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"The list of names and titles of those arrested today sounds like a roster for a community leaders meeting," Weysan Dun, head of the FBI's Newark office said the day the arrests were made. "Sadly, these prominent individuals were not in a meeting room but were in the FBI booking room this morning."

Dwek was the common thread and none of the cases would have been possible without him.

He appeared to have a perfect pedigree to become a persuasive police informant: He is, after all, a convicted con man who pleaded guilty Oct. 20 to bilking a bank out of millions.

Not everyone is enamored with Dwek's work as an informant.

Robert Fuggi, an attorney for one of the public officials charged, Assemblyman Daniel Van Pelt, called Dwek's plea agreement in the bank-fraud case, which calls for him to receive decades less time in prison than he could have faced, a "sweetheart deal."

"It's interesting that those who are righteous and have laws on their side would stoop to such a level to use one of the most vilified defendants in New Jersey in the past 10 years," he said. "I definitely think the integrity of the investigation has to be questioned, and it has to be challenged."

Mr. Fuggi said the government should use informants to expose ongoing criminal activity, which he said is not the case here.

"Dwek was the criminal activity," Mr. Fuggi said. "He instigated and precipitated much of what occurred in this case."

Overall, the individual cases Dwek worked have little relation. Broadly, about half the cases involved purportedly crooked politicians, while the other half involved rabbis who are accused of running separate money-laundering schemes.

He wore a wire and secretly recorded conversations that allowed investigators to build cases against each of the defendants. Like most informants, Dwek came into the employ of the FBI in a last-ditch effort to get out from under his own serious legal problems.

Dwek, an observant Jew and the son of a rabbi, was charged in 2006 with trying to pull off a \$50 million check-cashing scam.

"There's always a question that the government has to ask themselves which is: Do the ends justify the means?" said Michael Weinstein, who represents the congregation of one of the rabbis arrested. "Does using someone like Solomon Dwek provide the government enough of an opportunity to clean up corruption and money laundering that they want to be in bed with him for the greater good?"

"I think the answer in this case is yes."

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Dwek's path to becoming an informant began when he walked into a PNC bank branch on April 24, 2006, and tried to deposit a \$25 million check drawn on one of his accounts at the bank into another account he kept there, according to court records. The problem was that the account the check had been drawn on had previously been closed.

Authorities say a bank employee pointed out this dilemma, but Dwek was able to convince the employee that higher-ups at the bank planned to reopen the account. He also told the employee that he planned to make a wire transfer once that account was reopened that would cover the \$25 million check.

Court records indicate everything Dwek told the bank employee was a lie — no other bank employee had agreed to reopen the account and Dwek was not going to receive a wire transfer to cover the check.

But as a result of his fast talking, according to court records, the bank employee let Dwek deposit the check. And, because the check was deposited into another account at the bank, PNC made the money available the next morning.

That morning, according to court records, Dwek transferred \$2.3 million out of the account. Later that day, he went to a different PNC branch and tried to deposit another \$25 million check the same way he did the day before.

But by then, court records stated, the bank was onto Dwek. They refused to deposit the second check.

The bank also notified law enforcement, despite Dwek's insistence that a wire transfer was forthcoming to cover the check. He even went so far as to have someone call the bank and pretend to be the person who was planning to send the wire transfer.

Court records indicate Dwek's account remains overdrawn by more than \$20 million.

Facing the prospect of significant jail time, Dwek decided to offer his services to the FBI.

Authorities took that cooperation into account when reaching a plea agreement with Dwek, which calls for him to plead guilty to bank fraud and money laundering and receive a prison sentence between nine and 11 years. He could have faced 40 years in prison if convicted at trial of bank fraud and money laundering.

The agreement also gives Dwek a free pass for other crimes he may have taken part in during the past decade, including financial scams, money-laundering schemes and bribing corrupt officials.

He is scheduled to be sentenced Feb. 9 in federal court.

The same day he appeared in federal court, Dwek pleaded guilty in state court to fraud charges stemming from a separate case.

In that case, according to the Associated Press, Dwek pleaded guilty to fraudulently obtaining a \$10 million loan in 2005 that he told the bank would be used to buy real estate in Manhattan. The money actually went to pay other businesses and people to whom he owed money.

State prosecutors in that case asked that Dwek receive a four-year sentence that would run with his federal sentence.

But all those charges had been put on hold when the bureau put Dwek to work as an informant.

And he turned out to be a natural.

In February, according to court records, Dwek met with Mr. Van Pelt, a Republican assemblyman who had previously introduced a bill that would strip convicted corrupt public officials of their pensions, to discuss developing real estate in Mr. Van Pelt's district.

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