

Vancouver Falun Gong rally to continue consulate vigil

By **JOAN DELANEY**
Epoch Times Staff

Vancouver Falun Gong practitioners are scrambling to save their protest site at the Chinese consulate on Granville Street after it was ordered dismantled within a week by a B.C. Supreme Court ruling last Thursday.

The court upheld the City of Vancouver's application seeking an injunction to remove the hut and billboards which have been part of Falun Gong's round-the-clock vigil at the consulate since 2001.

However, the group is appealing, and in an effort to keep the vigil going until the appeal is heard, their lawyer, Clive Ansley, says an application has been made to the court for a "stay of proceedings" to be decided Friday.

"The vigil should be removed on Thursday but the city solicitor has agreed that they won't take any action until the court has had a chance to rule on our application for a stay. If we get our application then the vigil will remain until the appeal is heard. If we lose on the application on Friday then they will take it down," Ansley says.

At a rally and press conference outside the consulate on Wednesday, Falun Gong practitioners called on Mayor Gregor Robertson to allow the structures to remain until the court hears their appeal. The group plans to gather at the site again on Thursday, day 2725 of the vigil.

The Falun Gong say the site helps raise awareness and bears witness to the tens of thousands who have been tortured and murdered since the Chinese regime outlawed the spiritual practice in July 1999.

The "blue wall" along the consulate fence consists of posters calling for an end to the persecution, depictions of torture methods used in labour camps in China, and pictures of slain practitioners.

"The site constitutes a monument to human rights which should be the pride of the city, and it has been regarded as such by people of conscience and by human rights activists," says Falun Gong spokesperson Sue Zhang.

Speaking at the rally, Fred Muzin, former provincial president of the Hospital Employees Union, said getting rid of the site "erodes democracy."



Sophia Bronwen speaks at a press conference at the Falun Gong protest site outside the Chinese consulate in Vancouver on Wednesday. CHRISTINA LIAO/THE EPOCH TIMES

"When countries such as the Chinese government massacre people, when they murder people to harvest organs, it is very important that the world community shine a light on the atrocities that are going on. If not, we don't have a civil society."

While Justice Sunni Stromberg-Stein made it clear in her ruling that she was referring only to the signs and hut and not any other forms of protest used in the vigil, Falun Gong's lawyer Joseph Arvay said the protest wouldn't be nearly as effective without these structures, which "are on a strip of dirt that nobody uses" and are not blocking the sidewalk.

"It's kind of ridiculous that the city says they can be there with their signs every day marching up and down the sidewalk—in which case they will obstruct the sidewalk—but they can't be there with their hut and the billboards which doesn't obstruct anyone."

The hut has played a key role in allowing the silent protesters to be there day and night, says Arvay. Stromberg-Stein stated in the judg-

ment that she accepted that former Mayor Sam Sullivan wanted the structures removed in 2006 "as part of his public order agenda" and not "because of the sensitivities of the Chinese government."

Arvay and Ansley had argued that Sullivan wanted the structures removed at the behest of the Chinese regime and that Chinese consulate officials had pressured Sullivan to get rid of the protest.

A report written by a Chinese spy operating in Canada suggested that due to successful lobbying by Beijing, the Canadian government had pressed the City of Vancouver to remove the protest. This is according to a June 2005 statement by Hao Fengjun, a Chinese defector who sought political asylum in Australia.

The Falun Dafa Association of Canada has said that many cities in Canada and around the world with similar displays outside consulates and embassies have faced pressure from Chinese authorities.

