

'Don' Mario Cuomo and the dope mob

by Joseph Brewda

New York State Democratic Gov. Mario Cuomo has at times said that the term "mafia" is nothing but "a slur on Italian-Americans." He was more honest when he said that Judeo-Christian morality should be kept out of politics. *EIR* now has evidence suggesting that the term "mafia" is an apt description of the source of his entire political career.

The tip of this iceberg is the recent discovery that Cuomo, along with U.S. Sen. Al D'Amato (R), was cited as a reference by the Mattone Group, Ltd., a "construction firm," in its bid last May on a multimillion-dollar project at the Pittsburgh airport. The Allegheny County (Pennsylvania) Board of Commissioners gave Mattone Group the contract, but then abruptly canceled it. The firm isn't run by very nice people, it turned out.

The Mattone Group's vice-president is Nicholas Sands, a.k.a. Nicky Santiago, godson of the late Carlo Gambino. In 1975, Sands was indicted and jailed for embezzling \$500,000 from the pension fund of Carpenters' Local 3108, which he headed. He was an associate of the late Donald Manes, borough president of Queens, New York, whose recent suicide triggered the New York Democratic machine's ongoing corruption scandals. In May 1980, Sands was the victim of an attempted mob rub-out; he survived being shot nine times as he was leaving his Queens home. He would not cooperate with authorities to find his assailants.

The rejection by Allegheny County of the Cuomo-backed firm has triggered a Justice Department criminal investigation into the Mattone Group, according to sources.

Cuomo is an intimate of the Mattone Group mobsters. The firm's owner, Joe Mattone, was the top fund raiser for several of Cuomo's election efforts. According to investigators, Mattone and Nicky Sands began lobbying Allegheny County over a year ago to award them the \$3 million contract for construction of a third airport cargo building. They retained the firm of Baskin and Flaherty to represent them—not overlooking the fact that senior partner Peter Flaherty's brother is an Allegheny County commissioner.

The other senior partner, Phil Baskin, is western Pennsylvania's top operative in the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), an organization formed by the mafia in 1913 as a propaganda and dirty-tricks unit. Baskin's partner, until recently, was Stanley Steingut, the former minority leader of the New York State Legislature, and a longtime crony of

former Brooklyn Democratic boss Meade Esposito. Esposito is now under indictment for kickbacks, one feature of the unraveling of the New York Democratic Party machine. Both Steingut and Nicky Sands are business partners of Esposito in various ventures.

Cuomo is a political protégé of Meade Esposito.

A new dope route

To what was Mario Cuomo lending his name in the Pittsburgh caper? It was much more than a construction contract. The ambitious feature of the plan was to establish a customs clearing house at the airport, replacing the present system whereby items destined for Pittsburgh but needing customs inspection are flown to Cleveland for the inspection, then trucked to Pittsburgh.

The import of this lies in the fact that, currently, some 70% of all airborne freight entering the United States comes in through Kennedy Airport in Queens, New York. Sands owns several trucking companies at Kennedy Airport. Cuomo's associates in New York's Gambino clan thus secure a major share of the narcotics slipped into the country in that freight. In short, Sands's "construction contract" would have given Pittsburgh a cut—the basis of the support for the plan in Pittsburgh, according to investigators.

Also according to investigators, one of the key institutions binding the Pittsburgh and New York mobs to the proposed Pittsburgh airport deal, is Sterling National Bank of New York. Sterling National uniquely ties the Jewish and Italian mafias together, through its services for such mafiosi as the late Michele Sindona, and Meyer Lansky's ADL. Baskin's law firm has historically been associated with the bank.

Mario Cuomo politically "discovered" mob princess and Mondale running-mate Geraldine Ferraro—a pioneering effort to run a mafia-linked figure for high office, setting a precedent for Cuomo's own planned 1988 presidential campaign.

Guess who largely directed Geraldine Ferraro's 1978 congressional campaign fundraising. Nicky Sands, who raised over \$300,000 for her. Sands is also a partner of her husband, John Zaccaro, in at least one mob venture.

Cuomo's son-in-law, Peter Robert Perpignano, is a business partner of Michael Lazar, whose federal indictment for kickbacks was triggered by Donald Manes's suicide. Lazar went from directing the Democratic Party cash cow known as the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, to become one of the largest real-estate developers in New York State.

Cuomo's son Andrew has parlayed his law firm of a half-dozen 30-year-olds into one of the most powerful political operations in New York, in just a few years. The firm is retained by Bank Leumi of New York, the Israeli drug-money-laundering machine tied to the ADL and other elements of organized crime.