

Ex-New Jersey Police Chief Who Ran a Corrupt Force Is Sentenced and Fined

By IVER PETERSON
Published: January 06, 2000

The former police chief of West New York, N.J., who pursued a second career as a bribe taker and protection racketeer for decades while on the force, was sentenced today to four years in federal prison and fined \$50,000.

The court ruled that the former chief, Alexander V. Oriente, had personally presided over a corrupt operation that resulted in \$2.5 million to \$5 million in bribes and kickbacks from gamblers and pimps. Mr. Oriente had pleaded guilty to two charges of racketeering and tax evasion.

The sentence today was the second handed down by District Court Judge Jerome B. Simandle as a result of a federal investigation into official corruption in West New York, and the most severe. So far, 29 people, most of them West New York police officers, have been convicted of or have pleaded guilty to charges of accepting kickbacks, extorting money (primarily from illegal immigrants), loan sharking and protecting gambling and prostitution in this town across the Hudson from Manhattan.

Mr. Oriente's son, Alexander L. Oriente, a former lieutenant on the police force, has pleaded guilty to one charge of conspiracy to extort money from a gambling operation. He is to be sentenced next Thursday.

Three other figures in the West New York corruption case were also sentenced today. Roberta Palumbo, a towing company operator who paid police officers \$6 for every car they ordered towed, was given two years' probation and fined \$5,000. Jose Grana Jr., 34, who ran a gambling operation with his father and bribed officers, received a 60-month sentence and a \$25,000 fine; his father, Jose Grana Sr., 62, was sentenced to 62 months and was fined \$30,000.

The elder Mr. Oriente, who was a principal target of investigators, began cooperating with federal agents a month after he was indicted two years ago.

At the sentencing today, Judge Simandle said he took Mr. Oriente's cooperation into account, but he rejected his plea to be spared a fine or a long prison sentence. Mr. Oriente had cited his age, 67; the ill health of his wife, Grace; and his financial status. Mr. Oriente's only assets, according to court papers, are a \$40,000 retirement account and a \$380,000 home, which is debt free.

"It isn't encumbered?" the judge asked of the Oriente home. "There are many, many people who would like to be able to say that."

As for paying the fine, in installments of no less than \$500 a month, the judge said, "There is no reason someone can't sell a \$380,000 home and move into a \$200,000 home."

Far from being a simple declaration from the bench, the sentencing of Mr. Oriente involved a colloquy lasting more than two hours among his lawyer, William R. Lundsten; the assistant United States attorney, Carlos Ortiz; and the judge. Much of the discussion involved the extent of Mr. Oriente's cooperation with authorities and the amount of his illegal gains. Federal sentencing guidelines take the amounts involved in corruption into account, and Judge Simandle pointed out that the amount Mr. Oriente received would have made him liable for a sentence of 63 to 78 months and a fine of \$12,500 to \$125,000.

Mr. Oriente has lost his police pension and, as a form of restitution to the town, has given up his claim to \$315,500 due him for 353 vacation days he did not take. He has also paid back taxes and penalties for unreported criminal income.

His lawyer, Mr. Lundsten, had proposed a prison term of 30 to 40 months, and no fine. Mr. Lundsten said afterward that there would be no appeal of the judge's sentence.

As he stood to be sentenced, Mr. Oriente held a prepared statement with trembling hands and read it with a choked voice.

"When I joined the West New York police I was very young, and I was placed in a corrupt position," he said, "and I was foolish enough to go along with this corruption."

Mr. Lundsten at times seemed to attribute his client's wrongdoing to the culture of the West New York Police Department, and at one point said that a chief was under no greater obligation to report corruption than a patrol officer.

"He was the chief of police," Mr. Lundsten said, "but he was not the chief of the culture of corruption. He'd been around long time, he'd been participating for a long time, yes, but he was not the king."

Judge Simandle had no patience with this argument. "There was no one in a similar situation," he said. "Prostitution, gambling, accepting bribes, there was no one in this case who was equal to him."

[Home](#) | [Times topics](#) |

[Member Center](#)

Copyright 2013 The New York Times Company | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#) |

[Index by Keyword](#)