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## 'Absolutely impossible' that city not pressured to remove Falun Gong

Former diplomat says Chinese consulate-general would have been on orders from Beijing to have protesters stopped

BY PETE MCMARTIN, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 12, 2011 9:42 AM



In 2006, then-mayor Sam Sullivan had the Falun Gong's shed and banners removed from the front of the Chinese consulate on Granville Street. Then in 2010 the B.C. Court of Appeal ruled that the shed and placards were integral parts of the group's political expression and deserved protection under the Charter.

Photograph by: Peter Battistoni, Vancouver Sun Files, Vancouver Sun

Last Saturday, I wrote about the City of Vancouver's clumsy attempt to draft a bylaw that would effectively ban the Falun Gong from maintaining a 24-hour vigil outside the Chinese consulate on Granville Street.

To recap our story so far:

- In 2001, the Falun Gong begin their vigil to protest what the group claims is persecution by the Chinese government.

- In 2006, after five years of the Falun Gong's peaceful vigil, then mayor Sam Sullivan decides the Falun Gong's little shack and banners must go -not because of pressure by the Chinese government that they be removed, the mayor says, but because they contravene a street-and-traffic bylaw.

- In 2008, the issue goes to a hearing in the B.C. Supreme Court.

- In 2009, the judge orders the shack and banners removed. They are soon after.

- In 2010, the B.C. Court of Appeal reverses the decision and finds the city bylaw unconstitutional. It orders the city to draft a new bylaw within six months.

Which brings us up to last week, when, during council's deliberation over the new bylaw, the city engineer and city manager made the stunning admission that the city not only consulted with the Chinese government before drafting the new bylaw, but that the particulars of that meeting were confidential.

In light of all this, and in light that for all these years the city has maintained its campaign to remove the Falun Gong had nothing to do with Chinese government pressure, it might be worth looking back to the original 2008 hearing in B.C. Supreme Court.

Of particular interest were exhibits submitted by Falun Gong lawyer Clive Ansley. They purport to show the local campaigns of vilification the Chinese government waged against the Falun Gong.

Among those exhibits was an affidavit signed by Chen Yonglin, who from 1991 to 2005 worked as a diplomat with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It was in 2005 that Chen, then first secretary of the Chinese consulate-general in Sydney, Australia, defected. He alleged that China maintained an extensive spy network in Australia, with one of its main aims being to discredit the Falun Gong locally.

Opposing Falun Gong is the top priority of "Chinese Embassies and Consulates today," Chen stated in the affidavit.

"Chinese diplomats in all Embassies and Consulates worldwide are constantly told to lobby and pressure local MPs and elites that the Falun Gong is an 'evil cult' and they should keep their distance; moreover diplomats should stress that any relationship with the Falun Gong will damage bilateral relations."

As a consular diplomat, Chen stated, he was a member of the local Special Anti-Falun Gong Working Group -versions of which exist in every Chinese mission wherever Falun Gong has a presence.

"Every Chinese Embassy and Consulate, in all foreign countries," his affidavit reads, "has at least one diplomat whose primary job it is to implement the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners who are Chinese nationals with temporary or permanent residency, and citizens of the host country."

And that mandate is carried out in a number of ways, Chen stated, including "writing letters to all levels of government in the host country, and to individual politicians at all levels, pressuring them to have no contact with Falun Gong practitioners ...

"Such letters also often state that if the wishes of the Chinese Government are not respected ... the result may be a 'severe blow' to the bilateral relations meaning decreased trade and investment opportunities with China. Standard practice requires that a senior diplomatic official, often the Consulgeneral himself, must always write letters to the political figures responsible, and to local newspapers, opposing every public event or move hosted by Falun Gong practitioners in the host country."

Characterizing the Falun Gong's Vancouver vigil as "a major embarrassment to the Chinese Government," Chen recalled one occasion when all Chinese missions were provided with an example from Canada, "wherein the Chinese Consulate-General in Toronto had rallied over 40 Chinese organizations to write to then Prime Minister Jean Chretien and foreign affairs minister John Manley, opposing Falun Gong."

In Sydney, Chen stated, a "blacklist" was maintained of prominent Australians perceived to be sympathetic to the Falun Gong. He stated also that the Sydney Consulate-general regularly promoted "the private business ties of some Australian political leaders, state and federal MPs, and members of local councils."

Chen stated the Consul-General also regularly hosted dinners for them.

Told that Sullivan publicly stated his decision to remove the Falun Gong was not the result of consulate pressure, Chen, in his affidavit, offered this view of the world:

"In my opinion, based on my years of service in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and my intimate knowledge of the War on Falun Gong implemented by Chinese missions worldwide, at the orders of Beijing, it would be absolutely impossible that in this situation the mayor of the city in which the Consulate-General and the vigil are located would receive no pressure from the Consulate-General."

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