

California Cults Facing

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By Paul Grabowicz
and Joel Kotkin

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LOS ANGELES, Dec. 15 — California's multitude of religious cults and new consciousness movements, reeling from the aftershock of the Jonestown tragedy and the indictment on murder charges of Synanon founder Charles Dederich, are facing an unprecedented series of governmental investigations into their activities as well as a dramatic erosion of financial and moral support.

This new wave of governmental inquiries comes as a federal grand jury in San Francisco opens its investigation into the slaying of Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.) in Guyana and the activities of the Peoples Temple.

At the same time, the California state attorney general is coordinating a statewide probe of the Synanon Foundation. The probe was sparked by the arrest recently of two organization members on charges of attempted murder and allegations concerning beatings and harassment of the organizations critics.

Some cult leaders here fear that the Peoples Temple and Jonestown incidents may spark a backlash against their organizations as terrified parents and other critics demand a crack-down on cult activities. Among the most recent developments:

- Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (R-Conn.) said today that he has directed the minority staff of the Senate Select Committee on Small Businesses to conduct preliminary inquiries into possible unfair use of the religious status of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church in its deepening involvement in the lucrative U.S. fishing industry.

- On Nov. 21, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution urging U.S. Attorney General Griffin B. Bell to launch a full-scale federally coordinated probe into cult-type activities.

- In addition, according to informed sources, the Los Angeles County district attorney's office is exploring ways to slow massive transfers of property from cult members to cults and to prevent the cults from employing high-pressure sales techniques.

- Officials of California's Psychology Examining Committee are beginning an inquiry into the alleged practice of psychology with a license by both Erhard Seminar Training Inc.

(est), a major San Francisco-based new-consciousness group, and the Church of Scientology.

- The Pennsylvania Conference on Inter-Church Cooperation, a mainstream religious organization, is to release, later this month, a "pastoral statement on pseudo-religious cults."

The moves against the cults are only the most recent in a mounting number of governmental probes of cult activities:

- On Oct. 17, the California Department of the Church of Scientology, which claims 600,000 active members, were indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of conspiracy to burglarize government offices and obstruct justice.

- On Oct. 17, the California Department of Justice established a statewide task force including five local law-enforcement agencies to probe the activities of the Synanon Foundation. The announcement came four days after two Synanon members were booked on charges of attempting to

murder Los Angeles attorney Paul Morantz by placing a rattlesnake in his mailbox.

- On Oct. 31, the U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on international organizations issued a report calling for a "multiagency" federal investigation into certain activities of the Unification Church.

- On Jan. 9, 1979, three individuals affiliated with a splinter faction of the Hare Krishna cult are to go on trial in Orange County, Calif., for their alleged involvement in a bizarre murder-for-hire plot.

- In addition, the Alameda County district attorney's office is seeking an injunction to control the activities of Hare Krishna sect members at the Oakland International Airport, as part of a civil suit charging the organization and misrepresentation and fraud.

These government-initiated actions have come in the wake of critical press reports and growing public hostility directed at the cults. "Just after Jonestown, we sensed it," said Mi-

Support



Sun Myung Moon: a federal probe of his church sought.

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Synanon founder Charles Dederich: a murder charge.

chael Grant, spokesman for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Los Angeles. "It's very misleading. On the evening news now they sandwiched us between Charles Manson and the Nazis. It's Moonies, Krishnas, cults; sometimes they create their own mantra."

Ralph Wood, national executive secretary of the Alliance for the Preservation of Religious Liberty, a group close to and financed by several of the cults, says he believes a dangerous "backlash, threatening the civil liberties of cult members, is now developing across the country."

"We know there are a lot of intensified investigations of the groups. There is danger of a massive attempt, pushed by strong special-interest groups, to use this opportunity to destroy groups like the Unification Church, the Krishnas and the Scientologists," Wood said. "This (Guyana and Synanon) give them more firepower to say, 'See, we told you so.'"

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terest groups, according to cult leaders, are organizations of parents of children in the various religious sects. Numerous counselors and professional deprogrammers, who work to wean cult children from their religions, report an unprecedented flood of calls from parents concerned about their children's safety within the cults.

One leading counselor, Margaret Singer of Berkely, says she has been receiving 30 times the usual number of calls from parents since the Guyana tragedy.

