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## Scientology and Its German Foes: A Bitter Conflict

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY

Special to The New York Times

HAMBURG, Germany — It would take something like an invasion of space aliens — maybe something out of an L. Ron Hubbard science fiction novel — to match the climate of fear and mutual suspicion that prevails between the Church of Scientology that Mr. Hubbard created and its frightened opponents in Germany.

"Fear is part of their system — it's a totalitarian organization that seeks to control everybody else, a dictatorship," said Ursula Caberta y Diaz, who heads the four-member working group that was set up four years ago by the Hamburg government to combat the Scientology movement and that has tried to get the courts to declare it a criminal conspiracy.

"This couldn't happen anywhere else in the world," said Franz Riedl, the church's spokesman in this country. "Our members have been subject to systematic persecution, arson, threats of violence, and dismissals, and children have been thrown out of kindergartens simply because their parents were Scientologists. The situation has become unbearable."

The church, the high fees it charges members for services and rites that are similar to psychological counseling sessions, and its open involvement in business and marketing have provoked strong reactions all over Germany since it first turned up here in the 1970's.

The Church of Scientology, with headquarters in Los Angeles, was founded in 1954 on the basis of what Mr. Hubbard, an American writer of science fiction who died in 1986, had

set down in a book called "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health."

The church's goal, according to its literature, is "to bring an individual to an understanding of himself and his life as a spiritual being." Global membership is estimated variously from 50,000 to eight million.

The latest scare here is that Scientologists are using the high-priced Hamburg real estate market to amass huge profits for more nefarious purposes.

"They have been buying rental residential properties and turning them overnight into cooperatives, using disreputable methods to frighten and coerce the renters into buying them back at high prices," said Peter Landmann, chairman of the Hamburg branch of the German real-estate agents' association.

Mr. Landmann said companies controlled by the church and companies run by church members were involved. He declined to identify any, but said that as much as a third of the cooperative apartment market in Hamburg might have fallen under their influence.

Mr. Riedl said there might be some real-estate agents who were members of the church, but denied that it was in the business to make money.

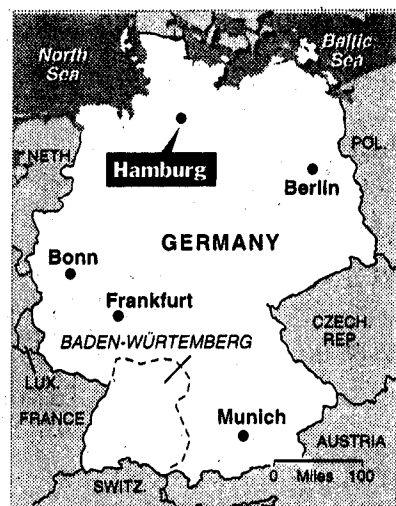
According to Mr. Riedl, the church has 30,000 members in Germany, mainly concentrated around Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt and Baden-Württemberg. But in his view, it is the state and its political institutions that are out of control.

Mrs. Caberta's Social Democratic Party organization in Hamburg fears subversion, and bars church members from joining. Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union and its Government coalition partner, the Free Democratic Party, bar them countrywide.

Renate Rennebach, a Social Democratic member of Parliament in Bonn, has called on the Government to ban the church outright, a step that seems unlikely unless somebody can prove in court that it actually practices the extortion, blackmail and subversion it is so often accused of.

"Scientology, despite official denials, is pursuing an expansion strategy that strives for nothing less than global domination," Mrs. Rennebach warned.

Other German politicians have charged that what the church wants



Hamburg has set up a working group to combat Scientology.

is political and economic power — Germany today, tomorrow the world. "It is a psycho-sect that makes people financially dependent on it and then squeezes them like lemons," said Stefan Schwarz, a Christian Democratic youth leader in Bonn.

But he said that too often the church's opponents did not back up their charges with the facts needed to take action in court.

The banners hanging on the church's five-story glass-walled headquarters in Hamburg say it is being persecuted. Scientology has tax-exempt status in the United States, Canada, Australia and Russia, the signs say — why not in Germany?

The church and 150 of its related corporations won that status from the United States Internal Revenue Service a year ago, after 39 years of legal battles. Here, there has been no definitive court ruling yet that the church is a nonprofit organization.

But in August, a Hamburg administrative court ruling forbade Mrs. Caberta's office from distributing a pamphlet charging that "Scientology amounts to this: A sick person has succeeded in selling his own madness, in the form of courses, for a great deal of money to mankind as a desirable goal."

The court also ordered the excision of passages accusing the church of "brainwashing" and racism. The city has appealed the decision.

