

St. Petersburg Times

Florida's Best Newspaper

St. Petersburg, Florida

Thursday, December 22, 1988

Scientology church faces new claims of harassment

■ *First of two parts*

By **STEPHEN KOFF**
Times Staff Writer

The year was 1976, one year after the Church of Scientology had secretly moved its spiritual headquarters to Clearwater, and Mayor Gabe Cazares was complaining too loudly for the church's comfort.

So, as documents seized by the FBI would later show, the church's Clearwater office devised a scheme to "ruin Mayor Gabriel Cazares' political career by spreading scandal about his sex life."

Church officials came up with ways to get Cazares' school records, birth records, anything — from checking with the Catholic Church to looking in graveyards for headstones with Cazares' name — that might discredit the mayor.

The next year, the FBI raided church offices and seized hundreds of documents. Eleven church members were subsequently convicted of crimes. And the Church of Scientology promised that it had cleaned house. Such dirty tricks, said the church, were things of the past.

Consider, then, the more recent case of Charles O'Reilly, an aggressive California lawyer who was another thorn in the side of Scientology. O'Reilly represented some former Scientologists who were suing the church, and he refused to settle their cases. One client, who said the church nearly drove him insane, had won a \$30-million verdict against the sect. Church executives were irate, one of their former lawyers recalled in sworn testimony.

So in the spring of 1987, top-ranking Scientologists and lawyers called a meeting at their headquarters on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles to talk over the O'Reilly matter. According to their former lawyer, Joseph Yanny, the Scientologists planned to steal confidential files on O'Reilly from the Betty Ford Center and other alcohol- and drug-treatment centers. Yanny said the Scientologists figured that such records could be used to blackmail O'Reilly.

Ultimately, the plan to steal the records was scaled back, then dropped altogether. But the idea was similar to other plans that were carried out, say former top Scientology officials and representatives. Although such claims have been made before by alleged victims of the church's tricks, the new charges are coming from people who were inside the

Please see **SCIENTOLOGY 6-A**



AP photo by MARILYN WEISS

Joseph Yanny, once a lawyer for the Scientologists, quit after protesting they were abusing the legal system.

Scientology

from 1-A

highest circles of Scientology. These officials include a church executive who recently left Scientology, a former church security chief, a California lawyer who until recently helped formulate Scientology's legal strategy, the church's former international president, and dozens of former church members, including one who has written a book critical of the church and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

Cumulatively, the new charges lead to a stinging conclusion about Scientology: Despite its assurances of reform, a pattern of abuses continues against church critics. In some cases, those abuses cross the line of criminal law, according to authorities.

A judge in Spain recently reached the same conclusion. After a nine-month investigation, Judge Jose Maria Vazquez Honrubia on Nov. 20 detained 71 Scientologists in Madrid and ordered 11 of them jailed. Those held included Heber Jentsch, a 53-year-old American and president of the Church of Scientology International. After three weeks, Jentsch and the church members were released on \$1.1-million bail but now must report to the court three times a week. They could face charges of coercion, fraud, flight of capital, illicit association and labor law violations. They say they are the victims of an international conspiracy.

Similarly, 15 Scientologists and the church itself are awaiting trial in Canada on charges stemming from a 1983 police raid in which about 2-million stolen government documents were seized from church offices. Scientology lawyers said the sect would donate money to charity if charges against the church were dismissed, but Ontario Attorney General Ian Scott declined the offer.

Scientologists and their lawyers would not answer questions for this series of articles.

The new charges are coming from people who were inside the highest circles of Scientology.

The church and the *St. Petersburg Times* are adversaries in a federal court case, and chief Scientology counsel Earle C. Cooley of Boston attributed the church's "no comment" to that dispute. The *Times* seeks to unseal files in four lawsuits against Scientology settled in 1986. Although court files are normally open, the judge granted the church's request to seal these cases over the objections of opposing lawyers. The Church of Scientology now wants to keep them closed. *Times* lawyers argued in a motion in October that closing the files violates the First Amendment.



Times files

Heber Jentsch, a 53-year-old American, is president of the Church of Scientology International.

The First Amendment to the Constitution, among other things, gives a guarantee of a free press, and *Times* lawyers said that closing the files interferes with the newspaper's right to gather and publish news.

The *Times* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1980 for exposes of abuse by the church. In 1984, California Superior Judge Paul G. Breckenridge ruled that "the organization clearly is schizophrenic and paranoid."

