

Rally Day Crowd Reacts With Sorrow and Anger

NYTimes By FRED FERRETTI JUN 29 1971

The Italian-American Civil Rights League's second annual Unity Day rally in Columbus Circle began at noon yesterday with a prayer for the life of Joseph A. Colombo

Sr. and ended at 3 P.M. with the League's president, Natale Marcone, shouting from beneath a statue of Christopher Columbus to the crowd: "Go home but never forget, be proud to be an Italian all the time!"

During the three hours of the rally, the crowd responded listlessly to the politicians and entertainers who had come to appear before them, but with visible concern to a series of reports about Joseph Colombo's condition.

His shooting had served to make the crowd, which had come to Columbus Circle in a mood to play, react with confusion, sorrow, anger, rage and violence directed at Negroes in the crowd, because, as the radio told them and they told each other, Colombo had been shot by a black man.

The rally was disjointed and ppaceless, interrupted often with reports from Roosevelt Hospital, where Colombo lay wounded. The people who stood in and around Columbus Circle,

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waving tricolored flags, appeared only to want to know how Joe Colombo was doing.

The police estimated the number of people at the rally to be 15,000. However, observers contended that there were at least twice that many. A spokesman for the Civil Rights League said the crowd numbered 120,000. Predictions of as many as half a million had been made by the Unity Day sponsors.

Those who attended came to life only sporadically. Several times the speakers raised index fingers and shouted "One!" into platform decorated with blue the microphones on the wood bunting, and the crowd responded with "One!" Soon it became the chant "One! One! One!" denoting the unity theme of the rally.

Except for these instances, the crowd gave only occasional attention to the happenings on the stage—political speeches, songs, comedy routines, some muscular posturing by Pete Caputo (Mr. America) and numerous urgings for Italian-American unity and concerted social action.

On three occasions black men in the crowd were roughed up by rally-goers.

One man, clad in a flowing white silk shirt, his head shaved except for a streak of hair resembling that of a Mohawk Indian, walked into the crowd.

A breeze blew open his shirt, revealing, according to policemen to subdue him and to walk belt. At least a half dozen men leaped on him, pummeling him,

while shouts of "Kill him! Kill him!" came from onlookers.

Policemen who attempted to rescue the man were set upon, both by the crowd and by the man himself. It took 12 policemen to subdue him and to walk him through the crowd to Central Park West. Blood was pouring from his head.

At least two of the policemen were injured in the battle, one with a severely injured back, another reportedly suffering a wound. Both men went to Roosevelt Hospital.

On the street where Colombo had lain after the shooting, there were pools of blood, and his horn-rimmed glasses lay upended a few feet away. The area was surrounded by barricades and ignored by its guards. It became, during the afternoon, a place for the curious to stop, look and curse.

Representative Mario Biaggi, Democrat-Conservative of the Bronx, departed from a prepared text to say that "your founder was shot by the same type of revolutionary that executed those two police officers, Waverly Jones and Joseph Piagentini." Patrolmen Jones and Piagentini were killed last month outside a Harlem housing project.

Anthony Imperiale, former City Councilman of Newark, said: "A disgrace happened here today. The founder of your league was shot by a fanatic." He urged those listening not to forget that "the blood of the Roman gladiators" flowed in their veins and that they had to "fight for your place under the sun."

The highest-ranking city official present was Controller Abraham D. Beame, who told the crowd that as a Jew he sympathized with Italians in their fight against discrimination. "It's time to put a halt to the slurs that stigmatize Italian-Americans," he said.

All the trappings in Columbus Circle were for a festive day — 40-foot-long red, white and green plastic streamers from Columbus's statue to lampposts, to building fronts, to trees.

There were 200,000 sandwiches, 400,000 orange and grape drinks, plastic straw hats and golfing caps in the red-white-green tricolor. There were shopping bags in the same colors and pennants and buttons. The speakers' platform was decorated with the league's emblem, a number "1" against a map of the United States, made of red, white, green and gold carnations.

Before the time of the rally, the crowd was milling about, some leaving, some murmuring, wondering whether the rally would start at all. Then the Rev. Louis Gigante, chaplain of the league, strode to center stage of the platform. He had just come from "anointing Joey Colombo," he said.

Initially Father Gigante believed Colombo to be dead. He told the crowd that "I lost a great friend," but he said that "this day must go on."

"Joey told me he's not the league," he said. "We're the league."

He asked the crowd to "pray to St. Jude for Joey's life," and

led them in the Lord's Prayer. As he spoke, Jenni Recchio, the 80-year-old "mother of the league" began sobbing as she sat next to him.

Other speakers followed Representative Biaggi and Controller Beame. Paul O'Dwyer said to the crowd: "We are living in a time very much like 1919 when there was an Attorney General Mitchell Palmer, who didn't believe in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights."

As he spoke, the Assembly minority leader, Stanley Stein-gut, and Meade Esposito, Brooklyn Democratic leader, took seats on the platform. County Democratic leader followed, as did former City Controller Mario A. Procaccino.

At one point several black reporters were ejected from a press enclosure directly in front of the speakers' platform. They were permitted to return only after other newsmen interceded.