

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

UB-7. Issuing an Official Apology from the City of Vancouver to the Italian Canadian Community During Italian Heritage Month in 2022 (Previously Motion B.8)

At the Council meeting on June 8, 2021, due to time constraints, Council did not consider the motion below. This motion has been placed on the Council agenda of June 22, 2021, as Unfinished Business.

Submitted by: Councillors De Genova and Dominato

WHEREAS

1. The Italian Community has been a part of Vancouver since the 1800s and grew through waves of Italian immigration to Canada. A substantial wave of immigration was prompted by the Second World War, with many Italians fleeing Italy to escape the fascist regime. Notably the Italian Canadian community in Vancouver has ties to East Vancouver neighbourhoods including Grandview Woodlands, Hastings Sunrise, and Strathcona;
2. On June 10, 1940, the Government of Canada, upon a unanimous resolution in the House of Commons, declared war against Italy following Benito Mussolini's declaration of war against Great Britain and France;
3. Shortly after declaring war against Italy in 1940, the Canadian Federal Government designated Italian nationals, and Italian Canadians naturalized after 1922, as 'enemy aliens'. Over 600 Italian-Canadians, including 44 from the Vancouver area were taken from their families and sent to internment camps. Although they were never criminally charged, this result caused irreparable harm and hardship to many families;
4. Of the approximately 4,500 Italians in Vancouver, 1,800 were designated as "enemy aliens" and were required to file monthly reports with the RCMP regarding their activities and whereabouts;
5. Under the *War Measures Act*, over 600 Italians across Canada, 44 of whom were from the Vancouver area, were arrested by the RCMP and interned in camps without being charged with any criminal activity;
6. On February 16, 1942, Vancouver City Council passed a motion imploring the Federal Government "to remove all residents of Japanese racial origin and enemy aliens to areas of Canada well-removed from the Pacific Coast and that their removal be under such conditions as will provide them with the essentials of a reasonable livelihood";
7. The reference to "enemy aliens" in the February 16, 1942, Council motion has long been viewed by some as unjustly and unfairly directed at the Italian community and contrary to the principles of fundamental human rights;

8. On April 28, 2010, Parliament passed Bill C-302, *the Italian-Canadian Recognition and Restitution Act*, to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their “enemy alien” designation and internment during the Second World War, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history;
9. On March 21, 2011, Bill C-302, *the Italian-Canadian Recognition and Restitution Act*, received Second Reading in the Senate and was referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology;
10. On March 26, 2011, the Governor General dissolved the 40th Parliament, and Bill C-302, *the Italian-Canadian Recognition and Restitution Act*, died on the order paper;
11. On February 27, 2013, Vancouver City Council, in support of reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples, voted unanimously to support the recommendation of Reconciliation Canada to proclaim June 21, 2013 to June 20 2014, as the Year of Reconciliation in Vancouver and to name Vancouver a City of Reconciliation;
12. On September 25, 2013, Vancouver City Council unanimously passed a motion to apologize for the City of Vancouver’s role in the 1942 Internment of Japanese Canadians, by formally apologizing for its complicity, inaction, and failure to protect the city’s residents of Japanese descent, and pledged to do all that the City can to ensure such injustices will not happen again to any of its residents and to uphold the principles of human rights, justice and equality now and in the future;
13. On May 27, 2014, Vancouver City Council voted unanimously to direct staff to conduct research into the laws, regulations and policies of previous Councils that discriminated against the people of Chinese descent in the City of Vancouver and directed staff to report back with recommendations on steps and actions in support of reconciliation, including a public acknowledgement and formal apology;
14. In 2018, Vancouver City Council passed a motion to include Italian Heritage Month in the City of Vancouver’s official celebrations and Observances;
15. On April 22, 2018, Vancouver City Council convened a special meeting in Chinatown where a formal apology on behalf of the City of Vancouver was delivered for past discrimination against people of Chinese descent;
16. Council approved funding in the 2020 budget for staff to work with the South Asian community on historical discrimination, including consideration for an apology;
17. For almost 40 years, The National Congress of Italians, The Order of Sons and Daughters of Italy, and the National Federation of Canadian Italian Business Professional Association have been working together

- and calling on the Government of Canada to make a formal apology for the treatment of Italian Canadians during the Second World War;
18. On May 27, 2021, in Parliament, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally apologized to Italian Canadians. He said, *“To the tens of thousands of innocent Italian Canadians who were labelled enemy aliens, to the children and grandchildren who have carried a past generation’s shame and hurt and to their community, a community that has given so much to our country, we are sorry.”*

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Vancouver City Council demonstrate its commitment to upholding the principles of human rights, justice, and reconciliation by acknowledging and issuing an official apology to the Italian-Canadian community for any injustice and harm to persons of Italian origin or ethnicity that occurred as a result of the actions of the City of Vancouver, including the reference to “enemy aliens” in the Vancouver City Council motion of February 16, 1942;

FURTHER THAT Council further demonstrate this commitment by directing staff to conduct research, in consultation with organizations representing the Italian-Canadian community in Vancouver, including ‘Il Centro’ - The Italian Cultural Centre, for a proclamation of Official Apology from the City of Vancouver to be delivered during Italian Heritage Month in 2022, for any historical actions, policies or public support of measures that contributed to discrimination of Italian-Canadians because of their ancestry;

AND FURTHER THAT this official apology be posted on the City of Vancouver website.

- B. THAT Vancouver City Council request the Mayor to write a letter to the Prime Minister on behalf of the City of Vancouver, in support of the federal government’s apology to Italian Canadians;

FURTHER THAT this letter notify the federal government of this motion and the commitment of Vancouver City Council and the City of Vancouver to right the wrongs, harm and discrimination caused to Italian-Canadians because of their ancestry.

- C. THAT Vancouver City Council direct staff to work with The Italian Cultural Centre - ‘Il Centro’ and the Public Art Committee to consider and possibly identify opportunities for an installation of Public Art to commemorate the City of Vancouver’s official apology to the Italian-Canadian community in Vancouver;

FURTHER THAT staff report back to Council with information and any recommendations as soon as possible.

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LINKS:

1. City of Vancouver: A brief history of Little Italy
<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/brief-history-of-little-italy.pdf>
2. City of Vancouver: Official Celebrations and Observances
<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/celebrating-diversity-and-inclusiveness.aspx>
3. House of Commons of Canada: Private Member's Bill C-302: Italian-Canadian Recognition and Restitution Act
<https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/40-3/bill/C-302/first-reading/page-30#2>
4. 'Il Centro' The Italian Cultural Centre- Museum
<https://italianculturalcentre.ca/events/museum-art-gallery/>
5. Georgia Straight: "Tracing the forgotten history of Italian-Canadian internment camps" <https://www.straight.com/arts/tracing-forgotten-history-italian-canadian-internment-camps>
6. Georgia Straight: "Italian Day on the Drive deserves civic status just like Pride, Black History Month and Lunar New Year"
<https://www.straight.com/news/1067981/italian-day-drive-deserves-official-civic-status-just-pride-black-history-month-and>
7. CBC: Trudeau apologizes to Italian Canadians for internment during WWII <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-apology-italians-1.6042194>
8. National Post: 'Nobody knows about it': Italian-Canadians find justice in federal apology for internment during World War II
<https://nationalpost.com/news/canadians-of-italian-origin-find-justice-in-apology-for-internment-during-ww2>
9. Nelson Star: Canadians of Italian Origin Find Justice In Apology For Internment During WW2 <https://www.nelsonstar.com/news/canadians-of-italian-origin-find-justice-in-apology-for-internment-during-ww2/>