"It hasn't changed at all," said William Franks, who until 1982 was chairman and executive director of the Church of Scientology International. Franks left the church after a showdown between church leaders and owners of numerous Scientology "missions," or franchises.

Franks has said that despite public statements, it became clear that church executives never intended to change Scientology's character. Franks is now a businessman in Philadelphia; his replacement as Scientology's international president was Jentsch, who is now out on bail in Spain.

Embarrassing the opposition

Although it has a large presence in Pinellas County, Scientology keeps its business headquarters in California, and it was there that top Scientologists and lawyers gathered to talk about O'Reilly, the lawyer who was causing them trouble.

Joseph Yanny, 38, was one of those lawyers. He has since fallen out with the church, but at the time, he was one of Scientology's top lawyers. Yanny began representing Scientology in trademark matters in 1983. His other clients include Corona Beer and the rock group Grateful Dead. By 1985, Yanny was "closely involved in the formulation of legal strategy," according to court documents filed by Scientologists.

"I and others were told by (Scientology executive) Marty

Rathburn that on the orders of David Miscavige, the successor of L. Ron Hubbard as the head of the cult, that the medical records of O'Reilly were to be stolen from the Betty Ford Center, and another location in Santa Barbara, to show that he was using cocaine, discredited him, and possibly blackmail him into easing off on his \$30-million verdict now on appeal." Yanny said last summer when questioned by Scientology lawyers.

Yanny balked. "I wanted no part of any criminal conduct to obtain the stuff," he said in an interview with the *Times*. "An alternative plan was quickly arrived at to settle my nerves," he said when questioned by other lawyers.

The new tack: Rather than steal the records, lawyers would get them through the judicial process. Subpoenas were prepared for records from the Betty Ford Center, the Eisenhower Medical Center and Cottage Care Center, all in California. Specifically requested in the subpoenas, which are now on file in federal court, were "records of admittance for treatment of alcohol and/or drug use or dependency, records of treatment of Mr. O'Reilly for alcohol and/or drug usage, records concerning any known distribution or receipt by Mr. O'Reilly of any illegal drug."

Yanny said he protested again, saying the Scientologists were abusing the legal system. He said he refused to sign the subpoenas, and although they were filed with the court, they were ultimately never served. Yanny resigned as church counsel.

Since then, Yanny has been sued by the Church of Scientology, which says that after quitting he supplied church adversaries with privileged Scientology legal information.

An account from inside

She was 22, a former Unitarian. He was a former Marine air traffic controller with two tours in Vietnam. They were taking courses at Mountainview Junior College in Dallas when Vicki McRae met Richard Azneran.

"He told me that there was a guy in Austin named Whit Whitford who was a Scientologist . . . and that this fellow could do all sorts of magical things, like make butterflies come out of the sky and things like that," she remembered when questioned by lawyers in June.

"That conversation ended pretty quickly, because I told him I thought it was bulls---."

Ms. McRae's skepticism yielded to Azneran's curiosity, though, and before long both were Scientologists. Later, they became husband and wife.

Scientists — their leader called the group a religion, but said it didn't require abandoning other religious beliefs. It was a religion of man: a belief that through a form of one-on-one counseling called "auditing," man could free himself of deep-rooted psychological baggage and live a self-determined life. This auditing was accomplished with the help of an "E-Meter," a device similar to a lie-detector.

The founder of this religion was L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction writer in the 1940s whose 1950 book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* planted the seed for the Scientology movement. In its simplest explanation, Dianetics was a science of the mind, and Scientology was the theology it embraced.

Hubbard wrote that the human mind is a camera with thousands of tiny images. These "engrams" were regularly picked up by the mind — they could have been recorded by a person almost as early as conception — and profoundly affected human behavior, even creating physical maladies. They had to be excised before man could rid himself and the planet of neurosis, war, crime and disease, Hubbard said. The end result was a state called "clear."

Vicki Azneran, like millions of other people around the world, was intrigued. She began taking Scientology courses at a Dallas Dianetics center and soon joined the staff. In time she advanced to the national staff, putting in 18-hour days in exchange for \$10 a week plus room and board and auditing privileges, she said. She was rewarded with prestige, and in 1983 was promoted to president of Religious Technology Center (RTC). This was the Scientology branch, based in Los Angeles, that made sure Hubbard's teachings were delivered in a standard format. The position made her one of the highest-ranking Scientologists in the world.

