



Clearwater Sun

FRIDAY, August 24, 1984

Metro/State

Clearwater, Florida

Sect repaying disgruntled members

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The Church of Scientology has begun reimbursement of money to a number of current and former members who claimed refunds were owed them for services not delivered when they took courses in Clearwater, a California attorney said Thursday.

California attorney David Jordan, himself a former Scientologist, said about \$160,000 has been repaid 14 of his clients in recent months, and another 19 persons with claims totaling about \$240,000 should be paid within 30 days.

Jordan also represents another 237 current and former Scientologists who are demanding repayment of money given to the sect, which they expect to have returned.

But a 73-year-old Englishwoman traveled to Clearwater from New York this week in an attempt to get reimbursed \$11,000 she claims is owed her for services not provided.

Violet Heckman, a Scientologist from East Grinstead, England, who is not represented by Jordan, came to the *Clearwater Sun* Tuesday to seek help, claiming she has spent four years trying to get her money back from the sect.

Mrs. Heckman said she had paid—in advance—\$15,000 for accelerated courses known as the "OT Courses," but she subsequently became disenchanted with the courses and never finished them.

She also said that when she sought reimbursement, a sect official in Tampa wrote her stating: "I hope you realize the consequences of your actions."

Mrs. Heckman, who began taking Scientology courses in the early 1970s, also had letters from Scientologists in Clearwater and bank statements detailing the transfer of several thousand dollars from her English bank account to a European bank account, which is "payable to Religious Research Foundation Account."

Former high-ranking Scientologists who are

knowledgable of the Liberian-chartered corporation, have told the *Sun* that RRF is "nothing more than a shell corporation set up to funnel money to (Scientology founder) L. Ron Hubbard."

RRF was mentioned in a Sept. 29, 1980, "strategy meeting" of the sect's Mission Corporation Category Sort-Out, in which a member of the sect's Legal Bureau called the operation to divert money to Hubbard "a classic case of inurement, if not fraud."

The *Sun* has learned that the Criminal Investigations Division of the IRS is investigating the sect's financial structure, including RRF.

Mrs. Heckman said she tried in vain to gain repayment of her money through the mail and being unsuccessful in that, decided to come to Clearwater to seek her money "in person."

"When I told them I was going to talk to the police, they said, 'If you do that you'll never get your money back,'" she told a reporter.

Richard Haworth, the sect's spokesman in Clearwater, said he doubted anyone in his organization would have said such a thing to Mrs. Heckman, but acknowledged he has not spoken with her.

He said the sect has had a standard policy for 20 years regarding refunds: "If somebody wants a refund—no argument," but noted the process may be a lengthy one.

Jordan said the sect's decision to make the reimbursements is "a combination of things." He said Clearwater's controversial charitable solicitation ordinance, presently being appealed in federal court, may be one reason.

"And we feel that the lawsuits were also a factor—a bigger factor," he said. "Actually it's hard to tell what prompted (the repayments). They have been paying—a little bit—all along."

Sun staff writer Howard French contributed to this report.