

Win or lose, FBI's Squad 4 keeps region's unions on toes

By William K. Marimow

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One Monday in June, FBI special agent John Tamm telephoned the headquarters of Teamsters Local 326 and, without identifying himself or his employer, asked for the union president, Francis J. Sheeran. It was the day on which Sheeran's long-time business associate, Eugene R. Boffa Sr., had been convicted — after a dogged FBI and Labor Department investigation — in a labor racketeering case.

Tamm recalled saying that he had

confidential information that he would relate only to Sheeran, and, after a few minutes' wait, the burly Teamsters president came to the telephone.

"Sheeran," the FBI agent said he began, "this is John Tamm of the FBI, and I want you to know that you're next. . . ." The rest of Tamm's comment, as well as Sheeran's three-word rejoinder, are unprintable. The next thing Tamm remembers hearing is the crashing of the receiver.

As it turned out, Tamm's five-month-old prediction was prescient:

Frank Sheeran, known as "The Irishman," a close friend of reputed northeast Pennsylvania organized crime boss Russell Bufalino, was convicted Friday in federal court in Wilmington of assisting Boffa in an illegal labor-leasing scheme in exchange for the free use of Cadillacs and Lincoln Continentals and cash payoffs.

For the FBI labor squad — Squad Four, as it is known inside the FBI's Philadelphia office — Sheeran's conviction is a high-water mark for a unit that, since its creation almost

six years ago, has generated some of the Philadelphia office's most intensively investigated and publicized labor-racketeering cases.

The 12-agent unit, assembled at the direction of the former special agent in charge of the Philadelphia office, Neil Welch, has had both notable winners and notable losers.

The winners include convictions of or guilty pleas from James J. O'Neill, the former business manager of Plumbers union Local 690, Gordon G. Grubb Sr., secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Local 830 and former pres-

ident of the Joint Teamsters Council 53 in Philadelphia; Albert Gerslie, the former Girard Bank officer who handled most of the bank's organized labor accounts, and Sheeran.

The losers, too, might be mistaken for an excerpt from a Who's Who of Philadelphia labor luminaries. Those acquitted include the late John McCullough, former president of

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The Sheeran conviction began with a Lincoln Continental in the wrong place at the wrong time. Page 24-A.

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