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## Scientologists Must Pay \$30 Million to Critical Ex-Member

By JOEL SAPPELL and ROBERT WELKOS, *Times Staff Writers*

A Los Angeles Superior Court jury Tuesday awarded \$30 million in damages to a former member of the Church of Scientology who said the organization intentionally drove him to the edge of insanity and ruined him financially for criticizing the group.

The 12-0 verdict in favor of Larry Wollersheim brought gasps from the Scientologists who packed Judge Ronald Swearingen's courtroom, as they had throughout the bitterly contested five-month-long trial. Some sobbed.

Wollersheim was awarded \$5 million in compensatory damages and \$25 million in punitive damages, assessed to deter future improper conduct.

"We've got a verdict that is a clear and strong signal to the tens of thousands of people who feel they have been abused by Scientology . . . that they can use the legal system to stand up for their rights," the 37-year-old Wollersheim said in an interview after the verdict.

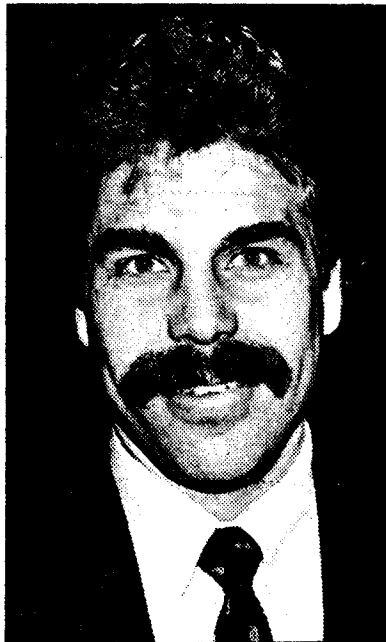
"I think it is justice personified," said his attorney, Charles O'Reilly. "What Scientology is about is outrageous conduct and it must be stopped."

### Appeal Promised

Scientology attorney Earle C. Cooley said the case will be appealed and promised that "Larry Wollersheim will never collect a dime."

"The jury is saying, 'We're of one religion, you're of another. . . . If we put you out of business, so what?'" Cooley charged outside the courtroom. He called the trial a "broadside attack on the religion of Scientology."

The verdict represents a significant setback to the controversial church, which has been engaged in



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### Larry Wollersheim

a well-financed public relations campaign to shake its cultish image and gain broad acceptance as a legitimate, though persecuted, religion. A series of suits brought by other ex-members are pending nationwide.

Wollersheim filed his lawsuit in 1980 after spending 11 years in the church, some of them as a salesman and a touring spokesman for Scientology courses.

In his suit, Wollersheim said that

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he spent more than \$100,000 for Scientology training that he was told would give him supernatural powers and enhance his intelligence quotient, health and success in business.

Instead, Wollersheim charged in his suit, he was subjected to "psychological manipulations" through a church practice known as auditing, a kind of confessional. During auditing, an individual is asked questions about the most intimate details of his life while his responses are monitored on a lie-detector-like device known as an E-Meter.

Wollersheim said that, through auditing, he was robbed of his independent judgment and developed severe personality disorders that intensified as he moved through more advanced Scientology courses.

Wollersheim said he was warned that if he did not continue to purchase the expensive courses "he would die from a dreaded disease,

such as cancer, or would become insane." As his mental state deteriorated, he complained, the church pressed him to pay for more auditing instead of directing him to obtain outside psychological help.

To further isolate and control him, Wollersheim said, the church ordered him to "disconnect," or separate from family and friends who opposed his involvement in Scientology.

When he began to challenge the organization's practices, he said, he came under attack, pursuant to policies written by Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, who died last January.

Wollersheim said the church struck at his novelty business, ordering Scientologists to boycott his products, to quit their jobs with him and to refuse to pay for orders they had placed. He said the action drove his business into the ground.

Eventually, Wollersheim said during trial testimony, he fled Los Angeles and went into hiding in Aspen, Colo. He was later diagnosed, according to testimony of a psychologist, as having a pre-existing mental disorder that was severely aggravated by church

practices. Wollersheim said he now takes Lithium to control dramatic mood swings.

During the trial, church attorneys portrayed Wollersheim as a confidence man who was after Scientology's money. They said he had a long history of drug abuse and severe emotional problems before he joined Scientology in the late 1960s. At the time, the Scientology attorneys said, Wollersheim was a drifting college dropout who had evaded the draft.

Midway through the trial, church attorneys succeeded in having two counts of Wollersheim's suit dismissed for lack of evidence. Those counts centered on Wollersheim's contention that he had been defrauded through false promises about Scientology's benefits.

Although Scientology repeatedly characterized the court proceeding as a heresy trial, jury foreman Andre A. Anderson said after Tuesday's verdict that the jury did not consider the organization's religious beliefs in reaching a decision. He said Scientology's "outrageous" policies turned the vote in Wollersheim's favor.

"The church has various policies we felt were in violation of civil law," Anderson said. "The defendant tried to portray the case as being a case of First Amendment rights regarding freedom of religion."

A key policy cited by Anderson and several other jurors was the church's "fair game" doctrine, written by Hubbard in the 1960s and allegedly employed against perceived enemies of the organization.

According to the policy, admitted into evidence during the trial, a person declared fair game "May be deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist without any discipline of the Scientologist. May be tricked, sued or

lied to or destroyed."

The church contended during the trial that the policy was rescinded in 1968. But Anderson said the fair game policy "was canceled in name only" and was used against Wollersheim.

Juror Bill Henderson said, "We think the church practiced the fair game policy and drove him out of business" after he fell from the organization's good graces. "We don't think the church has a right to punish somebody like him."

Church attorney Cooley said he plans to argue for a mistrial before Swearingin and, if necessary, appeal to a higher court. Last year in Portland, Ore., Cooley was successful in nullifying a \$39-million damage award to another ex-mem-

ber who had accused the organization of fraudulent representations.

Cooley was particularly critical of testimony offered by psychologist Margaret Singer of Berkeley, who likened several church practices to "thought reform," a term she acknowledged is commonly referred to as brainwashing. Cooley said her testimony poisoned the jury.

Three hours after the verdict, more than 1,000 Scientologists rallied at the entrance of church headquarters in Hollywood and heard a church official call for 10,000 church members to descend on the Los Angeles County Courthouse this morning to protest the jury award.