

Students jailed for protest at university

BY WOLF DEPNER AND DOUGLAS QUAN

VANCOUVER (CUP) — Two demonstrators spent several days in jail after refusing to agree not to protest at the home of the president of the University of British Columbia.

Jonathan Oppenheim, Victoria Scott and Caleb Sigurgeirson, all UBC students, were charged with criminal mischief following a protest at the on-campus residence of university president Martha Piper on Friday October 31. While Sigurgeirson signed a bail condition after being charged, Scott waited until late afternoon on Monday, November 3 to do so. Oppenheim was released the following morning.

The three were arrested after protestors used washable marker to write slogans on the atrium of the president's residence protesting the upcoming Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC). Parts of the

conference are due to take place on the UBC campus.

The protestors are members of APEC-Alert, a group organized to protest the conference. APEC-Alert is concerned that leaders of the APEC nations aren't addressing human rights issues in their countries and are against having the leaders of China and Indonesia, two countries with notorious human rights records, visit the UBC campus.

"If they want to limit protesting on campus, they have to get a court injunction and they are trying to get around that with bogus charges," Oppenheim said in a telephone interview from the Downtown Pre-Trial Centre last weekend. "We want the court to decide, not the RCMP."

Ali Yusuf, the lawyer representing Oppenheim and Scott at the bail hearing, said at the hearing on November 4 that barring the students from protesting at Piper's residence stripped them of their Charter rights

to peaceful assembly.

"The student protest amounts to little more than a cry in the night," he said.

Scott said it was only after being told she would be transferred to the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women that she agreed to the bail conditions. She said she was afraid of going to the institution.

But in an interview after her release, Scott said she couldn't promise that she won't return to protest at the president's house.

"I don't know. I'm a really spontaneous person so I can't be sure about what I'll do in the future," she said.

Andrew Epstein, a Vancouver lawyer, says it was unusual for the RCMP to take Scott and Oppenheim into custody at all. He says normal procedure for mischief cases is to issue a ticket requiring the recipient to appear in court to be formally charged.

APEC-Alert's media releases,

however, emphasize the possibility of arrests at protest events. In a press release sent out last week the group wrote: "UBC students to risk arrest three times this week as opposition to APEC grows."

The October 31 arrests followed an APEC-Alert protest rally on the UBC campus. Carrying placards condemning corporate influence on campus and accompanied by percussion instruments, 24 protestors met near the Goddess of Democracy statue and embarked on a tour of what Scott called "the seven scary sights of corporate domination" on campus.

After rallying outside Piper's office and the Museum of Anthropology, where part of the APEC summit will be held, the group headed to Piper's backyard where workers were finishing the construction of a \$400,000 atrium for the summit. The federal government paid for the project.

As workers made minor repairs to

the president's residence, protestors scribbled slogans like "APEC is coming — Head for the Hills" and "Act like a human — not like a president" on the atrium.

Shiraz Dindar, a member of APEC-Alert, says it's hard to get the anti-APEC message out at UBC.

"We're just beginning to try to get our message through," he said.

And he says he defends the methods used by APEC-Alert to do so.

"What we have done is really petty compared to what others have done. The severity of APEC calls upon severe measures. People are being shielded from what's happening."

This is the second time this year that a protest against the APEC summit has resulted in arrests on the UBC campus. In late September, two UBC students were arrested after they painted circles around the Goddess of Democracy statue which stands outside the student union building.

Dissatisfied student group votes on future with CFS

BY DAVID COCHRANE AND MICHAEL CONNORS

ST. JOHN'S (CUP) — Three more Atlantic Canadian universities are going to their constituents in an effort to pull their schools out of Canada's largest student organization.

The student unions at the Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook and the Marine Institute, a technical college in St. John's, issued writs of referendum this fall, and as a result, on Feb. 3 to 4, students at these schools will vote on whether or not they want to remain members of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS).

Student leaders say they want their schools to leave the federation because of non-existent lobbying efforts by the CFS and a general sense of isolation in the provincial component.

"CFS was too quiet during the federal election [last June], and it was nowhere to be found when the recent bankruptcy legislation was being introduced," said Glen Beck, president of Memorial's student union.

"A vital part of what the CFS does for students in this province...is represent them in Ottawa. If they're not responding to things like the bankruptcy legislation, then it's very evident they're not fulfilling their lobbying responsibilities," he said.

But Brad Lavigne, national chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, rebukes Beck's criticism of the federation's lobbying efforts. He says the CFS has had a consistent presence in the national media and adds that the organization is currently enjoying the highest profile in its history.

According to the CFS, the federation has had 15 meetings with federal government officials and members of parliament since late June.

Key among the Newfoundland schools is Memorial University. MUN is the largest university east of Quebec, with almost 13,000 undergraduate students, and the only

big school in Atlantic Canada which is currently a member of the CFS. Memorial provides the bulk of funding for the federation's provincial component and is the unofficial leader in provincial student politics.

Memorial's students tried to pull the school out of the CFS in 1995, but 70 per cent of MUN students voted to stay in the federation. The idea of leaving the federation gained new impetus, however, after MUN hosted the federation's national conference last May.

Many Newfoundland delegates complained that the federation lacked focus, worrying too much about social justice issues rather than education. There were also concerns that the federation concentrated on what was different about students from across the country, rather than what united them.

"There's a lot of division," Dale Kirby, chair of the federation's Newfoundland component, said.

"[The CFS] message has been somewhat watered down by identity politics. Some people [in this province] are hesitant to go to [CFS conferences] because there is such a confrontational attitude between the individual interest groups that are facilitated by the CFS general meeting structure.

Kirby adds that some of the province's schools feel that, because of structural issues, the Newfoundland component doesn't have as much say in the federation as some other provinces do.

But Lavigne says there is room for the Newfoundland schools to work within the federation. He adds that a lot of problems in the province stem from a lack of knowledge about the organization's structure and the fact that the federation hasn't adjusted to the rapid increase in Newfoundland membership, which jumped from three to eight in 1995.

"The organization will adapt," Lavigne said. "Not only does the

organization adapt to meet the growth needs of its membership, it also changes with the times.

"If demands are articulated and there is a willingness to ensure a place for everybody in this organization then I think we can put away any discussion of structure and deal with issues of student debt and student unemployment," he added.

Lavigne says he doesn't consider the Newfoundland referenda a problem and is confident students will vote to stay with the CFS, adding that the organization is strong both in Newfoundland and Atlantic Canada.

The CFS currently represents 14 of the 40 post-secondary institutions in Atlantic Canada but has seen a steady decline in membership since the 1980s, while discontent has grown. In 1989, St. Francis Xavier University pulled out, as did the University of New Brunswick and a bloc of smaller New Brunswick schools. Dalhousie University pulled

out in 1994.

The student council at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax is currently facing pressure from students to hold a pull-out referendum, while MUN students will decide the matter for the second time in three years.

Student politics in Atlantic Canada have adopted a decidedly regional and provincial flavour of late. That shift has resulted in the establishment of Atlantica, a twice-yearly informal meeting of schools in the region where educational issues are discussed.

Though the informal regional structure is particularly popular in Newfoundland, Lavigne says the national presence offered by the CFS is still a better option.

"You cannot lobby the federal government on a regional or provincial level," he says. "At the end of the day the decision makers, the politicians, will only listen to you when you are strong, articulate and have something to say."

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