

SOS

Bob Wyatt



Dear SOS:

While living in Winnipeg, a friend talked me into enrolling in a course run by the Church of Scientology. It cost me \$350.

After registering, I talked with several people and found out that continuation of the course in which I was interested would cost me thousands of dollars and would entail trips all over Canada and the U.S.

So I quit, and asked the Church of Scientology to make good on its promise to refund my money.

It was October of 1975 when I first applied for a refund. I was told the application had to be sent to Toronto for approval and then to England for something else.

I waited a while and then phoned the people in Toronto. They said they would check into it. When I didn't hear anything further, I called again and was told the application must have been lost.

I immediately made photocopies of all of the documents and mailed them away. Three months later, I again phoned and could not get any results.

At last, in November, 1976, they said my application had finally been approved. The person to whom I spoke said it would take six or eight weeks to get the cheque out.

I'm still waiting.

E.R. Pearson
Edmonton

It took six months of work before we achieved anything, but Mr. Pearson finally got his refund.

When we first wrote to the Church of Scientology, they said they had been advised that there was no legal liability on their part to refund the money, but that they would consider it.

(They didn't comment on Mr. Pearson's allegation that he had been promised a refund if he decided to drop out of the course.)

Moreover, they said, they weren't prepared to discuss anything, including "a number of discrepancies" they suggested existed, without a formal letter of authority from Mr. Pearson.

And finally, they said, once we did get the authority, we would have to deal with their legal department.

We got the letter of authority and sent it back to the Church.

In the interim, they wrote to Mr. Pearson directly. We found their letter most interesting.

They said, first of all, that the claim had been approved and a refund cheque was ready.

But, they noted, Mr. Pearson had come to SOS. "As you may recall," the letter said, "the Claims Verification Board (the group that decides on the refund) routing form specifies that if you contact the media concerning your claim, it is our policy to turn the matter over to our legal department and to contest the matter."

Diane Dobson-Smith, the woman who wrote the letter, suggested that a solution could still be worked out, and asked Mr. Pearson to call her.

Mr. Pearson did so and, in a letter to us, he said he had been told by Mrs. Dobson-Smith that "if I wrote a letter to The Journal telling them to cease action and to have nothing more to do with my refund, they would immediately send me my refund."

But, he added, he would still prefer that we deal with the matter.

So we wrote to Mrs. Dobson-Smith and said we were still involved. We suggested that we couldn't quite understand the reason they wanted Mr. Pearson to have us drop the matter, nor, for that matter, could we understand the section of the "routing form" she mentioned.

It said: "The claimant must also understand that his claim may be rejected as false or not valid if: . . . the claim is being sought from other pressure than that of the person himself."

We suggested that the clause seemed to be an attempt to restrict our reader's right to seek assistance from us, or anyone else he chose.

We also couldn't understand how approaching SOS could make the claim "false" or "not valid", especially since the decision to make the refund had already been made, or so Mr. Pearson was told.

We didn't get an explanation, or a response of any kind, despite three more letters, the last of which was sent by registered mail.

So finally, in mid-August, we phoned Mrs. Dobson-Smith, who told us that a refund cheque had been sent out in late July.

Mr. Pearson told us he hadn't received it.

We wrote back to the Church of Scientology but, in the interim, they discovered the cheque had not been cashed, so issued a replacement cheque for \$350.

"We trust this brings the matter to a satisfactory conclusion," the Church wrote.

On this particular file, it does.

But we still are more than a little concerned about an organization which, first of all, attempts to stifle a person's legal right to consult us, or a lawyer, or anyone else for assistance in resolving a problem and then suggests that although it was ready to make a refund, it is changing its mind and will fight the request because a third party was involved.

It would have been different if Mr. Pearson hadn't made any attempts on his own to get the refund. But he spent a considerable amount on long distance telephone calls to find out what was happening, and they got him nowhere.

We aren't sure whether the Church doesn't want the media attention, or exactly what the reason is for its restrictions.

We don't know that we'll ever find out, either.