

Tony Leah on The Taylor Report, Monday, March 28, 2022

Phil Taylor: Welcome back to The Taylor Report, I'm Phil Taylor, your host. Our guest is Tony Leah, of Unifor Local 222, Political Action Chair. Welcome to the show Tony.

Tony Leah: Hi Phil, glad to be here.

Phil Taylor: We've been following this rather closely, I know our listeners are fascinated, certainly many Canadians are. Jerry Dias is probably the most prominent, it's agreed, the most prominent trade union leader in Canada, and Unifor is probably the best known union. It's a bit of a shock, the story of his demise, stepping out of office, at a crucial time, with an allegation over his head. There's a report, I gather, that he might have done something improper. There's three things, I guess, we could cover here, that I know people must have seen.

The Toronto Star, with the largest circulation in Canada, and The Globe and Mail, a national paper, one liberal, the other conservative. Both have been doing in depth pieces on the situation. And then, your National Executive Board has made a statement about the situation, and there were going to be further steps. The statement had to do with the report, I guess we could start there. That set the news people going. You're a Unifor member, tell us about that report of that meeting, and what your leadership had to say, and what you think of that.

Tony Leah: That press conference, and I think it would've been on the 23rd of March, a lot of people were watching, and a lot of Unifor members I'm sure. We learned into a whole bunch of stuff that we didn't know up to that point, which was pretty shocking. Clearly, I felt anyway, and I think a lot of people felt, there'd been an attempt to keep stuff covered up for a long time. We learned that there had been a complaint filed against Jerry Dias on January 26th that was serious enough that it caused the leadership of Unifor, or at least the Secretary-Treasurer, to launch an external, independent investigation. Jerry was told of that investigation on January 29th. A week later, he went on leave of absence, and medical issues were cited. That's very suspicious timing.

Phil Taylor: By the way, wasn't that a two part thing? Didn't they first say he was just on leave? That turned into medical leave.

Tony Leah: The first message said he was on a leave of absence, without indicating any reason. The second message said that it was medical related, that's correct. But at that time, nobody was told that there was an

investigation. The membership of Unifor did not know. There was this sense created that Jerry, the President of the union for almost nine years, was suffering from some unknown, serious health challenges. But now we know, and it was revealed now that he was under investigation, and a very serious investigation. When more information started to leak out, and I think the Globe and Mail was the first to find out that there were serious allegations and an investigation going on, and they notified Unifor that they were going to be running a story on it. The next day, Unifor announced that there was an investigation, but they didn't say what it was about.

Phil Taylor: Following the fact that the media said, "We're going to be doing a story."

Tony Leah: Yep. Each step of the way it's been grudging, and then at the same time, Jerry Dias announced that he was retiring, effective immediately. So, he had also gotten wind of that. Again, the step that he took was in response to trying to stay ahead of the story breaking. It wasn't based on anything else, it wasn't based on any sudden change in his health situation, as far as we can know. Also, he said that he had timed his retirement, and he makes explicit mention of this in his letter announcing his retirement. He timed the retirement so that it would trigger a Special Convention ahead of the regular Convention, so that the union would have to have two conventions within a couple of months, at each one electing a President. It was bizarre.

Phil Taylor: It really prejudiced the second one, right? It's a lot of money involved.

Tony Leah: Huge amount of money to hold a Convention.

Phil Taylor: By the way, how could he do that without the agreement of the other executives? Why wouldn't they say, at that point, "Jerry, you're under a cloud. This is not a time for you to make a decision like this."

Tony Leah: He made sure that he announced the retirement before it was revealed anywhere publicly that he was under investigation.

Phil Taylor: Yeah.

Tony Leah: But he knew.

Phil Taylor: Certainly they knew, the other exec members knew.

Tony Leah: Some of them did. It's not clear how many of the full National Executive Board knew, or who knew, or how much they knew. I can't answer that

question, that hasn't been told to us. Certainly, the top leadership knew, because they commissioned the investigation, and Jerry knew. Once he retired, it triggered a snap Convention and election, where his preferred candidate would have the advantage. That's the other part of this. Even though he knew that he was under investigation since January 29th, on February the 1st he went to the National Executive Board of Unifor to recommend his own replacement as National President, and got them to endorse his preferred candidate, Scott Doherty.

