

Scientology Members Protest \$30-Million Damage Award to Ex-Follower

By JERRY BELCHER, Times Staff Writer

Hundreds of Scientologists were alternately exhorted and entertained Wednesday in the Los Angeles Civic Center during a highly organized protest against a \$30-million jury award, which they claimed threatens the freedom, not only of their church, but of all religions in this country.

The daytime turnout for the protest peaked shortly before noon, with about 850 members of the Church of Scientology marching in front of the Los Angeles County Courthouse on North Hill Street, bearing signs such as "Religious Beliefs Don't Belong in Court," "Uphold the First Amendment" and "Whose Church Will Be Next?"

Organizers said they expected the crowd to grow considerably larger during the evening, after other Scientologists got off work.

But by 8 p.m., the demonstration area was deserted.

The protest demonstration began shortly after 7 a.m., when about 300 Scientologists began marching outside the courthouse to protest Tuesday's damage award to former church member Larry Wollersheim, who said the organization deliberately tried to drive him mad and wrecked him financially.

Later, at a rally across Hill Street in the Court of Flags, the assemblage was exhorted by the Rev. Ken Hoden, president of the Church of Scientology of Los Angeles, to "fight for your rights" and entertained by well known musicians, including jazz star Chick Corea.

At times the protest rally sounded like a political convention, at others like a college pep rally and, when the Rev. Leo Champion of

Milwaukee's Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church stood up and belted out gospel favorites, more like an old-time evangelical celebration.

On Tuesday, shortly after the jury's finding, Hoden called for 10,000 church members to descend on the courthouse to protest the decision.

At mid-morning Wednesday, Hoden estimated the crowd at about 1,200. But later in the day Scientology spokesman Allen Hubbert revised the figure downward, to 850, a number which jibed with Los Angeles police estimates. Police said the demonstration was peaceful and orderly.

Hoden said that what he meant in his prediction Tuesday was that at least 10,000 demonstrators would show up at some time during

the daily protests, which he said will continue at least through Friday.

In a fiery speech to members gathered under colorful canvas sunshades in the Court of Flags, Hoden told the crowd: "We are here not to obstruct justice. We are here to uphold justice."

Virtually every sentence by Hoden was followed by a drum roll and the crash of cymbals.

"You are being punished for practicing the religion of Scientology!" he said, pausing for the percussive embellishment, then adding: "We're just not going to put up with it anymore!"

Hoden said that he had been asked if he was worried about how the church was going to pay the court judgment—\$5 million in compensatory damages and \$25 million

in punitive damages.

"I said I am not worried at all, because we aren't going to pay \$30 million," he said.

At the end of his speech Hoden, like several other speakers who followed him, received repeated cries of "Hip-hip, hooray!" from the crowd, responding to the directions of a master of ceremonies.

Offstage, Hoden said that Superior Court Judge Ronald Swearingner should have thrown the case out of court "20 weeks ago," because "on issues involving religion, you are not supposed to have a trial."

He repeatedly charged that the trial violated the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. He also charged that the jury was "inflamed" against the religious beliefs of Scientologists by Wollersheim's attorney.

several jurors interviewed by The Times, however, said that religion was not the issue.

"We didn't want to judge a religion," jury foreman Andre A. Anderson said. "My own personal opinion is that I think it [Scientology] is a church and a bona fide religion."

But, he said, the jury felt that the church went beyond the law in its so-called "fair game" doctrine, in which Scientology's late founder, L. Ron Hubbard, declared that a person who is seen as an enemy "May be tricked, sued or lied to or destroyed."

Wollersheim's attorney, Charles O'Reilly, argued that doctrine was used against his client to wreck him financially and to drive him almost to the point of insanity.