

Labor sleuths go after mob-run unions

By PATRICK CLARK

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They cover the waterfront. And construction sites and union halls. Sweatshops, too.

Their weapons are bugs (electronic listening devices), wiretaps and informants. But they rely on street smarts.

Agents of the U.S. Labor Department's Office of Labor Racketeering, led by Deputy Inspector General Ray Maria, are not exactly a household word like the FBI.

For one thing, the rackets squad is much smaller, just over 100 agents nationwide, 25 in New York at its 1515 Broadway office, and it's also newer, set up by Congress in 1978.

But the tiny rackets squad tries harder, scrambling to carve out a reputation. Its specialty: the labor-union-corruption front of the government war on organized crime.

Its agents focus on internal union affairs, on scams such as desk-drawer labor contracts between mob-dominated independent unions and corrupt businessmen, and on employee health, welfare and pension benefit plan schemes.

With \$170 billion a year in employer contributions pouring into 770,000 pension plans and 2 million welfare-benefit plans, the squad faces an awesome challenge.

Offices upstate

Its New York office covers New York City and Long Island. Sub-offices in Rochester, Buffalo and New Haven handle upstate New York and Connecticut.

The President's Commission on Organized Crime found that millions of dollars of workers' dues and be-



DISCUSSING A PENDING corruption case are (l. to r.) Frank Allesandrino, Jeff Schaffler, David Williams and Ray Maria. PAUL DE MARIA DAILY NEWS

nefit monies have been siphoned off by organized crime through embezzlement and loans or excessive fees paid to corrupt union and trust-fund providers.

A recent probe by the squad led to the indictment of Teamsters union officials accused of embezzling \$130,000 from several union health plans over a 20-year span.

The report of the President's commission identified four international unions—representing teamsters, dockworkers, laborers and hotel workers—as mob dominated. The report estimated that organized crime adds 20% to the cost of construction in New York. The report concluded that taxpayers eventually pick up the multimillion-dollar tab.

One of the squad's tipsters—still planted deep in the city's \$2 billion-a-year construction industry—reports "business as usual," despite the re-

cent and publicized crackdown on the mob. The labor official admitted taking \$250,000 in payoffs over 10 years.

"Our target is not the entire labor movement," said Maria, 47, a former FBI agent. "We're after a small, powerful minority—bums, hoodlums, professional criminals who undermine legitimate labor organizations."

There are an estimated 1,500 union locals in New York City.

The New York squad helped snare several big names, including:

- Reputed Colombo crime family captain Michael Franzese, a movie producer who is said to control the Allied International Union, the nation's largest private-security-guard union. Franzese was sentenced to prison last month for a massive criminal conspiracy involving business fraud and illegal gasoline distribution. He must pay \$15 million in fines and restitution.

- Daniel Cunningham, former president of Allied, who admitted he bought the union from the mob for \$90,000.

- Convicted labor racketeer John Cody, a Teamsters Local 282 official and reputed Gambino crime family associate.

- Slain Gambino crime family underboss Frank DiCicco was first unveiled by the squad when its surveillance spotted him as a no-show Teamsters union foreman. The information highlighted State Commission of Investigation hearings on overtime abuses last year. "He never wore overalls to work," an agent said.

- Anthony Rossetti, recently elected president of the Teamsters union in Connecticut, who is charged by the United States in an alleged health-plan-funds embezzlement scheme. He pleaded not guilty.

Labor leaders generally regard the squad as antilabor. AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland blames law enforcement for union crime. He contends the Justice Department has the budget and tools to move against allegedly corrupt union officials. "Corruption and criminality are attributes of individuals, not of organizations," Kirkland said.

The streetwise New York office of the squad is headed by Frank Allesandrino, a tough ex-Marine and former city detective who investigated major narcotics cases with former Brooklyn Strike Force boss Thomas Puccio.

His deputy, Special Agent Jeff Schaffler, is a former Army officer who got on-the-job experience in labor-management relations working as a waiter to pay for college tuition. Both can call upon prior military experience in guerrilla warfare.