"The other day I was behind 205 phone calls from desperate parents all over the country," she said.

Equally dangerous to the cults in recent weeks has been the growing hostility to them of political, religious and business leaders. Where only a handful of members of Congress including the late Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.), had expressed concern over cult activities before the Guyana mass suicide, today there are calls from congressional leaders like liberal Sen.

Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) and conservative Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) for federal action to deal with alleged cult abuses.

"There is a renewed interest," said one congressional aide close to the anti-cult forces. "It took 900 deaths to do it. But some people are finally beginning to raise the questions."

Even political leaders who have supported individual cults in the past are backing away from them in the wake of recent events. California Assemblyman Herschel Rosenthal, a Los Angeles Democrat close to Synanon for over 18 years, proposed a bill earlier this year to exempt that organization from standard state health department regulations.

But in the aftermath of the reports of violence within Synanon and the arrest on murder charges of organization founder Dederich, Rosenthal has decided to drop his bill.

"I told my friends in Synanon that this is the beginning of the end of them, that I won't carry any more legislation for them," Rosenthal said. "I guess I'm not going to embarrass myself anymore."

In addition, numerous business organizations which once gave gifts to and did business with Synanon have severed their relationship with the group, including Hart, Shaffner & Marx, Honeywell, Sperry Rand and Louisiana Pacific Corp.

"We no longer feel that our contributions would be helping people solve their problems," said Karen Bachman, a spokeswoman for Honeywell, which has donated products to Synanon in the past. "In the light of recent events, we wouldn't want to have any dealings with them."

But perhaps the most dramatic turnaround in public support for the cults has come from more traditional religious organizations, which in the past have steadfastly defended the cults in the name of freedom of religion. Now many of these religious leaders, horrified by what the Rev. Jim Jones did in Guyana, are reevaluating their support for the cults.

Contributing to this report was Washington Post staff researcher Katharine Macdonald.

U.S. Reveals It Rejected Idea to Police Cult Camp

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The State Department acknowledged yesterday that it considered asking Guyanese authorities last June to police Jonestown more effectively, but then rejected the proposal.

In a 16-page letter to the House International Relations Committee, which is investigating the murder of Rep. Leo Ryan (D-Calif.) and the subsequent suicide/murders of more than 900 members of the Peoples Temple last month, the department said it decided that such a request would be unwise "absent some credible evidence of wrongdoing or unlawful conduct at Jonestown."

The House committee, headed by Rep. Clement J. Zablocki (D-Wis.) released the State Department document without comment, but sources there described it as disappointing, "self-serving and protective."

The U.S. embassy in Georgetown, Guyana, had made the suggestion to Washington last summer, apparently as the result of charges by temple defector Deborah Layton Blakey.

According to Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations

Douglas J. Bennett Jr., who submitted the letter to Zablocki, Blakey had told embassy Consul Richard McCoy last May much of the information she later made public in an affidavit, including "the mass suicide rehearsal" that took place at Jonestown last year. McCoy evidently thought her complaint serious enough to urge her "to take her information to U.S. law enforcement authorities," according to the State Department.

For their part, embassy officials in Georgetown asked Washington last June for its view "regarding the desirability of a request to the government of Guyana to exercise its jurisdiction in Jonestown more effectively."

Assistant Secretary Bennett said the State Department rejected the idea on the grounds that "absent some credible evidence of wrongdoing or unlawful conduct at Jonestown, a U.S. government request to investigate the activities of the Peoples Temple might well have raised legal and policy issues related both to concerns for the privacy of U.S. citizens and for freedoms of association and religion."

In the affidavit she signed on June 15 after returning home to San Francisco, Blakey, once a high-ranking aide to Temple leader Jim Jones, said the situation in Jonestown "threatens the lives of United States citizens." She said Jones had become "genuinely irrational" and she recounted repeated mass suicide rehearsals, "at least once a week," in addition to a threat by Jones to bring it about in September 1977.

The State Department letter was a reply to a series of questions posed by Zablocki last Nov. 21.

Despite earlier news reports alluding to large quantities of sophisticated weapons at Jonestown, including automatic rifles, the State Department said that in a search following the tragedy, "the only firearms discovered were 10 pistols, 13 small caliber rifles and 7 shotguns. Three pistols were taken from members who survived the mass suicide."