

Many in the Mafia See Colombo As Unworthy of Leader's Role

By NICHOLAS GAGE

The reports by police officials yesterday that the shooting of Joseph A. Colombo Sr. was the product of growing hostility among underworld organizations in New York come as no surprise to those familiar with Colombo's impact on the Mafia in recent years.

The five Mafia families have been facing serious problems on several fronts of late and Colombo's maverick ways served to irritate the frustration and apprehension many members felt.

The chief problem has been the loss of strong Mafia leaders able to keep discipline.

When Joseph Valachi, the Mafioso turned Government informant, outlined the structure of the Mafia in New York, he identified the leaders of the five families as Vito Genovese, Thomas Luchese, Joseph Profaci, Joseph Bonanno and Carlo Gambino.

Genovese, Luchese and Profaci have since died, Bonanno has been deposed and sent to exile in Arizona and Gambino has discredited himself in the eyes of many Mafiosi, in part for supporting Colombo.

Gerardo Catena, who took over the acting leadership of the Genovese family, has not shown the strength of his predecessor and is in jail in New Jersey. The underbosses in the family, Thomas Eboli and Michele Miranda, are both old and sick.

One Indicted

Carmen Tramunti, the acting head of the Luchese family, is currently under a Federal indictment for extortion and has not been free to exert strong control over the family's affairs.

Natale Evola, who leads the family Bonanno once headed, came to the job recently after several others turned it down or tried it briefly and failed to be effective.

Gambino is the undisputed head of his family, but he is 72 years old, and suffering from a heart condition. Moreover, his judgment has come under serious question, according to reports of underworld informants.

His most questioned decision concerned his backing of Colombo for the leadership of the family once led by Profaci.

Gambino owed Colombo the support, according to information gathered by law-enforcement officials from monitored conversations of Mafia figures, because Colombo exposed a plot in the early nineteen-sixties by Bonanno to kill Gambino.

Many in the Mafia felt Colombo had neither the experi-

ence nor the character to become the tough and respected leader of a Mafia family. "He was a bust-out guy [petty gambler] all his life," Simone DeCavalcante, head of the New Jersey Mafia family, complained in a conversation overheard by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In addition to the leadership vacuum, Mafiosi have been concerned about the increasing effectiveness of Federal agencies to make criminal cases against them.

The agencies have been effective because of increased legal powers granted to them by Congress and implementation of new procedures that have coordinated efforts against organized crime.

In the midst of efforts by Mafia leaders to find ways to blunt the drive against organized crime, Colombo emerged on the scene and began goading the F. B. I. and other law-enforcement agencies.

The Italian-American Civil Rights League, of which Colombo was a founder, picketed F.B.I. offices and complained about the use of the words "Mafia" or "Cosa Nostra" in newspapers, magazines, books and movies.

Although the league was supported by many people with no underworld connections, Colombo's appearance at the head of league efforts brought increasing attention to him and his alleged position as head of a Mafia family.

"Every time Joe Colombo's face appeared on the front page of a newspaper or on the evening news, a lot of the old guys in the Mafia hit the ceiling," a Federal agent said recently.

Some of the young members of Colombo's own Mafia family were not very happy with their chief either. Among them were the leaders of two powerful factions in the family—Joseph Gallo and Carmine Persico.

Gallo Unhappy

Gallo, who lives in an apartment off Union Square in Manhattan but bosses a gang operating primarily in South Brooklyn, came out of state prison recently and started complaining that his gang was not getting a fair share of the family's illegal profits.

Persico has voiced similar complaints as well as some strong doubts about Colombo's abilities as a Mafia leader.

Law enforcement agents have said in recent days that any of these conditions in the Mafia could have produced a plot against Colombo's life.