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## Scientologists Ran Campaign to Discredit Erhard, Detective Says

■ **Religion:** Competition for customers said to be the motive behind investigation launched into activities of the est founder.

By ROBERT W. WELKOS  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

In October of 1989, a private detective was called into the Church of Scientology's offices in Los Angeles and asked to conduct an investigation in Northern California.

Ted Heisig, a non-Scientologist based in Orange County, said he was led into a room and shown five file cabinets filled with documents Scientology had been collecting for years. The subject: Werner Erhard, founder of the worldwide self-awareness movement known as est.

"They had contacts [in the file cabinets] dating back to his childhood days," Heisig recalled.

Many of the documents were written by former est members who had joined Scientology and were then asked to write down anything they knew about Erhard and his organization. Some accused him of having

links to neo-Nazis, of possessing bizarre personality disorders, of being a scoundrel posing as a messiah.

Heisig said it was clear from the documents that Scientology was preparing a "media blitz" against Erhard—and that he was going to be a key player, spreading and collecting information that could be used to discredit the est founder.

"The reason, I think it comes down to, is competition," Heisig said. "Since Werner started his est program, he took potential customers . . . away from the church."

The secret campaign against Erhard would span more than a year and become one of the Church of Scientology's top priorities. In Sausalito, where Erhard then lived on a yacht, private detectives spied on him and interviewed scores of disgruntled followers. They dug deeply into records of his personal and financial affairs.

In the end, Erhard received so much

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notoriety—including a scathing segment on "60 Minutes" last March—that he sold his business and now lives in Costa Rica. Although he blames Scientology for his troubles, it is hard to gauge what the organization actually accomplished behind the scenes because those who know most are not saying.

As Scientology's chief lawyer, Earle C. Cooley, put it: "I'm not going to comment in any way on the use of material that was obtained as a result of the investigation."

One thing, however, is clear: according to Heisig, the Church of Scientology was pleased with the outcome. And no one would have been happier than Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, whose hatred of Erhard was passed along to his followers after his 1986 death.

Hubbard had long held that Erhard, who had dabbled in Scientology, had incorporated some of its teachings into est, making a fortune in the process. Heisig said he was told by Scientology officials that the church had lost millions of dollars because Erhard had lured away potential customers.

Scientology's latest campaign against Erhard was one in a series of efforts by church members to undermine his reputation and movement.

Vicki Aznaran, the top ecclesiastical official in Scientology from 1984 until she left in 1987, said she saw secret files that showed Scientologists were instructed to enroll in est seminars and "act crazy" and "heckle" the program leaders to cause disruption of the seminars.

She said they were also told to steal materials from est to cause loss of business for Erhard.

Aznaran, who has sued Scientology for alleged fraud and false



United Press International

After spate of negative publicity, Werner Erhard moved to Costa Rica.

imprisonment, said Hubbard once devised a plan in which his followers were told to try to duplicate Erhard's sales success.

The plan was run by one of Hubbard's daughters, Aznaran recalled, and involved sending "lots of people into est and copying it." But, she said, for one reason or another, the Scientologists could never make it work as well as Erhard had.

"Hubbard was very angry at Erhard's success," Aznaran said. "Nothing got under his skin worse than someone taking one or two of his courses and then running off and making some money off it and him not getting a slice of it."

In the early 1980s, Aznaran said, she received orders to draw up a copyright or trademark infringement suit against Erhard. To assist in the lawsuit, she said, Scientology planted an agent in est who stole documents. But Aznaran said a lawsuit was never filed.

In 1977, the FBI raided Scientology headquarters in Los Angeles and Washington. Eleven top

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church officials, including Hubbard's wife, subsequently received prison terms for burglarizing and bugging government offices.

Sprinkled throughout some of the seized documents were references to est. In one, dated April, 1976, it read: "EST: IRS hasn't busted EST, with a little help they might." Another read: "EST Cld I have the SFO repts re plants."

Erhard had begun his own movement in the fall of 1971. He called it Erhard Seminars Training—est—and in the years that followed, the organization expanded rapidly as thousands flocked to his sessions.

