

Moscow police raid Scientology center

The Associated Press

MOSCOW

Police and secret service agents raided the Moscow Scientology center for a second day Friday, seizing files and trying to confiscate reporters' tapes of interviews with movement leaders.

Tax police and other security services spent 16 hours collecting boxes of documents and sealing rooms at the group's headquarters Thursday. They returned Friday to look for more materials and question members.

It was the second raid on the group's Moscow office in less than a year.

Vladimir Bizenkov, an investigator in the prosecutor's office, said the agents came back because they did not find anything during the raid in April, and would continue searches until incriminating evidence was found.

On Thursday, police refused to let anyone out of the building until late at night, and allowed people to leave only after taking down their names and passport numbers, the group's members said.

The tax police said they were investigating possible tax evasion and other financial irregularities, but the Scientologists said authorities had other motives.

"All raids and searches are carried out for a single purpose: To frighten the staffers and force them to renounce their beliefs,"

Alexei Danchenkov, a spokesman for the group, said.

Many Scientologists and human rights activists blame the crack-down on the Russian Orthodox Church, which jealously guards its position in Russia.

Authorities have moved against a number of religious organizations after the passage of a 1997 law that placed widespread restrictions on "nontraditional" faiths.

The group's members also said that the participation of Russia's Federal Security Service — the main successor to the KGB — in the raids indicated that something beyond an investigation into tax evasion was afoot.

Several agents grabbed reporters, twisting their arms and trying to confiscate film and tape recordings of conversations with the Scientologists.

Monday, February 1, 1999

Scientologists, Florida city at odds

► Clearwater hopes the church will help revitalize downtown, but the death of a believer sours relations.

By Lori Roza
The Miami Herald

CLEARWATER, Fla.

The city buses chugging past downtown Clearwater crowds recently bore strange and startling messages on their sides: "Think for Yourself. Quit Scientology," said one. "Doubt is Not a Crime," said another. "Run, don't walk — Quit Scientology."

In almost any other town in America, the advertisements would have been puzzling and meaningless. But in Clearwater, where the population of 110,000 includes perhaps as many as 10,000 adherents to the Church of Scientology, they were fighting words.

"That's like saying, 'Blacks, get out of town,'" says Scientology spokeswoman Pat Jones, who also is black.



A church and its foes

Second of two parts
on Scientology

nouveau religion decided to come to this sleepy Gulf Coast town 25 years ago.

Officials would like to embrace the church as a key mover in the revital-

ization of downtown. Pinellas County officials were looking on when the church broke ground Nov. 21 for its \$45 million "Super Power Project," a 300,000-square-foot "Mecca" for Scientologists that will be the third-largest building in town.

But just a week earlier, the state attorney had filed charges accusing the church of complicity in the 1995 death of believer Lisa McPherson, 36. She was pronounced dead on arrival at a New Port Richey, Fla., hospital after being kept in isolation at the Scientologists' Fort Harrison Hotel 45 minutes away in Clearwater.

The coming trial promises to be a low point in the long history of acrimony over the religion's presence here. And it will raise uncomfortable questions about the way the church deals with its own affairs and those of the surrounding community.

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Please see **STRAINED, A-4**



St. Petersburg Times
The Fort Harrison Hotel in Clearwater, Fla., is owned by the Scientologists.

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Frank Oliver, a Miami graphics designer who leads a group called Former Scientologists Speaking Out that had rented the bus space, says the Transit Authority's quick decision to kill the ads underscores the situation.

"How does saying 'doubt is not a crime' infringe on their rights?" Oliver asked. "How much power does the church exert on local government?"

By most appearances, the organization that slipped into town under an assumed name in 1975 had blossomed into a model civic citizen by the time the criminal charges were filed.

After years of rancor in which the church countered City Council hostility and police investigations with lawsuits, demonstrations and investigations of its own, the church went on a major good-citizen campaign.

It spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to spiff up a historic downtown bank building and began hosting performances there by local musicians, opera singers, chamber orchestras, and others. Six years ago, it started the Winter Wonderland Festival, a popular Christmas event that is listed on the Chamber of Commerce calendar of events.