In a letter to the mayor and coun-

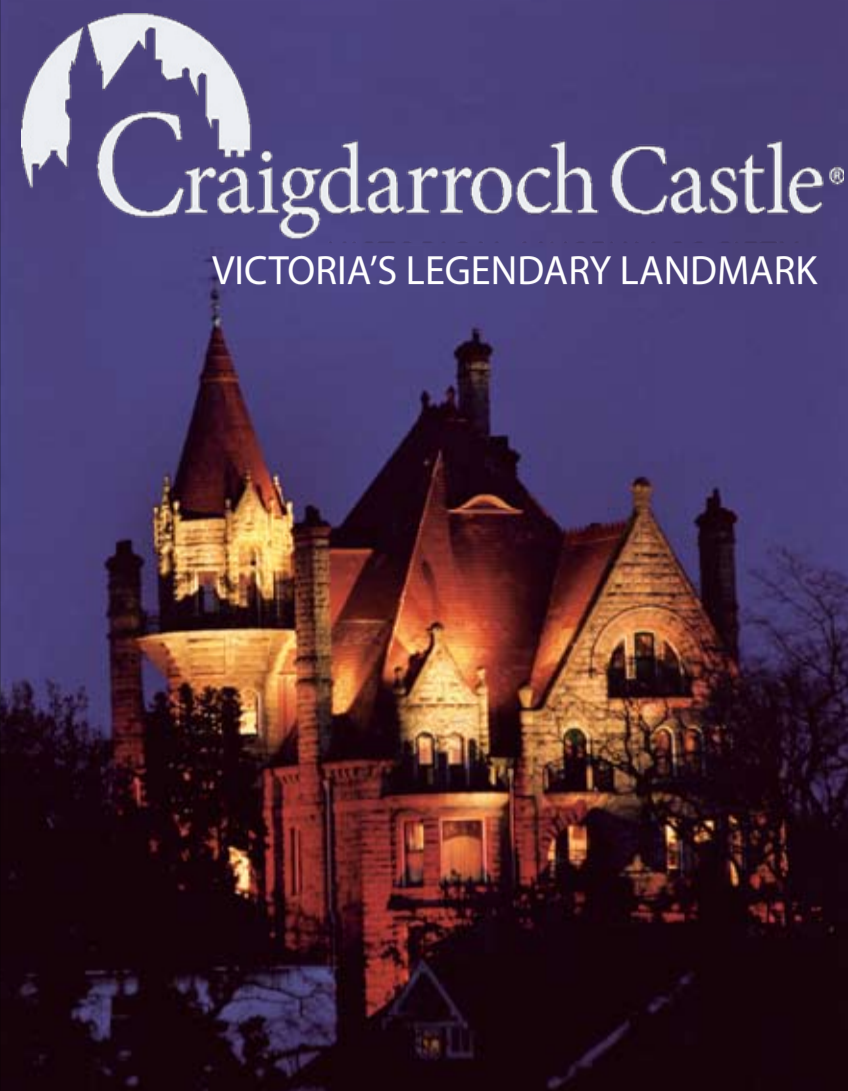
cil, former federal NDP candidate Dale Jackaman said he hopes the city will furnish a "suitable permit" for the protest to continue until the B.C. Court of Appeal hears the case.

"This site is a visible reminder to all Canadians, if not the world, that we can and do stand up against tyranny, oppression and censorship—something far and away more important than the enforcement of a sidewalk usage bylaw," Jackaman wrote.

Although the Vancouver practitioners had vowed to continue the vigil until the persecution of their counterparts in China ended, Zhang said the group will "definitely abide by the ultimate decision of the Canadian judiciary."

"We have always promised to obey the law and abide by the decision of the courts, there has been no change in this position," she says.

Ansley is hopeful the court will grant the stay. "I'm definitely optimistic. I think we meet all the tests that are required in order to get a stay in these circumstances."



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Budget aims to boost financial literacy

By **CINDY CHAN**
Epoch Times Staff

A year and a half ago, Jenny's husband used to look after all the household finances and Jenny, a stay-at-home mom with a three-year-old son, knew little about financial matters.

Then the Vancouver resident decided to take a money skills course advertised at her local family centre.

Since then, Jenny, 32, and her husband work as a team to make plans and set goals. Every month they review their financial statements together to see whether they are living within their budget.

"Together we make a better team than putting the whole burden on him to set our goals and take care of our money matters," said Jenny, who only wanted her first name used.

They've become more credit savvy, eliminated their debt, reduced their banking fees, and started saving for an emergency fund.

This has become especially important since Kodak, where Jenny's husband works, announced last week that it expects to lay off at least 3,500 employees in its worldwide workforce in 2009.

"My ears tend to perk up now certainly way more about financial news than before. That's helpful so that I am aware of when there are some changes and you can further ask questions, whether it's to a financial planner or looking online to get more information," Jenny said.

With greater confidence and the basics under her belt, she is starting another course on money this week, called Women and Wealth.

