

Pastor Indicted for Allegedly Accepting a \$150,000 Bribe

A New Jersey pastor was indicted on Thursday for an alleged bribery scheme involving a bitcoin exchange owned by an Israeli man linked to cyber attacks on JPMorgan Chase & Co and other companies.

Trevon Gross, the pastor and former chairman of the Helping Other People Excel Federal Credit Union of Jackson, New Jersey, was charged with receiving payments to let operators of an illegal bitcoin exchange gain control of the credit union.

Gross, 46, was accused of accepting \$150,000 in bribes from individuals including Anthony Murgio, who operated an unlicensed bitcoin exchange called , and Yuri Lebedev, who supervised computer programming functions for the exchange.

Prosecutors have said their goal was to operate the credit union as a captive bank and evade potential scrutiny of , which was owned by Gery Shalon, an Israeli accused of orchestrating a massive hacking scheme.

Prosecutors have said Shalon, another Israeli, Ziv Orenstein, and an American, Joshua Samuel Aaron, ran a criminal enterprise that hacked into a dozen companies' networks, stealing the personal information of more than 100 million people.

The companies affected included JPMorgan, which prosecutors said had records stolen belonging to more than 83 million customers.

While Murgio, Lebedev, and Gross were not accused of engaging in the hacking offenses, prosecutors said they committed crimes related to the unlicensed operation of .

Prosecutors said exchanged millions of dollars of the virtual currency bitcoin for customers, and the credit union, which federal regulators liquidated in November.

Beyond chairing the credit union's board, Gross is also the lead pastor of Hope Cathedral in Jackson, according to the church's website.

Gross surrendered to the Federal Bureau of Investigation on Thursday morning, an agency spokeswoman said. He is scheduled to be arraigned on Friday.

His lawyer did not respond to a call seeking comment.

Murgio and Lebedev are scheduled to face trial on Oct. 31. Both have pleaded not guilty.

The case is U.S. v. Murgio et al, U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, No. 15-cr-00769. {eo}

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