

Lawyer asks Martlet to Retract Editorial

(CUP) — A local lawyer is threatening to sue the University of Victoria's student newspaper over printed comments that members of his Canadian Free Speech League are "extremist thugs."

Doug Christie has given the Martlet a 30-day deadline to apologize for editorial comments made in its Nov. 7 edition.

The Martlet ran the editorial denouncing Christie's group for using the Victoria Public Library as a "venue to spread hate."

In a letter addressed to the Martlet, Christie wrote, "I am giving you an opportunity within the next 30 days to write a retraction of those remarks and an apology for any suggestions that myself and the

persons in attendance on behalf of the Canadian Free Speech League were engaged in the promotion of hatred."

In the letter, Christie also advises the Martlet to "seek legal advice on this point."

However, after consulting with legal counsel, Martlet Managing Editor Jess Howard and Editor-in-Chief Andrew Lupton have decided against running an apology, saying the comments fall within the boundaries of fair comment.

"The Martlet stands behind its comments about Christie and his Free Speech League," said Lupton.

"Our defence in this issue is truth and fair comment. The meeting in

question was hosted by Christie's Free Speech League and attended by people who've promoted hate and published racist views in the past."

"These people include Doug Collins, who suggested Holocaust deaths were exaggerated in a column he wrote in the North Shore News," said Lupton.

Another attendee at the Oct. 26 meeting included Tony McAleer. McAleer operated a telephone chat line that carried hate messages until a human rights tribunal pulled the plug.

Christie's client list also includes Ernst Zundel, who in 1985 was found guilty of willfully causing harm to racial harmony

after publishing a booklet that claimed the Holocaust was a Jewish hoax.

The Victoria lawyer has defended other Holocaust deniers such as Malcom Ross, whose books allege the Nazi slaughter of Jews during the Second World War was exaggerated.

Christie has a history of launching libel suits, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. In 1984 he was awarded \$30,000 in damages for comments published by columnist John Geiger in the Edmonton Sun.

In his article, Geiger called Christie and supporters of the Western Canada Concept Party members of a "lunatic fringe" and an "Alberta

version of the Klu Klux Klan."

In 1985 Christie launched an unsuccessful libel suit against Vancouver radio host Gary Bannerman after the open-line host said: "Doug Christie has aligned himself so many times with these perverted monsters that he has to be viewed as one himself, in my view."

A jury found that Bannerman's words were defamatory but constituted fair comment and were used without malice.

"I find that ironic that on one hand, Christie claims to be such a staunch defender of free speech, then calls for a retraction when a journalist writes something he doesn't like," Lupton said.

Tuition Deregulation Top Smith Panel's Recommendations

TORONTO (CUP) — The Ontario government must strengthen its financial support to universities and colleges, but should deregulate tuition fees and allow private universities to compete with public institutions, says a government sponsored panel created to look into the future of postsecondary education in the province.

Student leaders have responded with cautious approval to the Smith panel's call for increased government funding for the province's postsecondary system and its recommendation of an increase in capital for research — but they aren't happy with all of the panel's 18 recommendations.

"I think the call for greater public funding is a smoke screen to placate people who would otherwise be outraged at many of their other requests," said Michol Hoffman, acting president of the University of Toronto's Graduate Students' Union.

Vicki Smallman, a spokesperson for the Canadian Federation of Students, says the panel's report, which was released on Dec. 15, shows they didn't pay attention to the concerns of students.

"The panel managed to talk to a lot of people given the time line they were working under, but the only people they really listened to were the university presidents," Smallman said.

Many university administrators from across the province campaigned for the recommendations that ended up in the panel's final report including tuition fee deregulation, a loan repayment program indexed towards the future income of graduates, and a push for more private sector involvement with universities and colleges.

Smallman says the panel's call for private universities is dangerous and may contribute to the decline of the public postsecondary education system by setting the stage for skyrocketing tuition fees and plummeting value for degrees from public schools.

"It makes it more confusing for the public to gauge

which is a real university and which is not," she said.

Hoffman says the government should consider some of the recommendations, but not all.

The report has already had some effect of government policy. Education Minister John Snobelen announced four days before Christmas that funding for 1997-98 would remain stable at this year's level of \$6.1-billion for the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary school systems.

Snobelen said the freeze would provide the transfer partners with some stability in funding, and give the government the chance to look for "re-investment opportunities,"

which has become recognized Tory language for spending reductions.

The funding freeze to post-secondary education was not a total surprise to all. During this past year, the province's colleges and universities dealt with the effects of incorporating a 15.8 per cent reduction in operating grants outlined in November, 1995. At the same time, the 1997/98 transfer levels of some of the sectors were also announced, and it appeared at the time that the sector would see no more cuts in the second year.

Ontario currently spends less per capita on postsecondary education than any other province.