

From the

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Trial opens in Teamster dental billk

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A federal prosecutor yesterday charged several high-ranking Teamsters officials and dental plan administrators with having "concocted a complex scheme" to steal "hundreds of thousands of dollars" from union welfare funds.

The comment, made by Joanna Knowles, came as the government opened its case against nine defendants on trial in federal court in Trenton for participating in the alleged scheme.

A tenth defendant, Nunzio Provenzano, a former president of Teamsters Local 560, pleaded guilty Tuesday, before yesterday's formal start of the trial. Provenzano's plea was entered on a charge that he illegally received \$4,300 worth of free dental care for himself and his wife.

In her comments to the jury outlining what the prosecution hopes to prove in the case, Knowles said that as part of the scheme "hundreds" of documents were "phonied up" and huge sums of money were taken out of the welfare funds to pay for the improper dental treatments for the union officials and their families.

The plan was carried out, according to Knowles, by inflating claims of rank and file union members that were to be paid to the dentists. The prosecutor said the union officials "never paid a dime" for work that was, in fact, not covered by the dental plans.

On trial are Salvatore Provenzano—Nunzio's brother—the president of Teamsters Local 560; Thomas Reynolds, another local official; Andrew Reynolds, president of Local 84 until it was merged into 560; Jack Spera and Jack Dwyer, two officials of Local 641; and Gerald Hogan, who has served as president of Local 660.

and Norman Zell, the general administrator of all of the union welfare funds; Leo Marcus, who was hired to run the Teamsters dental plan; and Linda Rubino, Marcus' chief assistant.

Knowles described Marcus as the "front man in this scheme." Marcus, she said, actually falsified the documents as part of the 20-year scheme, which began in the early 1960s.

Although not all of the defense attorneys chose to make opening statements, seven did, including Joseph Benfante, Andrew Reynolds' lawyer, who accused the government of bringing "a shoddy, a disgraceful case."

His client, Benfante said, became a union official in the late 1970s and was never involved as a trustee with responsibility over dental funds.

All of the lawyers who spoke stressed that their clients were innocent. Harvey Weissbard, arguing on behalf of Salvatore Provenzano, said his client never "knew" that improper benefits were being received by him or his family.

Richard Carroll, Dwyer's attorney, told the jury, "It's still not a crime in this country to belong to a union... It's still not a crime to be an official of a Teamsters union."

The lawyers for Marcus and Rubino did not make statements to the jury yesterday.

The dental payments case, which is being presided over by U.S. District Court Judge Anne Thompson, is expected to last approximately two months.

Knowles said that 20 dentists will be witnesses and that some of them "knew exactly what was going on," but have cooperated with the prosecution and have been granted immunity.