Jenny credits this to Money Skills, a four-week financial literacy program that she took through Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV), a non-profit community-based organization that offered the course free to the public.

When last week's federal budget announced the creation of "an independent task force

to make recommendations on a cohesive national strategy on financial literacy," Jenny called it "fabulous."

The budget described financial literacy as "an important life skill," defining it as "the ability to understand personal and broader financial matters, apply that knowledge and assume responsibility for one's financial decisions."

"I think every Canadian would value reviewing some of the concepts that were brought up in the course," Jenny said, especially those "in a high-credit spending situation and living above their means."

'An ongoing process and continuum'

Casey Cosgrove is director of Financial Literacy Initiatives at Social and Enterprise Development Innovations (SEDI), a national non-profit organization that helps low-income Canadians reach self-sufficiency through financial literacy, asset building, and entrepreneurship.

SEDI called on the federal government last September to create a task force to develop a national strategy for financial literacy.

In November, SEDI launched the Canadian Centre for Financial Literacy, an initiative that aims to partner with businesses, governments, and communities to help low-income people, who include over 4.7 million Canadians according to Statistics Canada.

The budget announcement "is a terrific start," said Mr. Cosgrove, who heads the centre.

Financial literacy "is an ongoing process and continuum" that would benefit all Canadians, not only those on low-income, he said. "There are always changes, new products, new services, and new benefits available, whether they be government benefits or tax benefits like the Tax-Free Savings Accounts."

There is an abundance of information available on topics such as budgeting, credit, debt, insurance, investment, and saving for home ownership, post-secondary

education, lifelong learning, and retirement. A great deal, however, is associated with selling a product or service. Meanwhile, the government is increasingly using the complex tax system to deliver social benefits.

The challenge is to educate the public to keep up to date and make informed choices based on their own circumstances.

"It's a very complex environment even for the most knowledgeable people," said Mr. Cosgrove.

Meanwhile, the centre's January newsletter cites a recent survey indicating that one in five Canadians spend beyond their means. It also echoed the view of many analysts that lack of financial knowledge contributed to the U.S. mortgage crisis where people took loans they could not afford.

The U.S. President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy published its first annual report last month. In the news release, Council Chairman Charles Schwab noted, "There is no question that the lack of personal financial literacy has been a major contributing factor to the economic and financial crisis in the United States."

Among the council's recommendations were mandating financial education from kindergarten to grade 12, exploring tax incentives to employers to provide financial education, and increasing access to bank accounts for "the tens of millions of unbanked and underserved Americans."

Mr. Cosgrove said a growing number of other countries have developed strategies to improve the financial literacy of their citizens, including the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand.

Need for a coordinated national effort

FSGV, where Jenny learned about the Money Skills course, is one of more than 800 non-profit and government agencies across Canada that has worked with SEDI since 1986.

In 2005 FSGV partnered with Vancity credit union to deliver the course through schools and other

community-based organizations. Melanie Buffel, a Money Skills facilitator at FSGV, said about 36,000 people have benefited from the course over the last three years, including many low-income people, immigrants, refugees, and at-risk youth.

The course covers a wide variety of topics, including banking, budgeting, credit, savings tools, financial goal setting, and consumerism. The complexity of the financial system is one of the major challenges facing Ms. Buffel's clients.

"People don't understand their rights and obligations," she said.

Among her clients is "a large number who don't have a bank account ... and they get taken advantage of by the cheque cashers and payday lenders and spend lots of money there that they don't have."

Moreover, "the credit card is an enormous topic of conversation."

There's a lot of marketing associated with credit cards, and people are getting access to cards but not really understanding how interest and fees are being charged and how offers like balance transfers and visa cheques work, Ms. Buffel said.

Amid the current downturn, "people are talking about money and our phone is ringing off the hook for workshop schedules," she said.

Ms. Buffel noted that the government has financial literacy efforts taking place, such as through the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, but "it's not well coordinated and [does not provide] great opportunities for people to share knowledge and practices across the country."

She added that there is "really no established network for that" and "no real comprehensive money skills approach" in schools.

"If we had a national strategy for financial literacy, we would all be working off the same page and we'd know there was political support and hope that translates into some funding across the country to do this work."