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Church Accused of Infiltration of FBI

U.S. Claims Scientology Members Were Put in Agency to Leak Data

BY ROBERT RAWITCH

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The controversial Church of Scientology has planted an unspecified number of its members within the FBI in an effort to leak information to the church, Justice Department attorneys charged in Los Angeles federal court Thursday.

Asst. U.S. Atty. Richard Stiliz said the FBI learned of the alleged infiltration by church members while reviewing some of the more than 23,000 documents seized in raids on two church locations in Los Angeles July 8.

A federal judge in Washington, D.C., ruled that a similar raid there was illegal and the government has been prohibited from using any of the information gathered in all three raids in its investigation into whether the church took part in a wide-ranging conspiracy to steal government documents.

But Stiliz Thursday asked U.S. Dist. Judge Malcolm Lucas if an exception could be made in the court's order that would enable the FBI to track down and oust from the agency anyone planted within it by the church.

The judge gave attorneys for the government and the church one week to file legal briefs on whether such an exception should be granted and scheduled a hearing on the matter for Aug. 29.

Church spokesman Vaughn Young strongly denied that the Scientologists had ever planted anyone in the FBI, though he did not deny there might well be among the church's 2 million members employees of the FBI.

Young labeled the government's request for an exception to the court order as the beginning of a "Salem witch hunt aimed at getting out of every government position anyone who is a Scientologist or sounds like a Scientologist."

A reliable source said it is known that there are within the FBI employees who are members of the Church of Scientology but Stiliz said the government's intent is not to take any action whatsoever against anyone who just happens to be a member of the church.

He emphasized the FBI is only desirous of removing individuals who were "planted" there by the church.

Stiliz declined to indicate how many individuals are believed to have infiltrated the FBI or whether they are agents or employees in other positions.

"The bureau believes it is extremely important, imperative, to get such people (the infiltrators) out of the FBI," the prosecutor said.

Earlier, the government disclosed that a former high-level church employe had maintained the church has for several years had operatives within the Justice Department and the Internal Revenue Service.

Thirty-six letters have been received or sent by the FBI in Los Angeles to bureaus around the country, Stiliz said, probing the background of individuals and whether they have access to sensitive information within the agency.

Church attorney Robert Sarno has argued that since the raids, pending an appeal, have been declared illegal, the government should not have the right to use the information gathered from the documents, even in a civil proceeding such as proposed by Justice Department.

Scientology considers itself an applied religious philosophy that attempts to increase an individual's self-knowledge and self-awareness through counseling of its members.