

Scientologists protest jury's verdict

THE OREGONIAN.



CHURCH MEMBERS RALLY — Sign-carrying demonstrators circle the Multnomah County Courthouse Sunday to protest recent \$39 million verdict against the Church of Scientology. Church members from

The Oregonian/CLAUDIA HOWELL
around the country came to Portland to take part in the demonstration, which drew about 300 participants. More Scientologists were expected to take part in other demonstrations later in the day.

by JOHN SNELL
of The Oregonian staff

An estimated 300 members of the Church of Scientology rallied in downtown Portland Sunday, protesting a \$39-million judgment against the church issued by a jury last week.

For 90 minutes, the demonstrators, many of whom came to Portland from around the country, carried placards and chanted slogans as they marched around the Multnomah County Courthouse, which was closed Sunday. There were no incidents and no visible police presence during the rally.

The protest is expected to continue at least through Monday, said the Rev. Ken Hoden, a Scientology minister from Los Angeles, and one of the leaders of the rally.

An afternoon concert, more demonstrations and a candlelight vigil were scheduled for later in the day.

Jazz musician and scientologist Chick Corea was scheduled to perform a free concert in Tom McCall Waterfront Park Monday at 8 p.m.

Actor John Travolta, another member of the church, also was scheduled to arrive in Portland to take part in the protest, although his arrival time wasn't certain, Hoden said.

Hoden said the demonstrations could last much of the week, but added that there was no schedule of events beyond Monday.

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Estimates have varied widely on the total number of church members expected in Portland for the protests. The Rev. John Carmichael, head of the church in Oregon, estimated Saturday that as many as a half million Scientologists — or about a third of the church members in the United States — but church officials have since backed away from that figure.

Hoden estimated Sunday that 1,000 followers took part in the demonstration at the courthouse, but an estimate by The Oregonian placed the number at just under 300.

School buses filled with followers arrived throughout the morning and a "freedom train" — the Amtrak Coastal Starlight from Southern California — was expected to bring more followers in Sunday afternoon.

Hoden said that so many followers boarded in Los Angeles that extra cars had to be added, but Amtrak spokesman Art Lloyd said in San Francisco that the cars were added to handle extra traffic caused by the airline pilots' strike against United Airlines.

The rally was in response to a verdict handed down Friday in which a Multnomah County jury awarded \$39 million in punitive damages to former church member Julie Christofferson Titchbourne, 27, who said she was victimized by "wanton misconduct" by the church and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

Titchbourne was awarded what is

thought to be the largest punitive damage award in Oregon history when the jury decided the church made fraudulent misrepresentations to her when she was a member.

Titchbourne's attorneys said the church made more than two dozen misrepresentations about the personal background of Hubbard and about the potential benefits of joining the church. Titchbourne, who joined the church when she was 17, said Scientology officials pressured her into draining her \$3,200 bank account and urged her to get more money from family and friends.

Church leaders have said they will appeal the verdict.

"Major disasters in which hundreds of people are killed don't get \$39-million judgments," Carmichael said.

"This is akin to burning a witch, to nailing somebody to a cross — an outright attempt to exterminate a religious group," he said.

Some of the placards carried during the protest compared the verdict with the early stages of the Holocaust. Others said the verdict was an attack on First Amendment rights of freedom of religion.

"We want it to be known that the First Amendment is a guideline that says there is to be no (public) inquiry into religion," Hoden said.

Hoden said that "deprogrammers kidnapped Titchbourne from the church and held her for five days.

"She was made into a mindless robot and fired at the church like a bul-

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let.

"What you're looking at is a setup," he said.

Hoden said some of those who testified against the church at the trial were "IRS operatives." Others, he said, were guilty of criminal perjury. Still others tried to break into Scientology headquarters and stole documents to "use as models for forgeries that would incriminate the church," he said.

One downtown resident who watched demonstration from the Plaza Blocks said he thought the group was wasting its time.

"I think they've had their day in court," said Dennis Boyer. "They have a right to do what they're doing. I think they use high pressure on a lot of unhappy people to get their money."

Hoden said he had received calls from Baptist and Mormon ministers who support the church on First Amendment grounds.

Locally, however, other churches have not been quick to support the Scientologists.

"This was a case in which someone's civil rights were being violated and in which there was a charge of fraud," the Rev. Rodney I. Page, executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, said Saturday.

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high, 70; low, 50;
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