In fact, it was est's success that caught the attention of Scientology's founder.

On April 18, 1976, Hubbard sat down to watch the David Susskind show on television. The program featured 40 people who had undergone est training and Hubbard was looking to see what similarities, if any, there were between Scientology and Werner Erhard's seminars.

The next day Hubbard wrote a four-page analysis of the program, saying est was essentially Scientology "up to 1954."

"Their instructors and foundation board are certainly students of Scientology texts and possibly of Scientology," Hubbard wrote. "The reason they can't say why it works is that they don't dare mention or at least just don't mention Scientology. Werner Erhard may pretend to his staff that he invented these processes. But many of his staff would have to know that it is Scientology."

Erhard denied that "these processes" were the same, telling a biographer: "I am not surprised that people find traces of Scientology in est. In est we use variations on some of the Scientology charts, and as a result the terminology overlaps a bit. In essential respects, however, the two are different."

Although Erhard did not know it, he had created a powerful enemy.

Private detective Heisig arrived in the San Francisco Bay area in the fall of 1989.

His orders from Scientology, he said, were to do legal checks on Erhard to see if there were criminal cases lodged against him, contact disaffected former est employees and members and conduct surveillance of Erhard's boat. The boat, called the Canim, was then anchored in Sausalito, where the est founder lived and worked.

Over the next few months, Heisig said, he interviewed several dozen people.

Heisig told The Times that Scientology wanted him to find out any information "relating to Werner's questionable activities" and persuade people with such knowledge to file sworn affidavits against Erhard.

Heisig identified his main supervisor as Roger Stodola, who he said worked out of the Church of Scientology in San Francisco. Each morning, before setting out on his interviews, Heisig said he and Stodola discussed the day's "plan of attack."

Heisig said that Stodola, working behind the scenes, fed negative information about Erhard to various journalists around the country.

One of those Heisig said he was told to make contact with was Paul Gutfreund, a Sausalito resident and known Erhard foe, who has acted as a clearinghouse for anti-Erhard information. Gutfreund has a suit pending that alleges Erhard's training turned him into a manic-depressive and drove him to financial ruin and attempted suicide.

Heisig said Scientology provided him with materials, which he then gave to Gutfreund, who was unaware that the private detective was really working for the church. Heisig said Gutfreund, in turn, disseminated the documents about Erhard to journalists around the country.

Heisig said Scientology officials instructed him to tell Gutfreund only that he was working on behalf of some former est members—not Scientology.

"They asked me not to stretch the truth too much," Heisig recalled. "I went up there . . . saying I was representing a group of ex-est members, which, in part, was true because [some] people who were involved in est went to Scientology. So, it was kind of a half-truth."

When Gutfreund became suspicious of the private detective, his Scientology supervisors got a church member to meet with Gutfreund at a nearby hotel and pose as one of Heisig's "clients."

Gutfreund would not discuss his contact with Heisig. His attorney, John Elstead of Pleasanton, commented:

"According to what Heisig says, I guess they [Scientologists] did dupe him. I suspect if Scientologists got any information from Paul, they did it without him being aware of it."

Heisig also interviewed Dawn Damas, who once worked as a governess to Erhard's three youngest children.

In a recent sworn affidavit, taken by Erhard's lawyers, Heisig said Damas "made statements regard-

ing sexual molestation and physical abuse by Erhard of family members, that Erhard disowned his son and that Erhard's daughters were scared to death of him."

Damas—who acted as a go-between for some journalists seeking to interview Erhard's children—denied that she knowingly gave information about Erhard to Scientology.

"I certainly have nothing to do with Scientology," Damas said. "Apparently one of the people I spoke to has been hired by Scientology. God only knows where that information went."

In addition to his own activities, Heisig said Scientology used two other private investigators to unearth information about Erhard.

One of those, Heisig said, was a Bay Area private investigator named Seth Derish.

Heisig said that Derish was engaged by Scientology to obtain financial information on Erhard and his organization and then transferred that information to representatives of Scientology.

