

Hale paved the way for spy - White supremacist chief took a pass on background checks

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Matthew Hale, the leader of the white-supremacist World Church of the Creator, had said for years that he wasn't choosy about whom he let into his fast-growing organization. He didn't do background checks on new members, he didn't mind if they had spent time in prison, he didn't care if they paid their \$35 membership dues in postage stamps.

But last week, as federal prosecutors unveiled the evidence that had led them to charge the self-described racist with soliciting the murder of a federal judge, it seems that Hale's approach to enlarging his membership rolls may have come back to haunt him.

The federal case against Hale rests almost entirely on inside information and tape recordings provided to prosecutors by one of Hale's inner circle, a man known as Brother Tony who long had aroused the suspicion of many other World Church members and of Hale's father.

"You give Matt 35 bucks and he'll let anybody join. You fill out an application, give the man 35 bucks and you're a Creator," said Jon Fox, a member of the World Church of the Creator who said he had believed Brother Tony to be untrustworthy.

Federal sources have not identified Brother Tony, other than to say he led the White Berets, which served as Hale's security detail. But among members of the World Church--a largely Internet-based organization that claims thousands of members from all over the U.S. and the world--the identity of the loyal follower-turned-FBI informant is well known.

According to Christopher Peterson, leader of the Wisconsin branch of the World Church, Hale named Brother Tony his personal bodyguard in late 1999.

Tony, who stands nearly 6 feet tall and weighs close to 200 pounds, could handle himself and any trouble that came Hale's way at the often-picketed white-supremacist rallies the group staged throughout Illinois and the U.S. Peterson described a brawl that broke out at the Peoria Library between Hale's followers and protesters in which Tony defended Hale and earned Hale's admiration.

Although actions like that catapulted Tony into Hale's inner circle, Peterson said that in recent months Hale had begun to have suspicions about his security chief, primarily because Tony stopped showing up at rallies and other events.

"He was acting quite odd this past year," Peterson said. "We had a feeling he might be up to no good."

Other members had the same doubts. Fox, who describes himself as the state leader of the Illinois chapter of the World Church, spoke on Friday afternoon on the front porch of the East Peoria frame house where Hale, 31, had lived until his arrest on Jan. 8. It was from this house--in an upstairs bedroom painted bright red to symbolize the "pure blood of the white race"--that Hale solicited donations, accepted membership applications and served as "Pontifex Maximus" of the group, whose mission is "the survival, expansion, and advancement of our white race exclusively."

Fox said that after Hale was arrested, Brother Tony did not join other members to organize rallies for Hale and to help begin a legal defense fund. Instead, he said, Tony pulled away from the group.

"He just turned around and left," Fox said. "I kind of chased him down the street. I told him, 'You need to stay and be the leader you are.'"

According to federal prosecutors, Brother Tony was anything but a loyal leader in the World Church. They say the FBI recruited him in the summer of 1999, soon after an early July shooting rampage by one-time World Church member Benjamin Smith. The shootings, which targeted minorities, injured nine and killed two, .

During Hale's detention hearing on Thursday--in which a judge ordered him held without bond--prosecutors said Brother Tony was on the FBI's payroll and had provided it with numerous e-mails and audio tapes in which Hale plotted the murder of U.S. District Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow.

Prosecutors said in court on Thursday that they had a tape of a phone call in which Hale asked Brother Tony to gather information on Lefkow, whom he labeled a "corrupt judge" and "probable Jew." Lefkow had attempted to enforce a higher court's ruling ordering Hale to destroy printed materials about his church that violated trademark laws, prosecutors said.

In addition, prosecutors entered into evidence an e-mail to Brother Tony in which Hale asked him to find Lefkow's home address. The next day, in a recorded conversation, Brother Tony told Hale he was working to get Lefkow's address and asked, "When we get it, we going to exterminate the rat?"

Authorities say Hale responded, "Well, whatever you want to do, basically."

According to Assistant U.S. Atty. M. David Weisman, Hale added, "You know, my position has always been that I, you know, I'm going to fight within the law ... but that information has been provided; if you wish to do anything yourself, you can."

Hale's attorney, Matthew Madden, argued Thursday that Hale stated at least twice that he wanted no part in a plot against Lefkow. Madden said that at one point in a recorded conversation Hale told the source, "Here's the thing, brother, here's the thing. I can't be part of any such thing."

Peterson decried Hale's arrest, calling it an apparent case of entrapment.

"From what is being put forth, it was [Tony] that was initiating the proposed [hit on Lefkow]," he said. "It sounded like he was doing the soliciting."

Further, Fox argued on Thursday that the World Church could not solicit the murder of a judge because the group couldn't afford to pay a hit man.

"Two-thirds of our members are in jail and they pay us [our membership dues] in stamps," he said.

Caption: PHOTO

PHOTO (color): (Matthew) Hale .

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Page: 1

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