That's the background. On the 24th, we hear the details, and the details are, and Unifor announced this, that Jerry had taken \$50,000 from a company that supplied COVID test kits. He had recommended that employers purchase those kits, employers Unifor bargains with on behalf of their workers. He was able to get a number of them to buy these test kits. He was given \$50,000, we're told, and he had handed over \$25,000 of that money to one of his assistants.

Phil Taylor: By the way, if I can interrupt you, I love the detail. It was in a bag, \$25,000 in a bag. It wasn't in an envelope like Mr. Mulroney. This is in a bag, and a bottle of cologne with the initials of that individual.

Tony Leah: Yes.

Phil Taylor: I've never ordered a bottle with initials on it for a friend. People do that? Anyway, go on.

Tony Leah: Those details came from the Globe and Mail, and apparently they are in the 30 page investigative report that was done. Those details were not released officially by Unifor, but you're right, that came out the day after. The Globe and Mail, again, has the sources on the inside who have seen the report, and released those details, which are really striking. That's what really makes this whole thing sensational. To imagine that the person who portrays himself, apparently believes himself to be the greatest union leader in the country, so important that he thought the city of Oshawa should name a street after him, although he flubbed that one as well, would act in this way as he's going out the door. That he would invite his assistant into his office, and he had this bag of cash, \$25,000 in cash, in a bag on his desk, with three bottles of cologne monogrammed with the initials of his two assistants on two of the bottles.

He offered his one assistant, Chris MacDonald, one of the bottles of cologne, and the bag of money. This apparently happened on January 20th. It's another detail that's pretty interesting, because up until this

point, all we knew is that there'd been a complaint filed against Jerry on January 26th.

Phil Taylor:

Six days.

Tony Leah:

Immediately, you have to ask yourself, if he handed him the money on January 20th, the source says that in between those two dates, Chris MacDonald initially didn't want to take the money. Jerry told him, "Yes, you're taking the money," and then they went out to lunch together. Later, Chris MacDonald informed the Ontario director of Unifor, Naureen Rizvi, and over the next few days, Scott Doherty, Jerry's other assistant, came and had several discussions with Chris MacDonald. It took six days for them to look at this bag of money and decide what they were going to do with it. Eventually, they handed it to the Secretary-Treasurer, and filed a complaint against Jerry.

Phil Taylor:

The first person he reported it to on the day, knew he had that bag.

Tony Leah:

Yep, that's the story. That's what we're told is in the report.

Phil Taylor:

To your understanding, does the report say what the discussions were about, between Mr. Doherty and Mr. MacDonald?

Tony Leah:

I don't know. The leadership of Unifor says that they're being transparent, so I hope that they do release that full report, and we find out what those discussions were. It sure puzzles me how it can take six days to decide what to do with a bag of money that you know is improperly handed over. There are a lot of other things which would lead one to believe that, for all the professed transparency, which is a word that they're loving to use these days, it isn't really very transparent. They seem to have put very tight constraints on the investigation. The story is that they told the investigator to only talk to four people.

Phil Taylor:

How can you instruct an investigator like that? If they're independent, doesn't the investigator say, "Pardon me, I'm independent?"

Tony Leah:

Because independent is also a word that has different meanings, like transparency.

Phil Taylor:

Here's the \$64,000 question: who is the independent investigator?

Tony Leah:

That's one of the things we don't know. That's one of the things that's opaque. When you say independent, I want to underscore this point. Unifor hired the investigator. When you hire somebody, they ain't

independent, because they're following your directions. The directions from Unifor, as far as I know, from the Globe and Mail report anyway, were to only talk to four people, and explicitly not to talk to the company that allegedly handed over \$50,000 to Jerry Dias. How can we know what went on if you don't talk to that company? They said that they would know not to do that, because it could lead to legal consequences. Duh!