"I saw the financial reports that Mr. Derish submitted," Heisig said. "In the information I saw in the files that Scientology has on Werner Erhard, I saw information that Scientology believes Erhard has a Swiss bank account and that they have the account number."

Derish declined to discuss his cases with *The Times*.

Another private investigator who took part in the Erhard investigation was Alan Clow, whose firm is in Newport Beach.

Clow told *The Times* that he actually worked for a Los Angeles law firm run by Scientologists.

"I basically did a lot of investigation into Erhard's background and the relationship with his daughters," Clow said. "I was basically told to dig up dirt."

Clow said he always received his instructions from the attorneys. "Everything they asked me to do was legal and aboveboard," he said. "I didn't go sneaking around breaking into houses."

He estimated he talked to between "20 and 30" people.

Eventually, Clow said, his clients gave him permission to talk to a journalist at *Vanity Fair* magazine who was preparing an article about Erhard. Clow also said he gave "background" information on Erhard to people at "60 Minutes." A CBS spokesman declined to discuss the matter.

Jesse Kornbluth, a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, said he had been given Clow's name while reporting on Erhard for the magazine—although his article never ran.

"Basically, I didn't know who he represented," Kornbluth said about Clow. "Somebody gave me his name. . . . He gave me some suggestions [but] they were not people I would not have found on my own."

Clow said that before talking to Kornbluth, he sought the permission of his "clients" to see if they would allow him to cooperate with the writer. "They said, 'Go ahead, give Jesse the names.' I gave him like 10 names of people I talked to."

Kornbluth said that he had started his investigation in the spring of 1990 after receiving an anonymous packet in the mail that included "juicy" documents about Erhard.

Kornbluth had written about Erhard in *New Times* magazine in 1976. The intervening years had not dampened his strongly critical opinions about the est founder, whose life he described as "a trail of lies, betrayals and vast inconsistencies."

Heisig contends that Stodola, one of his Scientology case agents, played a role in getting information to *Vanity Fair*.

"Stodola was in direct contact with Jesse Kornbluth of *Vanity Fair*," Heisig said in his sworn affidavit.

Kornbluth declined to say who sent him the mysterious packet, except that he now knows who it was.

"It was no one connected with Scientology," he said.

The *Times* was unable to reach Stodola for comment.

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In late February of this year, only days before "60 Minutes" was to air its segment on him, Erhard terminated the lease on his yacht, sold ownership in his company to his employees, and gave his beloved Great Dane "Polo" to a friend. He then disappeared from Sausalito.

The year before, Werner Erhard and Associates had brought in more than \$30 million, but by early 1991 Erhard believed his name would only tarnish the organization he had built.

His associates say he had to leave the country because his reputation had been maliciously maligned by the news media.

Erhard's supporters believe that the media did not know they were being used by Scientology to get at Erhard.

Some journalists who covered the story said they knew of no overt Scientology activities.

John Hubner of the *San Jose Mercury News*, for example, said he had "zero" contact with Scientologists or their private detectives, although he suspected that Scientologists might be involved when he heard about mysterious packets being mailed to journalists. He said he received no such packets.

Erhard himself has declined in-



GARY AMBROSE Los Angeles Times

Detective Ted Heisig says the campaign against Werner Erhard was a top priority for the Scientologists.

interviews, but issued a brief statement to The Times in which he accused Scientology of mounting a conspiracy to destroy his family and associates. He called the conspiracy an "expression of evil."

For its part, Scientology said that all the information Heisig gathered was obtained legally, but church lawyers refused to say whether any of the information

was fed to journalists.

Scientology's national trial counsel, Cooley, would not discuss the specific activities of anyone connected with the church's Erhard investigation.

Cooley, confirming that the investigation took place, said the church did nothing illegal. But, he added, "I'm not going to get into what lawyers did or what paralegal

support did [other than to say] that they existed and they always have existed."

Cooley also declined comment on what Scientology did with material it obtained as a result of the investigation, "although I must say that if any was shared with the media, there is nothing wrong with that."