

The Martlet

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NEWS

CFS-BC refuses to let UVSS go

B.C. Supreme Court judge decides that UVSS is still a part of CFS-BC

Sep 06, 2012 | Volume 65 Issue 5 | 1 Comment
Jory MacKay

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In a B.C. Supreme Court decision last month, the University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS) was told it is still a member of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) B.C. chapter, even though the student union petitioned to leave the CFS last year and succeeded in doing so on a national level.



The CFS has been hard for the UVSS to wash off.

After a heated referendum in March 2011, 3255 students voted for the UVSS to leave the CFS national group, exceeding the 1361 who voted to retain membership in the organization.

Josh Thompson

"The wording on the actual referendum didn't designate any difference between CFS-National and CFS-BC; it was just 'the CFS,'" says Gabrielle Sutherland, director-at-large with the UVSS. "Students generally don't know that there is a national service component as well as a B.C. component, so people who voted to leave were under the impression that their vote meant they were no longer part of the CFS, period."

While the CFS national group eventually agreed to recognize the results of the UVSS's referendum, the provincial group claimed that the particular referendum did not apply to membership in the CFS-BC.



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Due to scheduling delays, the case was not heard until Aug. 8.

The question asked of Supreme Court Madam Justice Adair was whether or not, under CFS-BC bylaws, the UVSS's decision to leave the CFS national group automatically terminated their relationship with the provincial chapter of CFS.

David Borins, legal council for the UVSS, argued that the UVSS automatically terminated its membership in the CFS-BC when it left the national chapter, because according to the provincial group's membership bylaws, a member group must be a part of the CFS-National. In this sense, since the UVSS had left the national organization, it had lost one of the essential requirements for membership in the provincial group.

But the CFS-BC states that, although the UVSS went through the proper channels to leave the CFS national group, the referendum results did not comply with CFS-BC bylaws.

"While it's not optimal, yes, it is possible for a member group to be a part of the provincial chapter and not the national group," says Ian Boyko, a communications officer for the CFS-BC.

According to Boyko, by leaving the national group, the UVSS has forgone services such as the group health and dental plan as well as the international student identity cards. Members of the UVSS who opposed the CFS, however, found these services were not enough of an incentive to retain membership in the group.

"It was felt that basically we weren't getting anything for our money, and it was felt that [the CFS] was overly bureaucratic rather than democratic," says Sutherland.

Sutherland says the CFS-BC is fighting for the UVSS's membership most likely because of the level of funding it receives from the students of UVic.

According to Sutherland, undergraduate students pay \$4.02 per semester for membership in the CFS. Over the course of a school year, that amounts to over \$130 000 in fees paid to the federation. The UVSS has been holding CFS-BC membership fees in trust during the lawsuit, and will now give these to the organization, along with fees collected this semester.

"The way I see it, is that we are the largest student union in CFS-BC, and I think that it's really obvious that if we leave, they lose a big chunk of money," says Sutherland.

While the B.C. Supreme Court has ruled that the UVSS is still a member in the provincial group, Sutherland states that the next step is for students at UVic to hold a referendum to leave CFS-BC.

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aj Sept. 7, 2012, 6:42 p.m.

Instead of legally trying to fight to keep UVSS they should have been having a good long hard look at themselves and changing to actually give UVSS incentive to stay.

It is pretty obvious that CFS is needing this wakeup call. They just don't get it... they are out of touch with today's student.

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