

Massimo Ciancimino: Dynamite in the Garden of Justice

Judith Harris (April 29, 2011)



The three years of Ciancimino's testimony in three separate Mafia trials risk being compromised

ROME - He was a star witness, and in his testimony he tried to incriminate Premier Silvio Berlusconi. But when Mafia supergrass Massimo Ciancimino was caught falsely inserting the name of Gianni De Gennaro, a top Italian policeman, onto a list of alleged mafiosi, inquiring magistrates in Parma sent him straight to jail this week. Asked why he had forged De Gennaro's name, Ciancimino replied that the previous week he had found three sticks of dynamite in his Palermo home and, terrified, had put them into a bucket of water and buried them so as not to frighten his family. This, of course, does not explain why he took matters into his own hands, literally burying dynamite in the garden instead of informing investigators.

Possibly it is true that Ciancimino was threatened into taking an action that would muddy the judicial waters. But quite apart from his allegations of a Berlusconi-Mafia connection, his three years of testimony in three separate Mafia trials risk being compromised, even though prosecutors insist that, before accepting his testimony as credible, they had obtained confirmation, on every point, of



Ciancimino's allegations through testimony from other witnesses, phone and environmental taps and documents.

Berlusconi's political faithful could hardly fail to see this misstep as proof of the prosecutors' general ineptitude, and an opportunity too good to pass up. The ponderous journalist Giuliano Ferrara, who these days is one of Premier Berlusconi's closest advisors, has already called for one of the prosecutors who'd heard Ciancimino's testimony, Antonio Ingroia, to be put on trial himself, supposedly to risk a 10-year sentence.

As right-wing journalist Filippo Facci (*Libero*, *Il Foglio*, *Riformista*) put it, "Everybody else had long since understood that Ciancimino was a proven liar, as well as a new kind of anti-Mafia media star—a trendy super-witness, at home in Roman drawing rooms and on *Annozero* [Ed.: the controversial TV talk show run by Michele Santoro], a welcome presence at the Feast of L'Unità' and at Cortina, always ready, to hear him, to rewrite the history of Italy with clamorous revelations left on scraps of paper in the pocket of a jacket at the dry cleaner's." More seriously, in what amounts to a setback for the entire struggle against the Mafia, Berlusconi's party is calling for a parliamentary commission to be created to investigate all pentiti.

The man usually known here as "Ciancimino Junior" is the son of the Christian Democratic mayor of Palermo during the building boom Sixties, Vito Ciancimino, whose conviction for Mafia association and money laundering in 1992 brought him a 13-year prison term. He is believed to have salted away funds that have never been found, and Ciancimino Junior was arrested in mid-2006 on charges of money laundering. But then, testifying in Mafia trials in Palermo, Caltanissetta and Florence, Ciancimino provided magistrates with carefully dosed details from documents left by his father. He became a protected witness with bodyguards, and his testimony contributed to a recently revived investigation into the first known attempt on the life of prosecuting magistrate Giovanni Falcone, hero of the historic, two-year "maxi-trial" that ended in 1987.

On June 19, 1989, two years after the maxi-trial brought 360 Mafia convictions for serious crimes, Falcone was vacationing in a rented house at Addaura, near Caltanissetta in Sicily, when twenty kilograms (44 pounds) of explosives were found in a gym bag alongside a snorkler's wet suit and other diving gear at water's edge on a beach where he was sun-bathing. Two policemen noticed the bag, and its contents did not explode. Subsequently Falcone was transferred to Rome, where he lived so cautiously that this reporter learned only after his death that he dined often in a tiny Roman trattoria in the piazza where I lived (and where I also dined regularly), and that, unable to sleep some nights, he wandered that same piazza restlessly. On a return trip to Palermo on May 23, 1992, Falcone was murdered by a Mafia bomb on the highway to the airport. His wife, Francesca Morvillo, and his three bodyguards also died.

His murder put the unsolved question of what was behind Addaura in the background for a time, but gradually interest in it revived, along with suspicion of "Mafia infiltrations within the State and the secret services," as a conservative Italian journal put it. One serious investigative reporter theorized that, lurking near the beach in addition to known mafiosi, there were also two separate and rival squads of secret servicemen: the good guys on the land who found the gym bag and, in a rubber boat, the bad guys in wet suits—or vice versa, went another version.

It is true that Ciancimino became a popular figure making the anti-Mafia rounds. In May 2010, on the eve of the anniversary of Falcone's murder, Ciancimino appeared on Michele Santoro's evening talk show *Annozero* along with the Vice President of the Parliamentary anti-Mafia Commission and politicians of various stripes to talk about that presumed secret service connection. Ciancimino was there because, in a book written with the Sicilian journalist Licata, he had alleged that a secret serviceman with a scarred face, whom he knew only as "Signor Franco," had been in contact with his father for years, and had met with Paolo Borsellino not long before a bomb killed that magistrate. In the book, *Don Vito*, written by Ciancimino together with Francesco La Licata, the two suggest that strands of the Addaura investigation lead into a sort of "war of the secret services."

Moreover, "The last time I saw him [Scarface], he was leaving the American Embassy to the Holy See." That is, according to Ciancimino, rogue sectors of the secret services acted in concert with



crooked Italian politicians, the Mafia and U.S. spooks hiding under the umbrella of the American Embassy to the Vatican. Did the judges believe this? It is doubtful. Indeed, the Caltanissetta prosecutors have flatly denied that Ciancimino ever identified the mysterious “Signor Franco,” and on the basis of the photos they showed him, are on record that he was unable to recognize the man he was describing. Nor was Ciancimino certain that the scar-faced man was in the secret services, the prosecutors said one year ago.

In the meantime, prosecutors in Caltanissetta who reopened the 22-year-old Addaura investigation announced in January that they had found DNA traces on the wet suit, T-shirt and mask found with the bag of explosives. They have now matched it to Angelo Galatolo, described as the “boss of Acquasanta.” The latest twist: Totò Riina, the imprisoned Cosa Nostra boss, has just been named as the sponsor (mandante) behind the supposedly terrorist bombing of a train in the Val di Sambro near Naples in December 1984, when 15 people died. The explosives based on Brixia B5 dynamite, say investigators, was the same used for the bombing that killed Paolo Borsellino—and that was in the gym bag left on the beach at Addaura.

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