The church gets a uniformly bad press here, and its building has had to be evacuated several times because of bomb threats. "I've been threatened and sprayed with tear gas for distributing church literature," said Karl-Otto Clausen, a 44-year-old church worker.

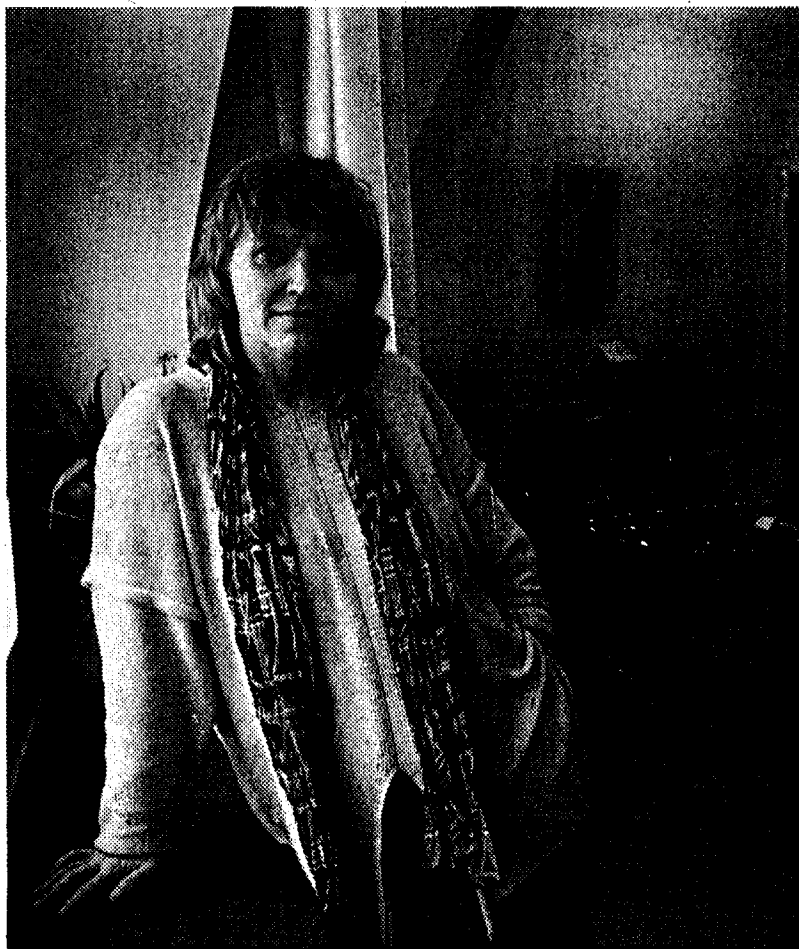
Mr. Riedl said the church charged 30,000 marks, about \$20,000, for the services — including counseling and questioning sessions — required to reach the level of "clear," which Mr. Hubbard's teachings define as "a new state for the individual in which he is no longer adversely affected by his past and is capable of living a rational existence."

But according to some former church members, "clear" is just the beginning of a cycle of financial indebtedness the church uses to ensnare adherents. Gunther Träger, a public relations agent in Frankfurt, said he paid six-figure amounts to reach higher levels before he left in 1991.

"They didn't do anything for three-quarters of a year," he said. "Then I gave an interview to a news magazine, and they started threatening me."

The established churches and Government authorities here say they are often asked for help by relatives of members who accuse the Church of Scientology of trapping them in a web of financial and psychological dependence.

Early this year, interior ministers of the 16 German states accused the church of combining "elements of business crime and psychological terror against its own members with economic activities," but stopped short of taking any action. In June,



Focus/Matrix

Ursula Caberta y Diaz, head of the Hamburg government task force set up to combat the Scientology movement, calls the group totalitarian.

## Does the church nurture fear or is it being persecuted in Germany?

prosecutors in Hamburg dropped a three-year investigation of the church on grounds of "lack of sufficient evidence of the existence of a criminal conspiracy."

The church then began a publicity counteroffensive in the United States suggesting that history was repeating itself here. "It is simply appalling to compare what's happening to them in Germany today with what happened to the Jews under the Na-

zis," said Professor Fritz Stern, a leading American expert on Germany at Columbia University.

The church recently called attention to its problems here with a series of full-page advertisements in The New York Times and The Washington Post. The advertisements place the measures against the church in the context of widespread racist violence against foreign immigrants and asylum-seekers here, suggesting that the authorities condone the attacks and persecute the church the way the Nazis persecuted the Jews.

The German authorities have denounced the comparison, and the advertising campaign, as being highly misleading. They have banned neo-Nazi groups for inciting violence, not encouraged them.