

**VICTORY IN THE SEATTLE INCIDENT TRIAL
BY JEFF FARR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

The Seattle Incident trial concluded on March 21 with a victory for the Soka Gakkai. The Tokyo District Court found the Soka Gakkai and SGI President Ikeda not guilty of libel, rejecting the defamation suit against them by High Priest Nikken Abe and Nichiren Shoshu. The suit, filed in December 1993, regarded coverage in Soka Gakkai publications of High Priest Nikken's March 1963 dispute with prostitutes over payment for services rendered and President Ikeda's references to the incident in speeches in 1992. The court ordered Nichiren Shoshu to pay for all of the trial's court costs.

The judge's decision not only exonerated the Soka Gakkai defense but clearly acknowledged that the Seattle Incident did occur. In a summary of his ruling, Chief Judge Fumio Shimoda wrote: "According to the evidence submitted in this case, the above-mentioned articles [published by the Soka Gakkai] refer to facts that are deemed to be in the public interest, and were written with the sole purpose of serving the public interest, and the above-mentioned incident caused by Mr. Nikken Abe is recognized to be true. Therefore reports in the above-mentioned articles etc. do not contravene the law. No defendant is responsible for any illegal act."

The lengthy decision was devastating to High Priest Nikken's testimony, repeatedly calling his denials into question and concluding that the high priest did ask a prostitute if he could take nude pictures of her, did have sexual relations with her and did become involved in the disagreement over money. "After assessing four statements by Mr. Abe, we cannot trust his statements," the judge stated.

Thus ended the trial that came into being because the late Mrs. Hiroe Clow decided in 1992 to publish her account of the incident. She was called by Seattle police in the early morning hours of March 20, 1963, to a downtown site where High Priest Nikken, then the Nichiren Shoshu Study Department leader, had been involved in the dispute. Mrs. Clow, an SGI-USA leader who had been assigned to assist the Study Department leader in the first-ever Gohonzon conferrals in that city, convinced the police to release him. Judge Shimoda described the statements of Mrs. Clow and three former police officers at the site of the incident as consistent and convincing.

After Mrs. Clow's story was published, High Priest Nikken publicly and in print called her a liar. In September 1992, she filed a libel suit against him in the Los Angeles Superior Court. It was eventually dismissed on jurisdictional grounds, never reaching the trial stage. Nichiren Shoshu then decided to sue the Soka Gakkai and President Ikeda.

Although Nichiren Shoshu says it will appeal the March 21 decision, it may be difficult for High Priest Nikken to live down within the priesthood his August 1994 declaration that "if what Clow says is true, I will quit immediately. If that kind of thing is true, I can't be high priest."

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima commented on the trial's conclusion: "Finally, we have proven the truth of Mrs. Hiroe Clow's testimony and the justice of the SGI. This is all thanks to the members' sincere prayers." He expressed his hope that "with this precious opportunity, we further educate everyone about the truth of Nichiren Shoshu. I believe that now is the most important time to save people from the confusion that the priesthood is trying to create."