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Sheeran Acquitted of Racketeering

By KITTY CAPARELLA

The curtain is about to fall on the criminal career of Francis J. Sheeran, predicted an FBI agent as the nine-man, three-woman jury deliberated for 4½ hours on the fate of the president of Wilmington, Del. Teamsters Local 326.

The review was premature. Sheeran, 59, was found not guilty on all three counts: conspiracy, racketeering and interstate travel to commit arson — ending a three-week trial in U.S. District Court yesterday.

As jury foreman Charles E. Rhoads, a Reynoldsford postal worker, announced the verdict, an audible gasp could be heard in the courtroom. Robert E. Courtney and Francis Higgins, attorneys of the U.S. Organized Crime Strike Force who had just prosecuted the biggest case of their careers, appeared stunned. Several FBI agents' mouths dropped.

SHEERAN'S face flushed, then he stood and hugged "my little baby," his youngest daughter, Connie, 16, and his estranged wife, Irene. Tears streamed down their faces.

As a score of Teamsters and friends surrounded him, the hulking, white-haired, 262-pound Sheeran turned to reporters who had covered the long, complicated trial and shook their

heads. "I want to thank you for your consideration. You were fair... I'm very happy."

As Sheeran left, FBI agent Quinn John Tamm and Courtney stood talking quietly. "I don't understand. I don't understand the verdict," Courtney said.

"I GUESS THEY just didn't believe (Charles) Allen at all," Tamm replied.

Apparently the jury didn't. The credibility of Allen, the confessed hit man who began cooperating with the government and secretly recorded conversations with Sheeran and others for six months, was the first topic of discussion after jurors bid the three alternates farewell.

"The prosecutors never put up enough information on the man to (show him) as being guilty," said juror No. 4, William T. Gormley, a TWA ramp service employee from Havertown. "We evaluated to a degree as to how much credibility (Allen) had, and then we took it from there."

THE CASE hinged on whether the jury believed Allen, whom the government described as a "thug, murderer and arsonist," a person the defense added "would lie to stay out of jail."

"They didn't believe him. Either

that, or they were scared," said one U.S. marshal.

More than 30 tape-recorded conversations with Sheeran about contracts for murders, arsons and beatings were presented as evidence as well as maps, weather charts, telephone records. There were 45 government and 38 defense witnesses during 16 days of testimony.

But the strongest evidence against the union leader — taped conversations about picking up "candy" (dynamite) from a munitions factory near Wilkes-Barre and orders for Allen to "break both legs" of a company executive — was technically not evidence proving any of the eight offenses listed in the indictment.

FOR 5½ DAYS, Allen, 48, testified Sheeran had hired him to commit crimes. He ticked off the murder of Francis (Big Bobby) Marino in Feb. 1976, the attempted murder of William Brown, a Teamsters Local 500 official in 1976, the 1973 murder of Frederick Gawronski and the attempted murders of two of Gawronski's friends, the setting of fires at a Sheraton hotel in Smyrna, Del., and at Teamsters Local 513 headquarters at 1462 E. Luzerne St.

Murder and arson are not federal

crimes. So under the umbrella count of racketeering, the jury had to find that two of the eight alleged crimes had been committed to enhance Sheeran's position in an "enterprise," a loosely knit organization of alleged criminals and labor leaders and also that he had to travel across state lines to do so.

INSISTING ON taking the witness stand, Sheeran, who lives in Cornwells Heights, Bucks County, defended his 25-year friendship with reputed upstate crime boss Russell Bufalino. The government contended that Bufalino had OK'd the 1976 Marino murder contract through Sheeran —

enhance Sheeran's position in the "enterprise," the offense could not be considered racketeering.

He also noted "a person may be a close friend of a known convicted felon or unconvicted character, but not likely to be a member of an enterprise."

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'Allen Lied, but I Didn't' Sheeran Throws Party to Celebrate Court Victory

By KITTY CAPARELLA

His "Gatorade" (white wine with a twist of lemon) in front of him, his favorite blonde ("my little baby") daughter, Connie, 16, beside him and a host of friends around him, Francis Sheeran celebrated his "victory" last night at Cons Little Italy, 111th and Christian St.

