

Scientologists Picket Court Over Freedom Issue

By MYRNA OLIVER, *Times Staff Writer*

About 400 members of the Church of Scientology's Crusade for Religious Freedom picketed the Los Angeles County Courthouse on Thursday, protesting what they consider to be court infringement on their constitutional right to religious freedom.

In a unique courthouse scene, more than half the group lined a hallway five deep on each side outside the courtroom of Judge Paul G. Breckenridge Jr. during a hearing on former Scientologist Gerald Armstrong's \$60-million fraud suit against the church.

The disparate group, which included babies in strollers draped in American flags and adults wearing clerical collars and religious crosses, stood silently in the sweltering corridor for two hours, politely obeying instructions from sheriff's deputies and their own monitors to permit access to various courtrooms.

The crusade began last month in Portland, Ore., when 15,000 Scientologists peacefully protested a jury's award of \$39 million to former member Julie Christofferson Titchbourne in her civil fraud case against the church.

"We are here," the Rev. Ken Hoden, president of the Church of Scientology of Los Angeles, said Thursday, "to let the people of Los Angeles know that we are not going to put up with having our religion dragged into court. The First Amendment says what is occurring is unconstitutional."

Court Scrutiny

Hoden and Jeff Pomerantz, spokesman for the crusade, said the Portland and Los Angeles cases have wrongly subjected religious practices and policy to court scrutiny.

In the local civil litigation, Breckenridge absolved Armstrong last year of stealing from the church documents concerning controversial church founder L. Ron Hubbard. Armstrong's countersuit, claiming that the church defrauded him by making false promises about what it could do for him and caused him

emotional distress by harassing him, is pending.

Before Breckenridge on Thursday were motions by Armstrong's attorney, Julia Dragojevic, to obtain what Scientology calls a "pre-clear" file on Armstrong, containing statements he made to a church auditor when he joined. She also is seeking files from the church's "guardian" office, which she said she believes prove that the church uses personal pre-clear or auditing files to harass former members.

Church attorney John Peterson argued that the pre-clear files are similar to the confession of a Roman Catholic to a priest and therefore are protected from disclosure by the First Amendment. Donald Randolph, also representing the church, said the other files involve attorney notes and work products that also are privileged.

Later Ruling

Breckenridge formally submitted the motions for later ruling but indicated that he will allow Armstrong to have his own statements from the pre-clear file but not the conclusions or comments of the church auditor-minister.

Demonstrators who remained outside the courthouse sang "We Shall Overcome." They wore T-shirts saying "Crusade for Religious Freedom Portland 1985" and carried signs saying "Your Church Could Be Next," "Religious Freedom Now" and "Never Again."

One person fainted because of the extreme heat while church attorneys addressed the group outside the courthouse after the hearing.

Also contributing to this story was Times staff writer Dorothy Townsend.