Vicki Azneran had become part of Scientology's elite. She knew the complex myriad of organizations and sub-organizations and how they fit together. She now says that Scientology's corporate web was created as a way of beating taxes. She also knew other details, and recently testified about them in federal court proceedings.

Among other things, she disclosed the systematic destruction of church documents. Scientologists feared those records might show that Hubbard secreted millions of dollars of church money into his own accounts, she testified. (A federal judge last year ruled that Hubbard did just that.) Since the church claimed to be not-for-profit — a contention disputed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) — any such records could be damaging.

Vicki Azneran said she and her husband helped make sure the records were never released. They shredded financial documents in 1980 in Clearwater, she said, and again in 1981. Then in 1986, she said, she and Richard "participated in the coverup of expenditures . . . in anticipation of an IRS audit" in California.

Meantime, in 1984, she said, she destroyed other documents — which a California judge had ordered the church to yield. The church had personal records on Gerry Armstrong, a former Scientologist in litigation with the sect. Now Judge Paul Breckenridge of California Superior Court was ordering the Church of Scientology to turn over these records, called "PC" files, or pre-clear files. The files, kept on all Scientologists, contain personal information — from secret desires to confessions of misconduct — extracted during auditing sessions.

"I removed documents from Gerry Armstrong's PC folders to keep them from being turned over to the court," Vicki Azneran said. "I went through them and removed things from them. And some of those things I destroyed, and some of them I gave away or gave to someone in OSA (Office of Special Affairs), I believe."

Richard Azneran, who also had risen through the ranks — becoming Hubbard's public relations representative and later supervising church security — said culling pre-clear files was standard church practice. He said he also carried out similar tasks.

Among the duties he described in depositions: bugging staff members' rooms, digging through adversarial lawyers' garbage and investigating so-called enemies of the church.

In 1985, Scientology executive David Miscavige told him to set up eavesdropping equipment in all the offices of Author Services Incorporated, Azneran said. Author Services is Scientology's for-profit division, licensing the copyrights to the prolific Hubbard's works. Miscavige feared a raid by the IRS and wanted to photograph and record "everything that any agent ever said to each other" so it could be used in plotting a defense, Azneran said.

Rick Azneran also devised and helped implement a system to destroy church computer tapes, he said.

The way it worked, records from the church's Southern California centers were transferred from computer discs to tapes and taken to rented storage facilities in Ventura, Orange and Riverside counties — outside Los Angeles County to create possible jurisdictional problems for the police.



Times files

The founder of Scientology was L. Ron Hubbard, a one-time science fiction writer who devised Dianetics.

Electronic machines that erase magnetic tapes "were set up in a row right next to the storage racks where the daily backup tapes were kept," Azneran said. "We drilled on a regular basis being able to destroy the information on those magnetic tapes in a given amount of time, which is what we thought we would have should there be a raid."

And what if the FBI or IRS tried to force their way into the actual computer centers?

The Scientologists had thought of that, too, Azneran said. "Earlier on in the computer rooms, the glass . . . that had been installed was all two-inch, two-and-a-half-inch bullet-proof glass so that they couldn't break in with sledge hammers and so forth."

Punishment and escape

Why are the Aznerans saying such terrible things about their former colleagues?

It goes back to 1986 — specifically, Jan. 24, the day the reclusive L. Ron Hubbard, 74, died of a stroke at his ranch in Creston, Calif. There was some struggle within Scientology's top ranks to succeed Hubbard, and Vicki Azneran found herself in the wrong faction, she says now.

As a result, she was sent to the Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF), a military-like work detail that former members say exists at nearly all major Scientology centers. Her assignment was to Happy Valley, a Scientology camp in the California desert. Guards ordered her to run wherever she went and sleep with a dozen women in one room, and a female guard stayed with her when she showered, she said.

Church of Scientology

ST. PETERSBURG TIMES ■ THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1988

She herself had dispatched dozens of others to the RPF for misdeeds against the church, she said. She had personally done stunts in the RPF on her way up the Scientology ladder.

But this time was different, she said. This time, she was sick. A uterine infection gave her a fever, and the guards wouldn't let her leave to see a doctor.

So in March of 1987, when two companions ran away and later came back in a rented car, she joined them and left. She had decided, as had Richard, it was time to leave Scientology, she told lawyers.

