

Scientology jury awards \$39 million

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A Multnomah County Circuit Court jury awarded \$39 million in punitive damages Friday to a Portland woman after finding she was victimized by "wanton misconduct" by the Church of Scientology and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

The verdict was returned in favor of Julie Christoferson Titchbourne, 27, after 2½ days of deliberation and a 10-week trial. One of her lawyers, Ronald L. Wade, said it was the biggest punitive damages verdict in Oregon history.

John Carmichael, president of the Church of Scientology in Portland, said early Saturday that Scientologists from across the country had been calling him to say they planned to come to Portland to protest the verdict.

"There may be as many as 500,000 people," he said. They've been calling all night from all over the world and all over the country."

Other sects expected

Carmichael said he also expected representatives of other religious groups to join the protest, but said he could not yet specify which ones.

The jury also awarded fraud damages to Titchbourne of \$3,203, which was the amount she paid for Scientology courses and services during a nine-month involvement with the organization in 1975 and 1976 in Portland.

Before a courtroom packed with Scientologists and others, jurors by a show of hands revealed unanimous agreement that Hubbard, the Church of Scientology of California and the local church, then known as the Church of Scientology Mission of Davis, all committed wanton misconduct in making fraudulent misrepresentations to Titchbourne.

The jury unanimously held Hubbard liable for \$20 million in punitive damages and by 9-3 votes approved punitive damages of \$17.5 million against the Church of Scientology of California and \$1.5 million against the Church of Scientology Mission of Davis. The Church of Scientology of California is the national Scientology corporate entity.

Titchbourne, who first became involved with Scientology as a 17-year-old high school graduate from Eureka, Mont., said she was pleased with the verdict but not surprised at the amount of punitive damages.

Second Titchbourne trial

The trial before Circuit Judge Donald H. Londer was Titchbourne's second against the church. She won a \$2 million judgment in 1979, which was reversed in 1982 by the Oregon Court of Appeals.

Church officials immediately announced they intend to appeal, and they criticized the verdict as a blow to freedom of religion in the United States.

In the fraud claim, Titchbourne alleged the church made more than two dozen misrepresentations about Hubbard's personal background and about potential benefits of Scientology that induced her to sign up for introductory courses.

Within two weeks after paying \$50 for the first course, Scientology officials used what were described as high-pressure sales tactics to deplete Titchbourne's bank account of the rest of the \$3,200 and encouraged her to seek money from her parents and friends.

Evidence of church attack

To prove continuation of the fraud, Titchbourne's attorneys presented evidence that after Titchbourne asked for a refund, the church attacked by suing her unsuccessfully on two occasions and by launching an investigation aimed at finding criminal conduct on her behalf.

Other targets of the so-called "Christo" project run by the intelligence branch of the church included Titchbourne's mother, friends and Lutheran minister in Montana, according to Scientology files produced in the case.

Evidence also was presented that Scientology witnesses in the 1979 trial were coached to lie in their testimony about the direct control of Hubbard over all Scientology organizations.

Defense lawyers argued that the representations at issue in the suit were made for religious purposes and as such were protected by constitutional guarantees of religious freedom.