ACTION LINE

Reader had a dim view of VCR repair picture

WHEN I BOUGHT an Akai VCR from Macy's, Brooklyn, in December 1985, I also bought a one-year home-service contract. In February, a problem developed with my remote-control unit, so I called home service to repair it. When the serviceman came to my house, he said he would have it fixed in about two weeks. After a month, I called, and home service said they were waiting for parts. I checked twice during the next two months and talked to a Mrs. Lee, who told me the same story, so I asked if they could just replace the remote-control unit.

She said no, because they had to wait for the parts. A month later, she told me they were waiting for another remote unit. Finally, I called the manufacturer in California, and spoke to a Tom, who told me there was no record of my remote control needing repair, but that he would look into it. I called again two months later, but Tom was not available, and he never called back. Next, I called Macy's billing department and was told to call the manager of the VCR department. It took six phone calls to reach him. When I described the problem to him, he said Macy's had nothing to do with home service, (yet they sell the contracts). But he agreed to call home service, who in turn said they would call the manufacturer, but no one ever got back to me. It is now two months since I called Macy's. I told the store that I will not pay the balance on the VCR until I get my remote control back.

- C.A. finally got his remote-control unit back in mid-May, after he contacted Action Line and we intervened for him.

Stamp sent out

I am an avid mail order buyer and usually don't have problems. However, in February, I sent for a Little Richard rubber stamp from a company called Acey Deucey of New York City. They cashed my

check for \$6.86, but never sent the stamp. I have sent them two letters and gotten no response.

- A. J. should have her Little Richard stamp now. Lynne Perrella of Acey Deucey wrote us that A.J.'s stamp was originally sent out March 15, and that on April 25 they received a letter from her complaining that she hadn't received it. They phoned to resolve her prob-

lem and told her they would replace the stamp at no cost, which they have since done.

Car problem

I hope you can help me resolve a problem with my car. Here is the history of events: On Sept. 28, 1985, I purchased a Chevy Caprice Deluxe from Kort Chevrolet, Floral Park. In December '85, the car was recalled because of an engine defect. On Jan. 13, Kort, under warranty, replaced the warning buzzer. On Feb. 12, '86, Kort finally received the replacement parts from the manufacturer, and the car was repaired. On Feb. 12, I also had a rear brake light installed and had Kort check out three dots of dark blue paint. I was told the dots were a loss of pigment and that the door would have to be repainted, which marked the beginning of my troubles.

On Feb. 14, I returned to Kort Chevrolet to pick up my car, which had not been painted properly. So I left the car at Kort. On Feb. 19, it was returned to me again, but the paint job was not finished. On Feb. 21, it was returned again, with a long scrape mark on the hood, plus dents on the trunk. The door was still not painted properly. Some 44 extra miles had been put on it, and a tank of gas had been

used. All channels on the radio had been reset to different music. Someone had smoked in the car and the interior of the car was filthy. On Feb. 24, the car was returned to Kort Chevrolet. The hood and trunk had been replaced, but the door had still not been painted. On Feb. 28, I finally received my car back. But the trunk doesn't close properly and the door has not been painted properly. Letters and phone calls to General Motors and the Better Business Bureau got me a service call for my car on April 14. On April 24, the car was a total mess. Everyone agrees it's up to Kort to fix this car, but they refuse to fix it properly and to lend me a car while repairs are made. Kort's repair people ruined the car, and I lost the use of the car for a total of 19 days.

- Dominic Carra, the service manager at Kort Chevrolet, wrote us that they tried very hard to resolve A.F.'s troubles, but they do not have their own body shop and had to rely on an outside one which had problems with their help, which was the reason for the faulty paint job. Carra said he personally apologized many times to A.F. for all the inconveniences she had been caused, but that she

was looking for the "pound of flesh." A.F. wrote Action Line in April. Carra wrote us July 1, saying that Kort gave her a rental car on June 17 while they repainted her car and replaced her radio. As of June 30, she was happy and satisfied, Carra said.

Glasses, credit?

Last fall, I ordered glasses from Lerner's, which were to be monogrammed with the names of my husband and myself. I was charged \$39.95 for the set, but never received the glasses. I wrote to Lerner's, but never got an answer. My bill was never corrected, and the glasses still haven't arrived.

- Mary Sweazey of Lerner's Customer Service Department wrote us that they would credit F.D.'s account and also contact her again to see if she still wants the glasses.

WRITE: Action Line, Box 5158, N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Give full name, address, daytime phone number. Incoming calls cannot be accepted.