Phil Taylor: By the way, that would be, in American lingo, the fifth amendment.

Tony Leah: Yes, but they're pleading the fifth amendment on behalf of some other party that may have been colluding with their President, against the interest of the union. They also said they would not reveal the names of the companies that were induced by Jerry Dias, and staff working on his instructions, to purchase the test kits. If you're going to investigate, I want to know, what did Jerry tell those companies to get them to buy the test kits, and what did he offer them? These are companies that he negotiates with on behalf of Unifor members. Is there a quid pro quo? Everybody these days is-

Phil Taylor: I've never been around \$50,000 without a quid pro quo.

Tony Leah: Lots of quids and quos. Everybody sees the echoes of what happened with the UAW and Chrysler and GM, where those corporations made millions of dollars available to the UAW to pay for staff, to basically fund large sections of the union's programs, and some of it to pay people off, to pay off people's mortgages. The corporations were prepared to make millions of dollars available to the union for their own staff, and in some cases for outright corruption. It was an exchange for something. It was an exchange for the union, cooperating with management, agreeing to a joint way of running things that they called team concept, which is basically class collaboration, where the union ends up supporting the company's goals in cutting wages, reducing pensions, ramping up the pace of work, getting more work out of people for less money, introducing two tier contracts.

In the words of Chrysler corporation, which, through Al Iacobelli, promoted this scheme with the UAW, the goal was to make the UAW leadership "fat, dumb, and happy", so that they could get what they want in terms of concessions.

Phil Taylor: Their phrase.

Tony Leah: Their phrase. A lot of Unifor members are wondering, what kind of deals might have gone on that Jerry Dias was involved in, in meeting with these

corporations, in having private meetings with them. Now we know there was money to be handed over. Was it in return for concessions, for agreements with the companies? We do know that, in the auto companies, wages have been driven down tremendously over the last 15 years, and particularly the last eight or nine years that Jerry Dias was the National President. The starting wages for an auto worker, an assembly worker in Canada today, are \$6 an hour, \$7 an hour less than the starting wage was in 2007, not even counting inflation.

Phil Taylor: That's a big step backwards.

Tony Leah: That's a huge step backwards. And we know what they did in Oshawa, where GM was able to close the plant, get rid of all the workers, and then turn around a year later and start it up again with people making the new, lower rate. Of course workers are asking, "Is there more to this issue than just a union leader scamming some money for himself?"

Phil Taylor: Tony Leah, local 222, Unifor. The Toronto Star piece was interesting, but it focused on a leaked psychiatrist's report that they said they had. It sounded like a doctor's note, as they say, about how he might have done all this because he was a good hearted guy, and he wanted to share money, et cetera, and maybe it affected his judgment. It didn't touch on something, which might be related. We actually have not heard Jerry Dias deny any of this, or affirm it. He hasn't said any of this is so.

Tony Leah: That's the way I read the reports, and the Star story. Clearly the psychiatrist's report was provided to them, presumably by Jerry or one of his many high-priced lawyers. They identified it actually as a forensic psychiatrist's report, which I thought was interesting. That report says that the psychiatrist had recommended to Jerry that he not participate in the investigation, for the sake of his mental health. It's fairly clear that Jerry did not participate, and has not made any admission of any of the allegations against him.

Phil Taylor: That's worrying, isn't it? I get the impression that your leadership says, "We were transparent, and we're doing everything right, and everybody go back to sleep."

Tony Leah: Everything seems to indicate that they have been grudging in their openness, until they were pushed. They have another chance at this, because what they have done is laid charges against Jerry under the Unifor constitution, which will lead to a hearing before the National Executive Board. They may delay that because Jerry has now checked himself into rehab, which is another wrinkle. That seems to be something

that he feels will help him one way or another. It remains to be seen how vigorous that further investigation will be, and whether or not Jerry will participate in that one.

Phil Taylor:

Tony Leah, Unifor, thanks a lot. This is The Taylor Report, CIUT 89.5. We'll see you next week.