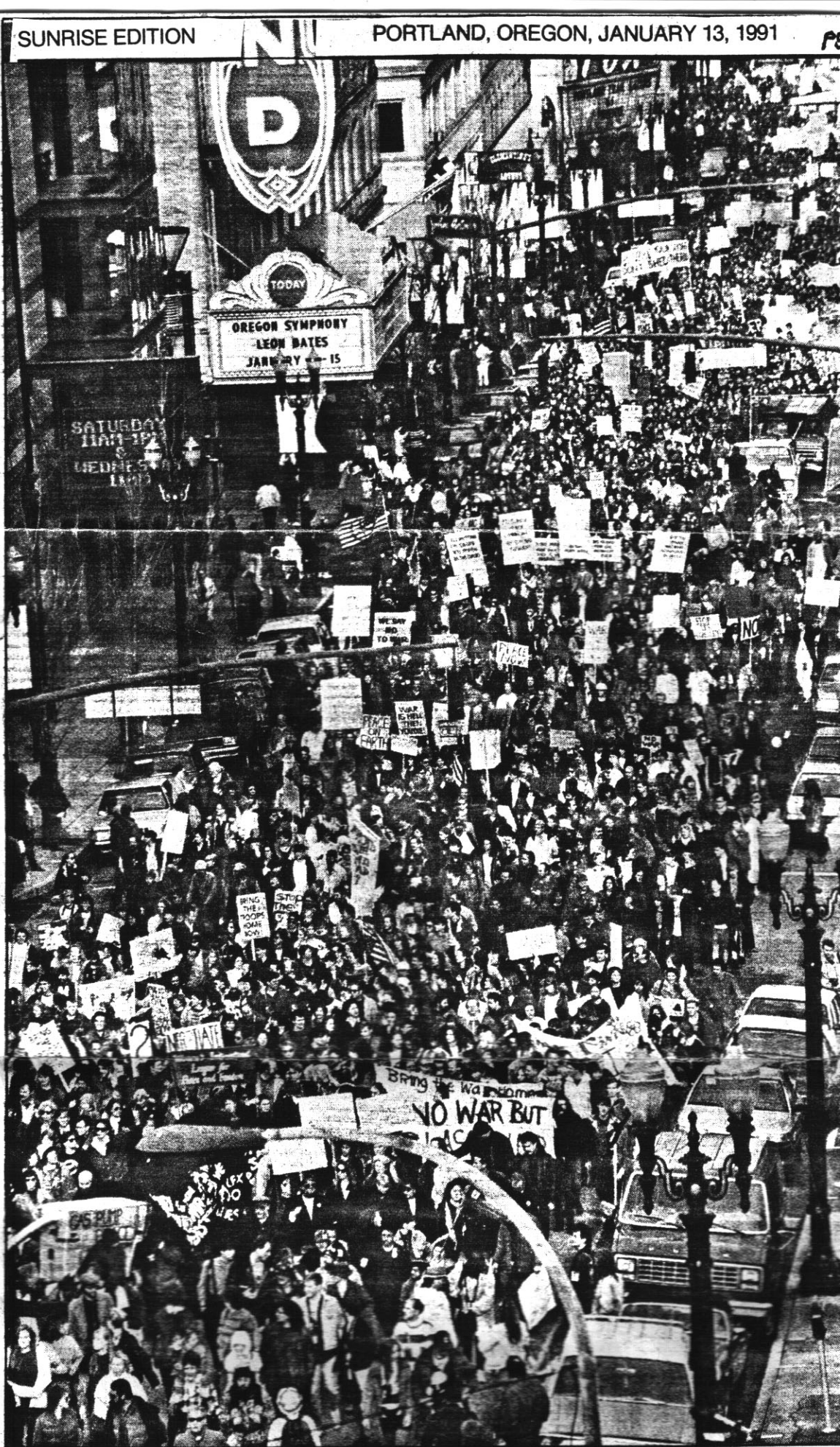
A gathering estimated by police at 12,000 to 15,000 people chanted for peace, sang out against war, applauded fiery speeches and marched from the square through downtown Portland to protest what they angrily decried as the U.S. government's willingness to spill American blood for Mideast oil.

The rally was sponsored by the Coalition Against U.S. Military Intervention in the Middle East, which includes dozens of peace, religious, minority and women's groups throughout Oregon.

"Clearly, this a a war about oil: who controls it, how cheaply we can get it," Portland City Commissioner Mike Lindberg told the crowd. "Our nation is addicted to oil, just as surely as some people eat too much and kill themselves."

The protesters packed the square, clogged adjoining streets, hung from streetlights and climbed onto fire escapes and roofs of nearby buildings. Police, who stood along the square and stopped traffic along the march route, said they were amazed that a crowd that size created no problems — no arrests, no injuries and no altercations.

"It's definitely the biggest crowd we've ever had in Pioneer Square," said Steve C____, the square's program director, who estimated attendance at easily more than 12,000. Morning rain ended in time for the rally's first speakers.

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Thousands of marchers clog Southwest Broadway on Saturday, calling for peace in the Middle East

The Oregonian/DAN