

IRS wins OK to copy videotapes

The Internal Revenue Service won court permission Wednesday to copy five hours of clandestinely made videotapes involving a former Church of Scientology member that were played earlier this month in a Portland fraud trial against the church.

The IRS request followed a claim by church officials in Los Angeles that the tapes revealed a government plot to take control of church assets and property.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles W. Stuckey said the tapes were sought by the IRS in connection with a federal court tax case involving the church in Los Angeles. He said he was not familiar with the details of the tax case, other than it involves a dispute over the producing of tax records in court.

The tapes involved Gerald D. Armstrong, a former Scientologist, and were made in November 1984 by a private investigator without Armstrong's consent.

A letter introduced in the Portland trial indicated that the private investigator, Eugene M. Ingram, obtained permission from a Los Angeles police officer to invade Armstrong's privacy to tape the conversations.

Investigation under way

Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates said earlier this week that the officer was not authorized to sign the consent letter and that an internal investigation is under way. Gates added that it was highly unlikely that the department cooperated with Ingram, who was fired as a police officer in 1981.

The videotapes were played earlier to a Multnomah County Circuit Court jury in an attempt to discredit the testimony of Armstrong, who appeared as a witness on behalf of a Portland woman suing the church for fraud.

Armstrong said on the tapes that he was providing information against the church to several federal and local police agencies, including the FBI and the IRS. Armstrong also mentioned a plan to place phony documents in church files in an attempt to discredit church officials.

In his Portland testimony, Armstrong said the phony document plan was never carried out. He said he agreed to talk to the unidentified party on the tapes because that person represented that he wanted Armstrong's help in reforming church practices.

Armstrong also discussed on the tapes a proposed lawsuit seeking to have the courts take over management of the church and its assets based on allegations of mismanagement. The suit was never filed.

Before leaving the church in 1981, Armstrong spent almost two years gathering materials for a biography of the church's founder, L. Ron Hubbard. Armstrong testified that many of the claims made about Hubbard's educational, military and professional background were false.

The church contends that Armstrong and other former Scientologists have filed suits against the church seeking more than \$1 billion in damages to exert pressure within the church to overthrow its leaders.