

Sect to counterattack, city told

By BILL PRESCOTT
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Clearwater city commissioners received a warning and some advice Saturday as witnesses gave final testimony against the Church of Scientology during public hearings on the sect's activities.

Scientologists' four-day time slot to present their side in the controversy begins Monday. Church spokesman Hugh Wilhere said Saturday night it has not been decided whether the sect will take advantage of its rebuttal time.

The warning came near the end of the hearings as consultant Michael Flynn, the Boston attorney hired by the city to provide evidence and witnesses, showed commissioners church documents confiscated by the FBI in 1977.

Flynn asked Edward Walters, a former high-ranking Scientologist for nine years, to explain a Church of Scientology organizational chart that detailed the top hierarchy. Walters was the first witness to testify and considered one of the most valuable by Flynn.

As he pointed out details, Walters said he talked Friday with his contacts within the Clearwater Scientology organization.

"Insiders tell me that (sect founder L. Ron) Hubbard is enraged (about the hearings)," Walters said. "The Guardian Office was supposed to stop the hearings so he sacked them."

He said the Clearwater Flag Land Base—located in The Fort Harrison Hotel and other local buildings—is in the midst

of an internal shakeup and that Hubbard has moved in his personal staff to deal with city officials.

"They have declared 'ethics' on Clearwater," Walters said. "Hubbard is not fooling around."

He translated that as a campaign to reverse the negative impact the hearings so far have had on the church. Walters predicted all city commissioners will be sued, a "massive" public relations campaign will begin, city government will be infiltrated by sect agents and that officials may be harassed.

"If the standard policy of Scientology continues, you can expect an attack," he said.

Commissioner Rita Garvey noted the city was sued by the Church of Scientology about two weeks ago in an attempt to stop the hearings.

Walters referred to a church policy to attack "enemies," those who criticize the organization. Church officials have said the policy was canceled years ago, but several witnesses countered that claim during the hearings.

The campaign, Walters said, will probably be conducted by the Commodore's Messenger Organization, which witnesses described as Hubbard's personal messengers in their early teens who have the authority to take over departments within the sect.

"They are a young, tough, elite group and totally dedicated to Scientology," he said. "Do not underestimate their cleverness and dedication to duty."

Mayor Charles LeCher asked what city officials should anticipate. Walters suggested that "young secretaries" might come "looking for jobs."

Wilhere referred questions about Walters' predictions to sect attorney Paul B. Johnson, who was not available for comment.

Asked if he would take any action based on the warning, City Manager Anthony Shoemaker said, "That's his opinion. We don't have the right to prohibit somebody from working for the city because they're Scientologists, nor would I."

LeCher considered Walters' statement "a strong warning."

"I hope the Scientologists are here Monday and tell me whether or not it's true."

Earlier in the proceedings, former Scientology senior executive Scott Mayer offered commissioners advice to deal with the sect. Mayer said he was a Scientologist from 1969 to 1977 and had authority to carry out covert operations for the church on a worldwide basis.

Mayer suggested the city set up a consumer affairs office as has been suggested by Flynn in a preliminary report to the city. The office would have the power to investigate allegations of consumer fraud and deceptive trade practices.

He also advised the city to:

- Set up a hotline for people being held against their will.



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... L. Ron Hubbard is enraged

- A halfway house for sect members to stay after they leave the organization. They are usually penniless and confused, Mayer said.

- A research team to investigate legitimate counseling groups to let disillusioned church members know they can get help for their problems.

- Make use of existing fire, zoning and health ordinances and conduct inspections "surprise, sudden and often."

"I think there's too many people leaving the church for (sect officials) to cover all the bases," Mayer said.