

Germany finds Scientology to have menacing mission

■ Lawmakers are looking at barring its members from teaching, police work, other government jobs.

By Barbara Demick
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HAMBURG, Germany — As the politicians see it, Germany is being threatened by an evil plot to infiltrate business and government.

"A giant octopus . . . that will stop at nothing in its desire to spread its blind ideology" is how Labor Secretary Norbert Blum has described the plot against Germany.

Claudia Nolte, another member of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Cabinet, warns, "They aim at world domination and the destruction of our society."

What's engendering all the panic? Communists? Neo-Nazis?

No. It's the Scientologists who are the bugaboo of the moment in Germany.

Not even going to the movies is safe, some Germans warn. On Aug. 8, the opening of *Mission: Impossible* prompted a protest by the youth wing of Kohl's Christian Democratic Party, angry about actor Tom Cruise's membership in the Scientology Church.

"Stop Scientology. Save our Democracy" read pamphlets that protesters handed out to moviegoers in Berlin and other cities.

The Church of Scientology, based in Los Angeles, certainly draws its share of criticism at home, but nothing remotely resembling the near-hysteria that is sweeping Germany.

On television and radio talk shows, and in newspaper editorials, politicians and pundits talk about the menace of Scientology. In city halls and regional parliaments, legislators are weighing drastic measures, such as barring Scientologists from teaching, police and other government jobs.

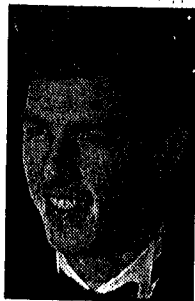
Staunchly conservative Bavaria forged the way Aug. 8, when it became the first German state to require civil servants to sign sworn declarations that they are not Scientologists.

The result is a no-holds-barred religious war between Germany and the church.

Church's counterattack

For their part, Scientologists are mounting a well-financed counter-attack against the Germans.

Since last September, they have



Tom Cruise's Scientology membership drew protests at the opening of his *Mission: Impossible* film.

spent nearly \$1 million on full-page newspaper advertisements in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* comparing their treatment to the persecution of Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses in Adolf Hitler's Germany.

"Helmut Kohl has a duty to stop the hate crimes being perpetrated by his party and his government underlings. He needs to be reminded this is 1996, and not 1936," the Rev. Heber Jentzsch, the Church of Scientology's president, complained recently.

The Scientologists' public relations staff has compiled newspaper clippings dating to the 1930s to counterattack the Germans.

One 1989 story about Scientologists has the same headline as a 1936 article from the anti-Semitic *Die Stuermer*: "Their God Is Money."

Founded by sci-fi writer

Scientology was founded in the 1950s by L. Ron Hubbard, a prolific writer of science fiction and inspirational self-help books. The church now claims 8 million members in 107 countries and does a thriving trade in books, tapes, videos and seminars that promise professional and personal success through spiritual training.

Although it often has been accused of exploiting members and harassing critics — and of outright quackery — Scientology has gained a patina of respectability in the United States with its stable of Hollywood celebrities. They include John Travolta, Kirstie Alley and Lisa Marie Presley as well as Nicole Kidman, Cruise's wife.

In 1993, the Scientologists won a decadeslong dispute with the Internal Revenue Service to be recognized for tax purposes as a legitimate church.

But not in Germany. Here, Scientology is deemed by law to be a business, and by consensus to be a cult — a most insidious one that brainwashes its members into antisocial behavior.

Germany takes cults far more seriously than the United States and devotes considerable resources to fighting them.

In Hamburg, where the Scientologists have their German headquarters, the city set up a full-time task force in 1992 with the sole mission of investigating Scientologists. Its four employees work behind a sheath of bulletproof glass in a well-guarded office building.

"Before I got involved in this project, I used to have the U.S. perspective on all this. I thought, 'Well, if you are stupid enough to believe in Scientology, that's your problem,'" said Ursula Caberta, director of the task force. "But now I truly believe if you analyze Hubbard and his writing, you will see that he is promoting the idea of a totalitarian state and of the *Urbemensch* — the superman — except that instead of talking about Aryans like Hitler, he is talking about Scientologists."

"Because of our history in Germany, we have to be much more careful about this kind of thing spreading," Caberta added.

Critics allege that Scientologists have infiltrated key industries, particularly computers and publishing, and especially real estate. In Hamburg, they say, there have been disputes between Scientologist landlords and renters.

Uneasy history

The Scientologists have operated uneasily in Germany since the 1970s and now claim 30,000 members in the country.

Tensions with authorities have flared periodically through the years. The Christian Democrats have barred Scientologists from joining, as have most of Germany's major political parties.

Well before the Tom Cruise controversy, American jazz pianist Chick Corea had to cancel some concerts in Germany because of his affiliation with Scientology.

Some politicians in Germany have suggested an outright ban on Scientology — such as exists against neo-Nazi and terrorist organizations. But law enforcement authorities say there is not enough evidence that there is really anything criminal going on.

"We haven't been able to prove that Scientology asks its members to commit crimes. Sure, we've arrested individual members who are criminals, just like we've arrested individual Catholics or anybody else," said Hartmut Wulf, the chief prosecutor in Hamburg. "About all I can say about Scientology is that I'm glad my kids aren't members, but as far as criminal law goes, we don't have anything against them."