

## Philip Caruso, Former N.Y.P.D. Union President, Dies at 86

He took the reins of the P.B.A. in 1980, when morale was low after the city's fiscal crisis. When he stepped down in '95, the force was at peak strength.



By Sam Roberts

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Philip Caruso, a former patrolman who as president of the union representing New York City police officers for 15 years fiercely defended them as crime peaked and cops were accused of brutality and corruption, died on Aug. 8 in Sayville, N.Y. He was 86.

The cause was complications of a fall, his daughter, Lynda Nicolino, said. His death, at a nursing facility near his home in Sayville, on Long Island, was announced by the union, the Police Benevolent Association, but not widely reported at the time.

When Mr. Caruso took the reins of the union in 1980 — it was called the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association then — personnel and morale remained depleted from devastating layoffs during the city's fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s. When he stepped down in 1995, its ranks had surged to record strength after thousands of officers had been hired, and crime was starting to plummet. He himself was on the force for 37 years.

Despite his public bluster, Mr. Caruso was generally well-regarded by the city officials with whom he dealt daily and conducted labor negotiations.

"Phil was a modern police labor leader," Robert J. McGuire, who was the police commissioner from 1978 to 1983, said in an email. "He never forgot that he was a sworn officer, and he took his responsibilities seriously while representing his colleagues vigorously."



Mr. Caruso campaigning to head the P.B.A. in 1977. He was a New York City police officer for 37 years. Chester Higgins, Jr./The New York Times

Mr. Caruso maintained a steady grip on the police officers' union as it fended off demands for greater civilian oversight. These came from the public and politicians and especially from prominent Black and Hispanic New Yorkers seeking to forestall or respond more effectively to allegations of brutality, abuse and corruption.

At the same time, Mr. Caruso struggled to vent simmering dissent within the ranks.

Senior officers sought to protect their pension and health benefits, new hires hoped to keep their jobs and demanded higher entry-level pay, and the entire force coped with deferred raises and shortages in manpower.

Their frustration boiled over into boisterous demonstrations. In 1976, hundreds of off-duty officers defied a court order and blocked traffic during the Muhammad Ali-Ken Norton heavyweight championship fight at Yankee Stadium demanding retroactive raises and protesting new schedules that would require additional work days.

Mr. Caruso, a union trustee at the time, joined in picketing The New York Times "to enlist its support," he said at the time.

"We've had to absorb the scorn of society as we did our jobs," Mr. Caruso said. "Now we feel the city should deal with us equitably."

In 1983, he stormed out of a congressional hearing on accusations that police officers had brutalized Black New Yorkers. He said afterward that instances of brutality were "aberrational and isolated."

Two years later, he mustered 10,000 officers to protest the indictment of a fellow officer for manslaughter in the death of a Bronx woman killed in an eviction dispute.

And in 1992, a rally by officers at City Hall to protest Mayor David N. Dinkins's position on police issues degenerated into a traffic-snarling, epithet-hurling melee with racial overtones that had been stoked by several politicians, including Rudolph W. Giuliani, who would unseat Mr. Dinkins the following year.

Philip Peter Caruso was born on Sept. 7, 1934, in Brooklyn to Italian immigrants, Angelo and Ramona (Gebbia) Caruso. His father was a mason, his mother a homemaker.

After graduating from Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, he served in the Army as a military police officer in Korea and earned a bachelor's degree from Pace University in Manhattan. He was later awarded a master's from Pace in labor relations and also studied at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Mr. Caruso served on the police force from 1958 to 1995. He was a patrolman in Midtown when he defeated the incumbent union president in a close race in 1980.

He married Joanne Hartman. In addition to his daughter, he is survived by his wife, four grandchildren and four great-granddaughters. Another daughter, Angela, died.

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