
3

Pizza Parlors: Safehouses for Drug Smugglers

In March of 1980, the Pennsylvania Crime Commission released a public report entitled "A Report of the Study of Organized Crime's Infiltration of the Pizza and Cheese Industry."

The report detailed how organized crime had cost Pennsylvania taxpayers incalculable millions of dollars in unpaid local, state and federal taxes. It documented how retail pizza shops were used as "safehouses" for illegal aliens, how millions of dollars were "skimmed" from these businesses each year. It described the murder and arson, the hijacking and theft, that have shadowed the industry's growth.

In the intervening five years since the report was issued, organized crime has continued to heavily influence this industry, using a seemingly legitimate business enterprise to further its criminal activity and subvert a legitimate society.

A year after the Crime Commission released its report, the F.B.I. and the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration initiated a major multi-state investigation into suspected heroin trafficking by what was loosely known as the "Sicilian Mafia."

Members of this organization, operating through a number of business fronts including numerous pizza parlors and restaurants, were responsible for the importation of multi-kilo lots of heroin into the United States.

In June of 1984, eight members of this heroin smuggling operation were indicted by a federal grand jury in Philadelphia. Among them was Albert Ficalora, who had been mentioned prominently in the Commission's 1980 "pizza" report in connection with an explosion at a pizza shop in which two arsonists were killed.

The D.E.A. noted that the investigation that led to the indictments *"showed strong ties of the operation to both the Bonanno and Gambino LCN families in New York."*

At about the same time the Philadelphia indictments were returned, a federal grand jury in New York City indicted six men with organized crime ties who also were accused of importing heroin into the U. S. Three of the defendants owned pizza shops in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

The F.B.I., in a recent assessment of the situation, stated: *"As a result of the extensive multi-state investigation conducted into the heroin smuggling activities of Sicilian organized crime members in the U. S., it has been determined by federal investigative agencies that these individuals control a sizeable portion of the heroin importation business to the U. S."*

"These individuals, who are also believed to have associations with members of existing American organized crime families, are believed to be responsible for the importation of millions of dollars of heroin to this country."

