

Rodney Hide abandons his politics for waltz and rumba

by Carmen Gray

Act Party leader Rodney Hide was too busy preparing to waltz and rumba to attend a scheduled public speaking appearance at a recent protest in Queen Elizabeth Square against Chinese Government human rights abuses.

Hide said he had been tied up that day with filming background material for his appearance in the television programme *Dancing with the Stars*, and had delegated the speaking job to someone else.

But no-one from Act showed up. Many others spoke at the demonstration, including UN refugee Huang Juo-Hua, who told of how his wife was tortured to death by the Chinese Communist Party for practising

the ancient spiritual tradition of Falun Gong.

Hide said he was not aware his replacement had not gone to the rally. "I was very disappointed I couldn't be there myself. I arranged for someone else to stand in for me and I'd be pretty grumpy if he didn't make it."

The rally aimed to draw attention to the alleged persecution and torture of Falun Gong practitioners by the Chinese Communist Party and the alleged "harvesting" of their organs. Participants said they were also celebrating the number of people who have withdrawn from the CCP getting close to 10 million.

Protesters called for thorough investigations by the international community into the reported human rights abuses, and are currently gathering sig-

natures for a petition to Prime Minister Helen Clark asking that she hold the Chinese Government accountable.

Rally organiser Sam Murphy, of the *Epoch Times* newspaper, says few governments are willing to recognise and condemn CCP atrocities because of their economic ties with China.

"China is a big country and has a lot of clout economically.

"It's a shame the communist regime is in that position. They pull a few strings and silence the international community.

"If it was a smaller country other nations would put sanctions in place and condemn them."

It's a view shared by Tom Liang, of the Global Coalition to Bring Jiang Zemin to Justice, a former victim of CCP persecution who spoke at Saturday's

rally. "The choice of speaking up or remaining silent is simply the choice between money or conscience," he said.

Hide agrees the current New Zealand Government should be doing more to condemn these abuses.

"It's important we show our support," he said. "Our Government is sort of not prepared to speak out in favour of human rights in China. They're worried about their trade deals.

"I can understand that but at the end of the day, even from a selfish point of view the Government in China will change anyway and it's better for us to be standing up for the right principles, not the wrong ideals."

Although Hide was not at the protest to give his voice to this view, he has spoken at previous

rallies in Auckland held by Falun Gong practitioners and supporters.

Shaun Yu, who had arranged for an Act Party representative to speak at the event, said the organisers felt a little disappointed no representatives from Act had shown up this time, but said he understood unforeseen circumstances can detain people. "You never know what can come up."

Meanwhile, Hide is delighted at the progress of his dancing. "The first dance I do is the waltz and the second is the rumba," he said of his participation in *Dancing with the Stars*. "I've gone from not even knowing one step to being able to get the basics."

Hide is still a contender on the show, with four weeks of competition remaining.

High Court precinct under threat

by Jessica van der Schaaf

The charming, historic precinct surrounding Auckland's High Court is caught in an ongoing battle between the preservation of its past and the persistent onset of development.

Residents are concerned that the conservation of the area's heritage and amenities continues to be seriously undermined by lack of protection in Auckland City Council's district plan.

Susan Sweetman, who has lived in the area for more than 12 years, has experienced firsthand the ongoing encroachment of development. "It just keeps getting closer and closer. There is more and more of it. None of it seems sympathetic to the area or the context.

"The area has a lot of history. Maori lived here before the settlers. It was the first part of Auckland to be settled. There were houses built here, gardens planted. There's the first Government House, the first seat of Parliament. We'd quite like to keep some of that history."

To make way for a 14-level student hostel, an engineering motor garage built in 1912 was demolished in January. A jacaranda tree planted by the Government's first officials, that the council says was aged between 90 to 110 years, was among four trees removed.

"Some time in the 1990s Auckland City Council changed the town-planning in the district. They removed protection for anything that wasn't scheduled," says Sweetman. "I'd like to see the council revise the district scheme. I think the council should initiate this change."

Eden Cr, the site of the new development, was not included in the conservation area that surrounds it, stretching from Princes St to Emily Place. Its exclusion effectively means heritage buildings within the conservation area can be blocked in by developments on neighbour



AUCKLAND HIGH COURT: Facing development pressures.

ing sites.

George Farrant, heritage manager for the city council, says the whole area is currently being assessed. "Protection of surrounds is in place for heritage buildings such as the town hall. We don't have surrounds protection for every heritage building. We are starting to come to the conclusion that maybe we should."

Farrant says: "There is an essential tension between the goals of intensification and preservation."

Sweetman is also concerned about the loss of amenity in the area because of development. "The light, the air and the birds. They are gone. The council is

allowing this to happen. It's very frustrating.

"They are bringing tens of thousands of people into the inner city. They need to create more open space. I would like that. Otherwise we are all going to be jammed in together like sardines, and drive each other crazy."

Farrant agrees recent developments have equalled "a significant loss of amenity in the area". While it is too late to change what has already been set in stone, he encourages residents to keep raising their concerns. "I don't think we can win this particular one but we may be able to change things for the future."

Petrol tax floated

by Anna Rutherford

Wellingtonians may have to pay a petrol tax of at least five cents a litre to fund an extra \$428 million needed for Transmission Gully.

Other possible solutions to the debt include road tolls or congestion charges.

Wellington Regional Council access planning manager Joe Sewitt says it is too early to know if the tax will go ahead and the option would need to be put to a public referendum first.

"We're expecting to clarify the way forward on funding over the next few months," he says.

The Transmission Gully debate has been ongoing for 30 years. Problems with congestion, traffic accidents, natural disasters and unreliability are leading reasons behind the campaign for an alternative access from Wellington to the north.

Wellington, Kapiti, Porirua, Upper Hutt and Lower Hutt city councils recently voted unanimously to go ahead with the new road.

Wellington mayor Kerry Prendergast says her council reluctantly approved it because of overwhelming public support. The government had made it clear it would not be funded without complete regional support.

Sixty-five per cent of people across the region want Transmission Gully to go ahead.

The mayor says reasons against it are affordability, limited population and traffic growth, climate change, peak oil and rising gas prices. "We don't believe it's justified."

Porirua City mayor Jenny Brash says public health, economic development, access, stability and reliability are all benefits of the proposal. "To me, upgrading the coastal route would have been an utter waste of money."

Construction of the new road is expected to begin in either 2011 or 2012.



HERITAGE: Outside the court.

PHOTOS: DAN PILKINGTON