"I wasn't surprised. I thought the decision should be the way it was. The judge gave a fair charge and the jury understood the difference between a liar and me," said the president of Wilmington Teamsters Local 326, who only hours earlier had been found "not guilty" of federal labor racketeering charges.

"And the press gave me a fair coverage," he added. "All I know is, I didn't lie. Allen lied but I didn't."

Almost everyone accused of anything in Sheeran's trial was celebrating at the three-deep bar last night. Teamsters Frank Lord, Charlie Daly, Joe Shafferman, Larry Thomas, roofer Billy Stearn, attorney Jim Moran, Daily News freelance columnist Joe Markey.

PLUS SOME OTHERS, whose futures — criminal, labor and otherwise — are a little rosier because the jury did not believe, confessed hit man-turned-snitch Charles Allen or the tape recordings he secretly made.

Asked about conversations with Allen when they allegedly picked up dynamite, Sheeran said: "It was not part of the predicate offenses. It was a matter of conversation, I was probably half-shot in the ass."

Complaining about being persecuted by the government, Sheeran waxed philosophic. "Look at what they did to Martin Luther King, (Jr.)... the government, they persecuted him."

Suddenly a voice shouted. "A big hand for Emmett Sheeran's attorney, former District Attorney F. Emmett Fitzpatrick and his wife, Debbie, walked in. The partygoers applauded, with one commenting: "Brilliant summation."

"EMMETT'S GOT TO be the greatest attorney to ever

hit the city," said Sheeran's driver, Jack Flynn, a bartender who testified in his defense.

In a matter of minutes, a rum cake with the frosted message, "Congratulations, Frank" and two blazing sparklers came out of the kitchen.

"I'm very happy because the truth came out. I'm glad the jury had the ability to know the difference between right from wrong," said trial watcher Frank Vadino, arrested Feb. 10, 1979, in a Port Landerside, Fla. drug buy set up by Allen and federal agents.

"It's gonna prove he was a liar and trying to entrap us," added Tony D'Amato, also awaiting trial in the Florida bust.

MANY FELT THE labor movement had been "vindicated" by the decision, especially Thomas, president of Teamsters Local 513, who Allen said had ordered him through Sheeran to torch the former 513 headquarters before it was to merge with Local 596.

"It's really a victory of the labor movement and (Teamsters) Joint Council 53," Thomas said.

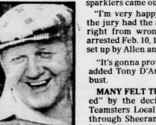
"I feel good about the FBI trying to frame people. They tried it on me twice," smiled John McCallough, business agent for Roofers Local 38, whom Allen also taped. "No matter where an informer comes from, or an informer on the stand, it's the same thing — people hate him."

Billy Stearn was asked if he still was selling silencers — a charge Allen testified about in the trial. Stearn replied, without cracking a smile, "Not really. I never sold them in my life."

ATTORNEY KEVIN RANKIN, Fitzpatrick's nattily dressed assistant whose silk handkerchiefs "bloom" from his suit pocket, lowered his head in confidence and said: "Don't you know these things never happened?"

"They lose, I win," said tracker Frankie Lord, in a gravelly voice. Allen had accused Lord of helping plant a bomb at the Sheraton hotel in Smyrna, Del. Both he and his longtime friend, Daly, testified they didn't recognize their voices on tapes.

Anxious to hit the road Monday, Daly, a 530,000-year tracker, said: "I'm a high-paid tourist. Put me in a truck and I love it." Suddenly the jovial atmosphere tensed when a Daily News photographer arrived. "Let's get outta here," whispered one guy. A photo was fixed.



Sheeran



Refugee Kids Hit the Ice

Indochinese refugee Min Lau discovers that ice skating has its ups and downs, as she is saved from a spill by ice skates ment her Susan Boyens. Min Lau and 14 other children, aged 9-13, from Vietnam and Cambodia, got their first taste of the popular American sport at a skating clinic held at the Spectrum. The kids, recently settled in Logan, attend James J. Sullivan Elementary School in Frankford.

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