



# The Sacramento Bee

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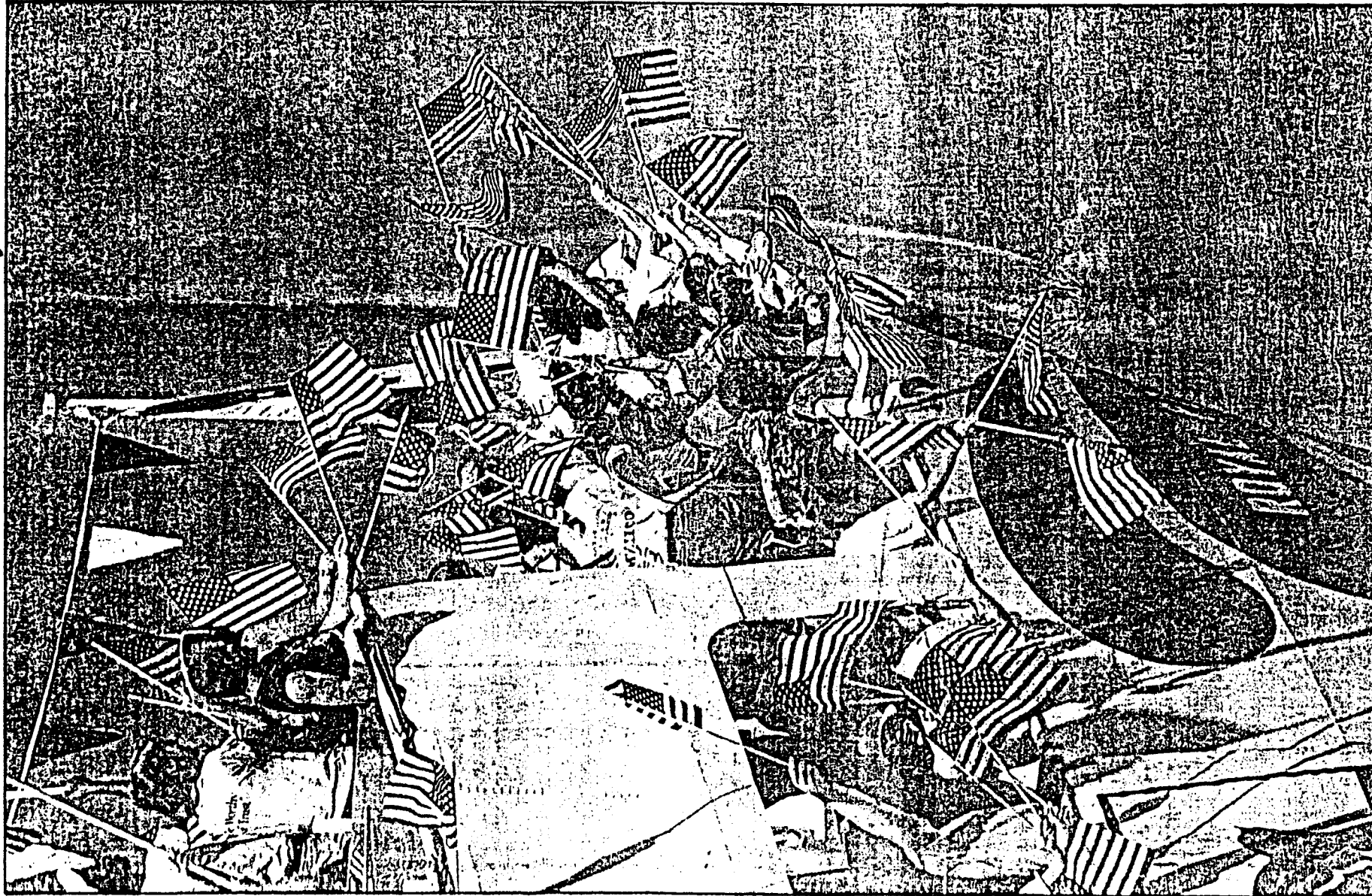
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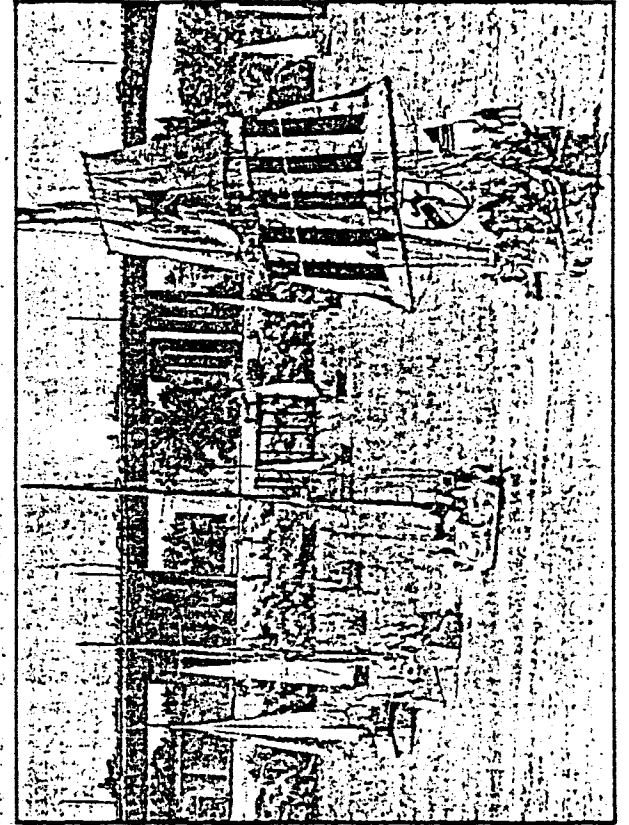
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Bee/Tom Alvarez



