

Scientology trial jury views surreptitiously made videotapes

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The Church of Scientology struck back Wednesday against a former member who testified against the church by playing to a Portland jury videotapes, made surreptitiously, in which the man discussed placing phony documents in church files.

Multnomah Circuit Judge Donald H. Londer allowed the 108 minutes of tapes, made in a Los Angeles park last November, to be played to the jury as evidence of bias on the part of Gerald D. Armstrong against the church.

"I can create documents with relative ease," Armstrong said on the tapes during a conversation with a man named "Joey," who, Armstrong thought, wanted to reform some practices within the church.

Armstrong learned last week that "Joey" was not involved in an attempt to reform the church and that two conversations in the park were recorded and videotaped without Armstrong's knowledge.

During the profanity-laced conversations, Armstrong told Joey, "I'm saying I can type those . . . things (documents) and duplicate them and make them look the same" as staff papers in Scientology files.

Armstrong said on the tape that his purpose was to encourage high church officials to resolve lawsuits filed by numerous former Scientologists and to halt the church's hiring of private investigators, which he said violated written Scientology policies.

"I'm not really saying create incriminating evidence of which there are no facts, you know, but just to write about the speculation," Armstrong said at one point on the tapes.

Would cause problems

He said such documents would raise possible problems within the church to higher officials reading them. "Even if they responded at all, they're acknowledging that this is true," he said.

Armstrong asked Joey during the second conversation if Joey was carrying sound-recording equipment. "No," the man replied.

Armstrong was called as a witness earlier in the trial on behalf of Julie Christofferson Titchbourne, a Portland woman who seeks the return of \$3,000 plus punitive damages against the church and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, arising from her involvement with the church in 1975 and 1976.

Armstrong, who spent almost two years as a Scientologist gathering materials for a biography on Hubbard, testified earlier that he had found numerous inaccuracies in Hubbard's prior biographical sketches and in claims about his educational and military background.

Garry P. McMurry, a Portland attorney representing Titchbourne, objected to the playing of the videotapes involving Armstrong because, he said, they were made in violation of civil and criminal laws in both Oregon and California.

Londer said last week that he would not allow the tapes to be shown to the jury, but he changed his ruling late Tuesday after the second day of legal arguments outside the jury's presence. Londer said he had changed his mind because he thought playing the tapes was the best way to show the "entire context" of the conversations, rather than cross-examination from portions of a transcript.

No documents planted

After the tapes were played, Armstrong said no false documents were ever planted in church files. But he defended the suggestion he made on the tapes by saying, "It would be incriminating because it would state the truth they (church officials) knew to be the truth."

Armstrong said he should have realized at the time that he was being "set up" by a covert church operation when he met with Joey and others to discuss plans for reforming the church. "I should have smelled a big skunk early on," he said.

Earle C. Cooley, a Boston attorney representing the church, also questioned Armstrong about a handwritten document in which Armstrong asked Joey to find out what he could about the church's planned legal defenses in several lawsuits against the church, filed by Boston attorney Michael Flynn.

Flynn and his clients — including Armstrong — seek hundreds of millions of dollars in damages against Hubbard and church-related organizations. Armstrong said he would have passed on any information he obtained to Flynn.

Cooley's questions suggested that Flynn and Armstrong hoped to drive the church into bankruptcy with their suits. Armstrong said he hoped the church would change its philosophy

and settle the claims against it.

"The organization has not sought to bring cases to trial," Armstrong said of the church. "They have tried to avoid coming to trial." He said he thought juries eventually would hear the cases, despite what he said were delaying tactics.

Testimony in the trial, now in its second month, will resume Thursday.