

Anthony M. Scotto, Former Union Power on the Docks, Dies at 87

He rose to leadership in the longshoremen's union as a polished reformer, but the U.S. called him a Mafia boss, and he served prison time in a racketeering case.

By David Stout

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Anthony M. Scotto, a former leader of the longshoremen's union whose polished manners and soft-spoken approach made him seem out of place in the turbulent, often corrupt world of the waterfront until he himself went to prison for labor racketeering, has died. He was 87.

His death was announced on Sunday on Instagram by his daughter, Rosanna Scotto, a co-host of the Fox Five New York news program "Good Day New York." She gave no other details. Mr. Scotto had homes in New York City and Southampton, N.Y.

Mr. Scotto (pronounced SKOE-toe) was not yet 30 when he became president of the Brooklyn-based Local 1814 of the International Longshoremen's Association in 1963, succeeding his father-in-law, Anthony Anastasio, who had died of a heart attack at 57. Before Mr. Scotto took over, Mr. Anastasio had risen from dock worker to union leader and consolidated 10 small locals into Local 1814, the biggest in the I.L.A. and the most powerful along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, with some 9,000 members.

Early on, Mr. Scotto said he preferred cordial bargaining instead of threats and picket lines. He spoke quietly, read widely, dressed nattily and smelled not of cigar smoke but of after-shave lotion, so much so "that the fragrance can be inhaled nearly six feet away," as Gay Talese wrote in The New York Times in 1965. Mr. Scotto promised to crack down on pilfering and extortion.



Mr. Scotto spoke to Brooklyn longshoremen in 1965. “Who knows what you can achieve when there are reasonable men on both sides of the table?” he said. Meyer Liebowitz/The New York Times

He became a vice president of the I.L.A. as well, and people familiar with big-city waterfronts dared to hope that change was coming to a world in which union chiefs sometimes shook down shippers, workers stole cargo to make up for wages lost during strikes, and hired goons discouraged dissension among the rank-and-file with shivs and baling hooks.

Mr. Scotto delivered college lectures on labor-management relations. He pledged to listen to shippers, who had long complained of being squeezed by the unions. “Who knows what you can achieve when there are reasonable men on both sides of the table?” he said in 1964.

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He promoted renewal of the Brooklyn waterfront and oversaw a foundation that provided scholarships to union members’ children. He supported racial integration of his union. He established a union medical clinic.

But there were whispers that perhaps Mr. Scotto had a few things in common with the cruder labor chieftains who had preceded him. The Justice Department in 1969 told a Senate investigating committee that informants had identified him as a captain in the mob family headed by Carlo Gambino.

“This isn’t the first time a thing like this has been said against me, and I guess it won’t be the last

time as long as my name is Scotto and not Schwartz or O'Hara," Mr. Scotto said in rejecting the allegation.

Undeniably, Mr. Scotto was vulnerable to guilt by association. Although his father-in-law, Mr. Anastasio, was never convicted of a serious crime, no one disputed that he had earned his nickname, Tough Tony. And Mr. Anastasio's older brother was the much feared Albert Anastasia, a mob boss and hit man who was said to have run the Mafia's Murder Inc. gang and who had also worked on the docks. (Albert spelled his surname with an "a" at the end.)

Anthony Michael Scotto, a son and grandson of dock workers, was born on May 10, 1934, in Brooklyn. He graduated from St. Francis Preparatory High School there and began working on the docks while attending Brooklyn College. He had his eye on law school until dropping out of Brooklyn after his second year.

He also began dating Anthony Anastasio's daughter, Marion, whom he married in 1957. The guests at the Plaza Hotel wedding reception included Joseph Profaci, founder of what became the Colombo crime family; Carmine Lombardozzi, a top Gambino lieutenant; and Albert Anastasia, who months later would be shot dead in a Manhattan hotel barbershop.

Mr. Scotto befriended politicians in New York City, Albany and Washington and toured Brooklyn with Jimmy Carter during Mr. Carter's successful run for president in 1976. Yet he remained under suspicion. In 1970, he invoked his Fifth Amendment right by refusing to answer questions before a committee of the New York State Legislature on whether he was a member of the Mafia.

In the mid-1960s, when he managed social activities at a New Jersey country club after it was bought by a real estate company co-owned by his wife, he became uncomfortable when suspected mobsters, including Thomas Eboli, a reputed underboss in the Genovese crime family, would show up. He would ask them to tee off elsewhere.

In 1979, federal prosecutors in Manhattan obtained a 70-count indictment charging Mr. Scotto and others with labor racketeering and tax evasion. He was accused of extorting more than \$200,000 from executives of waterfront companies in return for steering business their way and reducing the number of accident claims filed by longshoremen.

The prosecution's main witnesses, two executives who had pleaded guilty to conspiracy, testified about giving cash to Mr. Scotto. Mr. Scotto testified that he had "never taken a cent" for himself, and that any money he had received was meant for political contributions. But the defense was unable to explain the absence of campaign records to account for the cash, or the fact that some money changed hands in unusual places, like men's rooms.

Gov. Hugh L. Carey of New York and the former New York mayors John V. Lindsay and Robert F. Wagner Jr. were among those who testified to Mr. Scotto's integrity. But they conceded that they had no direct knowledge of the evidence against him, and Mr. Scotto was convicted after a two-month trial. (An Anastasio nephew, also named Anthony Anastasio, the executive vice president of Local 1814, was also convicted of taking payoffs and sentenced to two years in prison.)



Mr. Scotto left court after being convicted in a labor racketeering case in 1979. “My conscience is clear, and they will have to live with theirs,” he said of prosecution witnesses. His daughter, Rosanna, was on the left; his lawyer, James M. LaRossa, on the right. Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Mr. Scotto was still insisting on his innocence when he entered a federal prison in Danbury, Conn., in the summer of 1981. “My conscience is clear, and they will have to live with theirs,” he said of the witnesses who had testified against him.

He was later transferred to a prison in Minnesota and then to one in Otisville, N.Y., in Orange County. He was released in October 1984, his five-year sentence having been cut by two years for good behavior. His sons, Anthony Jr. and John, drove him home. In addition to his daughter, they and his wife survive him, as do another daughter, Elaina, and eight grandchildren.

In recent years the Scotto family has operated a restaurant, Fresco by Scotto, in Midtown Manhattan. On Father’s Day 2012, a family gathering at Mr. Scotto’s Southampton home was featured in *Hamptons* magazine. “Heavenly aromas of marinara waft into the air, and wineglasses are never empty,” the author wrote.

Miles and years away from the waterfront, Anthony Scotto seemed happy. “There’s nothing better,” he said, “than waking up on Sunday mornings and making my grandchildren pancakes and waffles, catching up on their weekend activities, starting the Sunday sauce, and then sneaking off for a round of golf with my friends before dinner.”

David Stout, a reporter and editor at The New York Times for 28 years, died in 2020. Jordan Allen contributed reporting.