

# Scientology in the Dock

It started a little like Watergate. Late one night two years ago, two men made their way to the third floor of the U.S. courthouse in Washington. With stolen keys, they opened the office of assistant U.S. attorney Nathan Dodell and photocopied sheaves of government documents rifled from his files. They repeated the caper a few nights later, but when they showed up at the building again, a suspicious guard called the FBI. The two men, Gerald Wolfe and Michael Meisner, were described by authorities as agents of the Church of Scientology, a religious therapy group that claims 4.5 million adherents, among them such celebrities as John Travolta. Wolfe was subsequently convicted and Meisner agreed to cooperate with an FBI probe. Last week, the investigation paid off: a Washington grand jury indicted eleven Scientologists on charges of burglary, bugging and obstruction of justice over a three-and-a-half-year period.

**Two 'Moles':** The defendants, including some top Scientology officials, are accused of an elaborate conspiracy to infiltrate government offices. They are said to have bugged an IRS conference room before a meeting on the church's tax-exempt status; to have pilfered files from IRS and Justice Department attorneys; and to have placed two agents as undercover "moles" in government jobs. At a press conference, Henning Heldt, the head American Scientologist and one of those indicted, countered that the government has conducted a 28-year campaign to suppress the church. "We welcome the opportunity to put the government on trial for their crimes against the millions of American Scientologists and Scientology congregations all over the world," he said.

Scientology has inspired controversy

*Heldt, Scientologists aping FBI at protest in Washington: Church vs. state*

ever since founder L. Ron Hubbard, a former science-fiction writer, published his 1950 best seller, "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health." Four years later Hubbard made Scientology a religion—a move that has saved the church millions of dollars in taxes. Similar to some self-help therapies, Scientology holds that by recalling negative experiences or "engrams," a person can free himself from repressed feelings that cripple his life. That liberation process, which is called "getting clear," is assisted by a counselor, called an "auditor," who charges up to \$60 a session. The auditor's main tool is the "E-meter," a skin galvanometer that is said to help him discover what is bothering his subject. Scientologists, who believe in reincarnation, say they often dredge up experiences from previous lives during an auditing session.

Over the years, the Scientologists have attracted close government scrutiny.

John Ficarra—Newsweek



James K.W. Atherton—The Washington Post

ny. The Food and Drug Administration seized E-meters as deceptive cure-alls, but the church won the legal right to use them in 1976. Church spokesmen say the government has disseminated inaccurate reports that enmeshed Scientology in legal battles in Australia, France and Britain, where Hubbard now lives. The church responded by establishing an elaborate security network, known as the Guardian's Office, to protect its operations. The Guardian's Office has sued numerous church critics, including the American Medical Association and ABC-TV, and filed 80 Freedom of Information Act requests for 200,000 pages of government documents.

But as Meisner tells it, the Guardian's Office also undertook a massive espionage operation against its critics. Based on evidence from Meisner, the FBI obtained search warrants for one of the most extensive raids in its history. On July 8, 1977, 134 FBI agents, armed with battering rams, chain saws and sledgehammers, burst into Scientology headquarters in Los Angeles and Washington. They carted away thousands of documents, as well as a lock-picking kit, a blackjack, eavesdropping equipment, two pistols and even a vial marked "vampire blood."

**Bomb Threats:** According to the FBI, the documents showed that the church was deeply involved in a harassment campaign against its critics, public and private. Among the confiscated papers was a folder tagged "Operation Freak-out," a plan to "incarcerate Paulette Cooper." Cooper, a New York free-lance writer and Scientology critic, has accused the Scientologists of stealing papers from her psychiatrist and lawyer, sending anonymous notes to neighbors that accused her of being a prostitute and mailing forged bomb threats written on stationery stolen from her apartment. The bomb threats led to Cooper's own arrest, on charges that were eventually dismissed. She has recently filed a \$20 million lawsuit against the New York church. A similar lawsuit is contemplated by Gabriel Cazares, the former mayor of Clearwater, Fla., who says that after he opposed the establishment of a Scientology training center in Clearwater, the church harassed him.

There was no comment last week from the church's world headquarters, which is located in Sussex, England, on a luxurious 55-acre estate that once belonged to the Maharajah of Jaipur. There Hubbard lives in retirement, while his wife, Mary Sue Hubbard, helps run the church's activities. Last week, dressed in black and looking older than her 47 years, Mary Sue was in Washington. Charged with conspiracy and burglary, she was fingerprinted and, like her codefendants, released on personal recognizance—to await the trial that will give her the opportunity of legally "getting clear."

—ARTHUR LUBOW with DIANE CAMPER in Washington, MARTIN KASINDORF in Los Angeles and bureau reports

