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**Clearwater Sun**

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# Tete-a-tetes and sunshine

CAN ANY good come from elected officials meeting in private with Scientologists?

During the past fortnight various representatives of the cult, including its president, Rev. Kenneth Whitman, huddled behind closed doors with Mayor Charles LeCher, City Commissioner Bill Nunamaker, State Rep. Jim Smith and Pinellas Property Appraiser Ron Schultz.

Out of these meetings, some say, came a Scientologists' decision to pay two years of back property taxes owed to the county.

A case might be made that only in private could such a decision have been reached.

The argument says that if a news reporter or the citizenry were sitting there, talk could not be frank and the temptation (often present in politicians) to grandstand and gesture might surface, thus blocking any real chance of progress.

tete-a-tete with a public official is an ideal setting for the cultists to ingratiate themselves.

WE DO NOT buy the assertion that the private meetings of recent days were the reason for the Scientologists' agreeing to cough up their 1976 and 1977 taxes.

They are paying up because it seemed obvious the courts would have forced them to.

Another reason they are paying is to look like good guys.

The Scientology leaders are not good guys. They are devious, ambitious men and women who seek money and power. Some of them, including the founder's wife, have not hesitated to break the law in attempts to defeat persons and agencies who oppose the cult.

It is plain that not everyone in Clearwater believes that. Some persons cling to the

Those in favor of private sessions point out that the state's Sunshine Law does not forbid such meetings as long as no two members of the same elected body—such as a city commission—are present.

WE SUBMIT that a much stronger case can be made against any further private sessions with Scientologists. And we applaud Commissioners Marvin Moore and Karleen De Blaker, both of whom had the good sense to turn down the invitation for a private meeting with cult leaders.

Quiet, unpublicized, "just between us girls" meetings are ideal settings for the Scientologists to divide and conquer.

If Richard Tenney can be tricked into blowing his cork at Charlie LeCher, and if Jim Smith can be cajoled into making a statement that, say, Ron Schultz will later take issue with, what we can end up with is a band of public officials at each others' throats. Meanwhile, the Scientologists laugh up their sleeves.

When we meet the devil, he seldom has horns. What he usually wears is a dinner jacket and a disarming smile.

Scientologists are capable, when it is to their advantage, of being subtle and charming. A low-key, off-the-record,

hope that an accommodation can be reached with the Scientologists, that perhaps the cult's policies and goals will some day change so that the leadership can be trusted.

We urge anyone who still feels that way to reconsider.

We strongly suggest that elected officials stop meeting privately with Scientologists.

WHILE WE'RE at it, we also suggest that city hall pay no further attention to the cult's contention that an emergency exists here, that the cult is being harassed and that peace should be restored.

Clearwater is at peace, insofar as a functioning city goes. The Scientologists hold their classes and walk the streets just as safely as anyone else. We don't know of a single person who wishes to physically or materially harm or threaten any individual member of Scientology, or deprive him of his civil rights.

After all the meetings, public and private, after all the rallies and press conferences and marches, after all the Whitmans, Wolfes, Tenneys, Stuarts, LeChers, Cazares and Hubbards, one thing is clear.

It is this: in Clearwater there exists a growing, relentless opposition to the presence of the Scientologists and their organizational apparatus.

And that opposition is r likely to fade.