The November groundbreaking signals a major impact on downtown development plans.

"In order to come up with a game plan on how to deal with the revitalization of the community, we need to deal with everybody," said Clearwater City Manager Mike Roberto. The church, he said is "not a dominant entity, but they are a factor. They're very visible nationwide; it's a topic of some conversation."

Clearwater is the religious retreat for the church, whose membership is either the 8 million worldwide that it claims, or the 50,000 to 200,000 that various critics assert. The church's Golden Era Productions in Gilman Hot Springs produces Scientology's educational and promotional films, audiotapes and graphics. It employs 750 church members. Los Angeles, where Hollywood stars like John Travolta and Tom Cruise are prominent Scientologists, is the administrative headquarters. The street in front of the Los Angeles office was recently named L. Ron Hubbard Way after Scientology's founder.

Whatever its actual member-

ship, it is undisputed that Scientology draws thousands to Clearwater every year to stay in one of the church's three hotels and to undergo the complicated and secretive counseling process, called auditing, that is the core of Scientology.

"The city and the church had a very contentious relationship for many years," Roberto said. "A lot of mistakes were made on both sides. Now both sides are trying to work very hard to find compromises and move forward."

He said the church has had a positive influence downtown, and people may resent them for their success.

Scientology's history in Clearwater began in 1975, when Southern Land Sales and Development paid \$2.3 million cash for the Fort Harrison. The buyers at first said they were with a group called United Churches of Florida. The new owners turned out to be the Church of Scientology.

Founder Lafayette Ronald Hubbard wanted a "land base" for his church, which in 20 years had become a fast-growing organization already drawing adherents and critics worldwide.

Hubbard, who died in 1986, was a science-fiction and adventure writer who wrote for pulp publications with names like Astounding Magazine. He turned to book writing and philosophy, and in 1950 published what turned out to be the genesis of Scientology — a self-help book called "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health." It decried formal psychiatry while advocating its own blend of therapy and treatments. It became an instant best seller.

The church's income comes primarily from selling courses based on the theory that the human mind can be cleared of negative influences through a process called "auditing." An electronic device, called an "E-meter," is used to identify psychological problems. The E-meter is like a low-level lie-detector machine. The person being audited confesses to past sins and problems and talks through them.

Scientology spokesman Brian Anderson said the course prices are comparable to a seminary or college course.

The Mark Super VII Quantum

E-Meter sells for \$3,255 and comes in designer colors, such as copper teal and periwinkle blue.

"The fact is, your eternity depends on what you do here and now," reads a Scientology brochure for the E-meter. "Deciding to do something about it is just one step in the right direction. You need the tool that guarantees your eternity — Get a Quantum."

As Scientologists work their way through the auditing sessions, they get closer to "The Bridge" — Hubbard's mysterious promise of immortality.

Scientologists welcome Christians, Jews and anybody practicing any other religion. They believe in God, but their philosophy is based on man's inner spirit. They also believe in reincarnation and that everybody has lived several lives, dating back millions of years.

People need to be "cleared" of the bad things that have happened in this and in past lives, Scientologists believe. With the help of auditing, ministers and the E-meter, they can become clear.

Lisa McPherson was "cleared" in September 1995, a few months before she died.

Tampa, Fla., attorney Kennan Dandar is representing McPherson's family in a wrongful death lawsuit against the Church of Scientology. He claims McPherson was trying to leave the church after 19 years and they wanted to stop her.

"In her final days, she was virtually begging for help," Dandar said. "What happened to Lisa was disgusting."

Scientologists say McPherson was happy in the church, and wasn't planning to leave.

On Nov. 17, 1995, McPherson was driving her Jeep when she rear-ended a boat trailer at a low speed. Nobody was injured. But McPherson stripped off her clothes in the middle of the street, and walked up to paramedics. She kept repeating, "I'm a bad person; I'm a bad person," paramedic Bonita Portolano testified in a deposition.

McPherson said she was concerned because she "took her eyes off the object," Portolano said.

