

18 MAY 1984

Defendant denies sect employment

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LOS ANGELES—Gerald Armstrong steadfastly maintained Thursday that for 11 years he worked only for L. Ron Hubbard, and he refused to acknowledge Church of Scientology lawyers' contentions he was actually a sect employee.

Time and again during his Superior Court trial, Armstrong brushed off suggestions of his sect employment, insisting he worked for Scientology founder Hubbard—regardless of the chain of command.

"I was a Scientologist, and I worked for Mr. Hubbard," the former Scientology archivist told Superior Court Judge Paul G. Breckenridge.

Armstrong is charged by the Church of Scientology of California (CSC) with taking 10 thousand documents he collected while working on Hubbard's biography and kept when he fled the Clearwater-based organization in 1981. A great part of Armstrong's defense is his contention that he worked for Hubbard. Armstrong said neither the sect nor Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue, have a legal claim to the contested documents currently under court seal.

The sect, however, claims ownership of the "personal and private" papers, letters and recordings. It is demanding their return unsealed along with unspecified monetary damages.

Armstrong consistently refused to answer certain

questions "yes" or "no" during cross-examination Thursday, choosing instead to elaborate on or explain his answers. Armstrong, who is not a high school graduate, has an expansive vocabulary and on several occasions clarified questions of semantics and definition for sect attorney Barrett Litt.

"He's the best witness I have ever seen in my 14 years of practicing law," said defense attorney Michael Flynn.

Nonetheless, Litt continued to point out Armstrong's apparent connections to various organizations beneath the umbrella of Scientology. Litt concluded that the former researcher must have been a Scientology employee.

In a Nov. 25, 1981 letter, Armstrong wrote to the sects' Commodores' Messenger Organization (CMO) stating: "If (my performance as archivist) is unsatisfactory and I should not be on this project ... please let me know."

"Could it be concluded that the CMO had the authority to take Armstrong off the project?" asked Litt.

"In a sense, yes; in a sense, no," Armstrong replied. "They were acting for him (Hubbard)."

Litt introduced a May 25, 1980, letter from Armstrong to the sects' Guardian Office detailing a problem with the U.S. Immigration and Naturaliza-

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* Trial

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tion Service. "There is one action I could use some help on, and that is a letter of employment by the Church ..." Armstrong requested.

Litt wanted to know if that meant Armstrong needed a letter stating that he worked for the Church.

"No," Armstrong said, explaining that the request was for other sect officials who were having problems with the INS.

Litt and Armstrong discussed contracts, checks, directorships, corporate organization and past discussions, all of which pertained to the Church of Scientology. Through it all, Armstrong maintained his only employer was Hubbard.

Armstrong did acknowledge changing the date on a Xeroxed Oct. 15, 1980, letter to Mary Sue Hubbard in which he made suggestions how various "church organizations" could aid in the biography project.

When Litt produced the original letter, on which the date had clearly been changed to Oct. 31 and White-Out used to change the first paragraph, Armstrong explained his superior had made suggested changes.

He said he made the changes, altered the date and forwarded the letter to Mrs. Hubbard.

When Litt introduced a letter from Armstrong's superior saying, "Right now, you are working for CSC and supported by SOR (Sea Organization Reserves bank account)," Armstrong acknowledged that "ostensibly" they were his employers.

"That's who I was working for, ostensibly," he said, adding that a number of sect corporations were created so that "Mr. Hubbard could—at arm's length—control Scientology organizations."

But sect spokesman Sandy Block scoffed at Armstrong's claims, saying Scientology lawyers "have the documentation to prove that he worked for Scientology."

Armstrong's trial, now in its third week, continues today when sect lawyers are expected to continue their cross-examination of Armstrong. Lawyers for both sides say the trial is expected to last through next week.