## Ship-to-shore protest march

Scientists arrive Thursday in Old Sacramento in a flotilla from San Francisco. The Tower Bridge had to be raised for many of the ships to pass, tying up traffic on both sides. About 1,000 Scientists then marched to the state Capitol for a rally. Story on page B1.



Bee/Skip Shuman

Members of the Church of Scientology demonstrate Thursday at the state Capitol. They came to Old Sacramento by boat and marched to the Capitol.

# 1,000 Scientologists rally

## March on Capitol ends long journey to support bill

By Clark Brooks  
Bee Staff Writer

Amid chants of "Religious freedom now," about 1,000 seafaring Scientologists docked Thursday in Old Sacramento and marched, single-file, to the state Capitol.

They came in boats from San Francisco, completing a journey that began Tuesday in Los Angeles.

The Scientologists made the trip to show their support for a proposed Senate bill that would prohibit juries from awarding punitive damages to people who win civil suits against religious organizations.

Sen. John Doolittle, R-Citrus Heights, said he will re-introduce the bill in December when the next legislative session begins. He tried to get the same bill passed earlier this year, but it died in its first legislative hearing.

A spokesman for Doolittle's office said that the Church of Scientology wasn't among the religious groups that supported the bill when it

was introduced in February. The Rev. Ken Hoden, president of the Church of Scientology of Los Angeles, said that isn't quite true.

"We were supportive. We just weren't as actively involved as we are now," he said as hundreds of Scientologists began lining up to march on the Capitol.

He said his church became more interested in the bill last month when a Superior Court jury in Los Angeles awarded \$30 million to a disgruntled former Scientologist named Larry Wollersheim. The bulk of the award — \$25 million — was for punitive damages.

Wollersheim filed a lawsuit in 1980 alleging that the church ruined his business and subjected him to emotional stress through its counseling methods.

Attorneys for the Scientologists want a new trial, and a hearing has been scheduled for Sept. 4.

Wollersheim, who was last known to be liv-

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## Rally

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ing in the Bay area, could not be reached for comment. His attorneys in Los Angeles did not return phone calls Thursday.

Hoden was on the first boat that docked Thursday afternoon. As passengers on other boats began coming ashore, he used a cordless microphone to greet them.

"You can't sue a labor union for punitive damages anywhere in this great country," he shouted. "You can't sue a city for punitive damages. But you can sue a church for punitive damages."

He acknowledged in an interview that Americans already have religious freedom, but he said churches aren't as free as labor unions and cities, which don't have to pay punitive damages to people who sue them and win.

Hoden said it cost more than \$100,000 to stage the protest. But you can't put a price on religious freedom, he said.

"The parishioners have poured their money into this," he said. "We pooled all the money and went to the dock in San Francisco and said, 'We need 50 boats.'"

He said they traveled to Sacramento by boat because that's the way the Pilgrims, fleeing religious persecution, came to the New World.

The demonstrators, singing "We Shall Overcome," began marching toward the Capitol, walking on the grassy center strip when they reached Capitol Mall. They walked one behind the other.

"Single file! Single file!" those in charge yelled whenever somebody got out of line. "Five feet apart! Five feet apart!" they shouted when the marchers got too close together.

City police officers managed to

keep both the traffic and marchers moving at a fairly smooth pace.

When they all reached the Capitol, Hoden repeated that religious freedom was at stake and that the time to save it was now. He then introduced Doolittle, whom he described as a "champion of religious freedom."

The senator told the cheering throng that if churches continue paying punitive damages stemming from lawsuits, people who don't want to be stuck with the bill might not join churches.