"I have no idea what that means," Portolano said. "But that was very, very important to her

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that she didn't know that she wasn't supposed to take her eyes off the object and that she had taken her eyes off the object."

The paramedics took her to Morton Plant Hospital in downtown Clearwater. She told someone to call the Scientology offices, and soon, five or six Scientologists showed up. She checked out of the hospital, against the advice of Dr. Flynn Lovett.

"The Scientology group will observe her very closely and will give her whatever care that they want to do for this problem she is having," Lovett wrote in his report.

Scientology caretakers kept notes about McPherson's treatment. Florida Department of Law Enforcement agents obtained the notes — all except those covering the final 53 hours of McPherson's life. Those "have been lost or destroyed by the Church," wrote agent A.L. Strobe.

Among the notes the Florida officials did find was this:

McPherson was "Blabbering, incoherent nonstop, shaking, no warm clothes on," Scientologist Alice Van Grundelle wrote in a note dated Nov. 22, 1995. "I finally chased her around the place 50 times and got on slacks and tee shirt, jacket, socks and shoes. She was like an ice cube. She talked incoherently hour after hour. She refused to eat and spit out everything she took. Her breath was foul. She looked ill like measles or chicken pox on her face."

Scientologists kept McPherson in a Fort Harrison Hotel room for another 13 days. Morton Plant Hospital is just a few blocks from the hotel, but McPherson wasn't seen by a licensed doctor until she was taken to the emergency room at another hospital 45 minutes away.

That doctor, Scientologist David

Minkoff, pronounced her dead. Her appearance, he said, was "horrific."

Florida law enforcement investigators and the Clearwater Police Department worked for nearly three years, compiling a 7,000-page file, before presenting their case to Pinellas County state attorney Bernie McCabe. McCabe decided to file the criminal complaint against the church but declined to name any individuals.

Critics say he didn't go far enough. If the church is found guilty of the charges — abuse or neglect of a disabled adult, a second-degree felony, and unauthorized practice of medicine, a third-degree felony — it will face a fine of no more than \$15,000. No individual would face a jail sentence.

Police won't say what charge they recommended, and the state attorney's office won't comment.

But there is no doubt McPherson's death and the criminal charges against the church reopened old suspicions among

many in Clearwater who had come to accept Scientology as a part of the community.

The downtown demonstrations by anti-Scientologists every year on the anniversary of McPherson's death, the bus ads and the publicity given to the criminal charges have put the church under scrutiny again.

There's no good reason for it, Scientologists say.

"If it were any other church, this would have been damped out within weeks," spokesman Anderson said.

THE SERIES

Second in a series

Sunday: The sprawling church complex at Gilman Hot Springs may be more than it appears, critics say.

Today: The church faces new questions in Florida after a woman dies while staying at the Clearwater spiritual center.

Scientology's Europe chief sees progress

The Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark

The Church of Scientology's struggle to gain recognition from European governments should pay off in the next decade, the head of its international branch said Wednesday.

The Los Angeles-based church created by late science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard has been persistent in attempts to become recognized as a legitimate religion, said the Rev. Heber Jentzsch, president of Church of Scientology International.

"There is a shift," he said. "Scientology has become visible. It will happen in the next five years, maybe 10 years."

For now, the church is considered an economic enterprise in Germany and its 30,000 adherents are banned from public jobs and closely watched.

France registers the church on a list of 173 groups that should be tracked to prevent cult activities. A Greek court closed operations in that country in 1997. Most other European countries also don't accept it as a religious community.

"It's not been easy. But we never thought of withdrawing," Jentzsch said from the church's European headquarters in Copenhagen. "Any new religion, any new ideas will be fought. There is an old guard that is threatened by anything that is new."

Jentzsch said much of the problem stems from misinformation that remains from U.S. investigations into the church in the 1960s and 1970s. He also rejected reports that people who want to leave the church are harassed.

The church heads into its 40th anniversary in Europe with 53 offices and about 3 million members, Jentzsch said.

Hubbard founded the church in 1954 to teach that technology can expand the mind and help solve problems. Five years later, he opened a first European office in Britain.