

FORMER SCIENTOLOGISTS FIGHT FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH: SCIENTOLOGY FILES FOR BAN ON PROTESTS AHEAD OF ANNUAL GALA

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A group of former Scientologist whistleblowers are fighting for their right to protest outside their former Church's headquarters after Scientology applied for a 'Public Spaces Protection Order' to ban demonstrations near their Sussex property.

Last November, protesters organised the largest demonstration against the controversial group since the Anonymous movement 15 years ago, and are set to return to the gates of Saint Hill Manor on October 25th, the date of the 40th anniversary of the 'International Association of Scientologists'.

The anniversary event is held every year and involves thousands of Scientologists travelling from across Europe to hear their reclusive leader David Miscavige speak. Captain Miscavige, who was recently served with a human trafficking lawsuit in the United States, is expected to arrive in the UK imminently for the occasion. Scientology recently made headlines around the world after it was found to have covered up multiple rapes by That 70's Show actor Danny Masterson. Actress Leah Remini has also recently filed a suit against the Church and its leader alleging harassment and intimidation after she spoke out about her experiences in the group.

Alexander "Apostate Alex" Barnes-Ross, the former Director of Public Booksales at the Church of Scientology London, has organised the protest with the aim of "sending Scientology a clear message: the abuse must stop." He says, "our mission is to reach people currently inside Scientology, whose contact with the outside world is restricted due to the organisation's strict policies. We want them to know that there is a community of people and a wealth of resources available if they need help trying to leave."

Claire Headley, former high-ranking Scientologist who testified as expert witness on Scientology's abusive practices in the Danny Masterson trial explains "public protest of this high control organization is vital. Those trapped inside need to know there are resources in the outside world that will afford them the opportunity to escape and start their lives over. Public protest of abuse is a basic human right." Claire grew up in East Grinstead and was a child captive of Scientology, victim of child sexual assault as well as child abuse and neglect at the hands of Scientology. Her uncle is still trapped inside at Saint Hill. She now volunteers as president of The Aftermath Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing resources and support to those starting new lives after escaping this abusive organization. Last year's protest at Saint Hill directly resulted in victims of Scientology being made aware of The Aftermath Foundation's work.

Protest organisers want to use the demonstration as an opportunity to reach Scientologists with a message of kindness and compassion. "When I was a teenager, I was locked in a room at their London Org at 146 Queen Victoria Street and told I couldn't leave until I'd written down everything 'unethical' I'd ever done – when all I was asking for was help" Barnes-Ross says. "After leaving, I have heard countless stories of similar things happening to Scientologists around the world – people being harassed, forced to have abortions, held against their will and, for example, thrown in a lake during winter at Saint Hill as punishment."

"We are not protesting Scientology's belief system and we don't want to cause disruption to their event. But we do want to do what we can to raise awareness of what's going on behind closed doors. People are free to believe in whatever they choose, but Scientology cannot continue treating people the way it does."

The ex-Scientologist now runs a Youtube Channel called 'Apostate Alex', where he interviews other former members and an online magazine called *Scientology Business* (www.scientologybusiness.com) which sheds light on Scientology's UK and European activities. "People often think of Scientology as a crazy American cult. What they don't realise is they have a huge, multi-million pound operation here in the UK – despite the government warning in 1975 that it is a 'harmful movement with an evil reputation'"

On 2nd October, Mid Sussex District Council held a Scrutiny Committee meeting to review an application made by the Church of Scientology for a Public Spaces Protection Order to be imposed that would restrict protesting near their headquarters. "This is a direct threat to our freedom of speech and right to protest, and forms part of an extensive campaign the Church is operating to shut down and silence critics", Barnes-Ross explains. "If they are successful, the PSPO would ban protesting outside Scientology's headquarters, which means this could very well be the last time we are allowed to voice our concerns in public."

Mike Rinder, former Chief Spokesperson for the Church of Scientology International, says "It is vital that public awareness be raised about the ongoing abuses perpetrated by the scientology organization. Right in East Grinstead, human trafficking is occurring on a daily basis. Families are being broken up. People are being coerced to give money they cannot afford. Scientology wants the world to think they are benign and misunderstood -- it's why they fight so hard not to have anyone draw attention to what really goes on behind their security guard protected closed doors."

Scientology claims to have over a hundred thousand adherents in the United Kingdom, however the 2021 census recorded only 1,844 people identifying as Scientologists. The group's application for charity status was rejected in 1999, with the Charity Commission upholding their decision last year in a statement stating Scientology "does not exist for the public benefit."

Saint Hill Manor, near East Grinstead, is the UK headquarters of the Church of Scientology and the former home of founder L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction writer who died in 1986. Scientology is now led by David Miscavige, who has rarely been seen in public after allegations of abuse, human trafficking and intimidation were made against him in 2019. Process servers attempted to serve him legal papers in excess of 27 times and struggled to locate Mr. Miscavige. His whereabouts is currently unknown. His role at the forthcoming IAS event in the UK will be his first public appearance in months.

People wishing to find out more information or interested in participating in the protest are asked to visit www.iasprotest.com where you can register to attend. The demonstration will also be live streamed on Youtube at www.youtube.com/@apostatealex.

LINKS / SOURCES

David Miscavige served in human trafficking case:

https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/scientology-leader-david-miscavige-served-with-human-trafficking-lawsuit_n_63ee6cb9e4b02c25737b92ca

Charity Commission statement on Scientology, September 2023: [https://](https://www.scientologybusiness.com/tax-exemption/charity-commission-scientology-cannot-appeal-rejection-for-tax-exempt-status/)

www.scientologybusiness.com/tax-exemption/charity-commission-scientology-cannot-appeal-rejection-for-tax-exempt-status/

1975 UK Government warning on Scientology:

<https://www.scientologybusiness.com/people/scientology-requested-a-formal-apology-from-the-uk-government/>

Apostate Alex on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/@apostatealex>

Protest website:

<https://www.iasprotest.com>

The Aftermath Foundation:

<https://www.theaftermathfoundation.org>

IMAGES

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fzXuAPP7qjGv1ivuxAezwvU97ga_UYoV?usp=sharing

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