Their separation from the church seemed amicable. They even accepted a \$20,000 loan, to be paid back at 5 percent interest over 10 years. They took the money and started a private investigation firm in Dallas.

But Vicki and Richard Azneran held a grudge.

On April 1 this year, they filed a \$70-million lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles against the Church of Scientology of California, RTC and other church divisions, and several Scientology executives. The 11-count suit claimed false imprisonment, infliction of emotional distress, loss of consortium, conspiracy, fraud, breach of contract, invasion of privacy and breach of duty to pay minimum wage and overtime.

Scientology lawyers denied the charges.

Suing their lawyer

On June 15, Scientology lawyers called Yanny, the former lawyer, to a meeting. "They told me they were going to sue me," Yanny said. "Howard Weitzman (a prominent Los Angeles lawyer) said they wanted to make this all go away. He said to me, 'This doesn't have to happen if you can make the Azneran case go away.'

"End of meeting.

"And so I got sued. And fur started flying."

The Church of Scientology International, the Church of Scientology of California and RTC charged in the suit, filed eight days after the meeting, that Yanny violated the attorney-client privilege. According to the Scientologists, Yanny presided over a series of "clandestine meetings" in March at his Hermosa Beach home with various lawyers, aides, the Aznerans and Bent Corydon. Corydon, of Riverside, Calif., wrote the 1987 book *L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?*, and has faced a barrage of litigation from the church.

The Scientologists said that Yanny, who had inside information, now was aiding, even encouraging, the Aznerans. As proof, the Scientologists presented affidavits from two former employees of Yanny who said they were present during the meetings with the Aznerans and Corydon. The Scientologists also submitted photographs, taken by a private investigator, showing Corydon's car parked behind Yanny's house. On the basis of this information, a California judge ruled that neither Yanny nor his lawyers could represent the Aznerans because of an appearance of impropriety.

Although Yanny acknowledged a friendship with the Aznerans and Corydon, he said he has not helped them with their suits. But the Scientologists had other charges as well. Their suit said that of the \$1.8-million Yanny's firm billed the sect in four years, a substantial portion was padded or fraudulent. And they said that Yanny performed incompetent work "while under the influence of drugs and alcohol."

Later they amended the suit. They dropped the part about incompetence, drugs and alcohol.

The rearview mirror

Joe Yanny took a plane from Los Angeles to Dallas and then another to Pittsburgh last June. In Pittsburgh, he rented a car to go to his sister's home in Belleaire, Ohio.

He said he thought he was being followed.

The Grateful Dead, one of his clients, was playing in Buckeye Lakes while he was in Ohio, so Yanny and three friends got into the car and drove to the concert. Coming back, he thought he was being followed.

He sped up and lost the tail. But when he got into town, alongside his sister's house, four police cruisers pulled up with lights flashing.

The officers said they had a tip, phoned in anonymously to the Ohio Highway Patrol. Yanny, they said they were told, had firearms and cocaine in the car.

"I was told at that point in time that I and those in my company could be searched, including the vehicle, or that I could be arrested on the spot," Yanny said. "The choice was mine."

He agreed to be searched, as did the others. The police found nothing.

The next day, Bellaire police stopped a different rented car in town. The men in the car gave a story the police did not believe, so the police persisted, and the men in the rental car finally acknowledged that they were watching Yanny.

"The police were informed that these people had been hired by — the name Economic Research Group from New York was mentioned," Yanny said in a deposition. "They were from the Washington, D.C., area and had been hired by a firm named Williams & Connelly. At least this is the information that was given to the police. (Williams & Connelly) had represented the cult of Scientology on various matters, and various of its chief executives such as David Miscavige."

Williams & Connelly lawyer Gerald Feffer said he would likely know of any Scientology matters involving the firm, but knew nothing about the incident. He said he has used the Economic Research Group — an investigation firm that would not return a reporter's calls — but said, "I don't, and would never, under any circumstances, hire anyone to harass anybody."

Capt. Robert Wallace of the Bellaire police said: "Mr. Yanny's account would be correct. And yes, the Bellaire Police Department can confirm that." He said the only part of the story he could not verify was whether the private investigators phoned in the tip about Yanny carrying drugs. But he said: "It is extremely coincidental, to say the least."

Friday: How Scientologists made Clearwater their mecca.