

LYONSWOOD INVESTIGATIONS AND FORENSIC GROUP INVOLVED IN UNION INVESTIGATION

TWU head hires PI to spy on rival union

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THE head of the Transport Workers Union in NSW has hired private detectives in a quest to prove a rival union is running a vicious smear campaign against him and his colleagues.

Tony Sheldon confirmed last night he had engaged Sydney-based Lyonswood Investigations & Forensic Group to gather evidence against the National Union of Workers and its NSW secretary, Derrick Belan. Mr Sheldon - the TWU secretary at the centre of allegations aired on the Nine Network's Sunday program about a union fund paid millions of dollars of company money - said the detective agency had provided "indications of a trail" leading to the NUW.

He claimed Lyonswood had uncovered that the NUW and one of its officials, Mark Ptolemy, had registered websites in Mr Sheldon's name, the name of his TWU deputy Wayne Forno and the TWU's name. Mr Sheldon also claimed the agency had "verified" it had been approached by the NUW to follow Mr Forno, and possibly himself. "They told us the NUW was ringing around asking for quotes to put surveillance on Wayne Forno," Mr Sheldon told The Australian. He believed the NUW's alleged internet registration of the TWU and its leaders was possibly "a conspiracy against me".

He said the TWU would soon receive a report from Forensic Data, a computer investigation agency also hired by the TWU, which Mr Sheldon believed would prove emails had been sent from inside his office to the NUW.

The rival NSW unions run by Mr Sheldon and Mr Belan have been locked in a long-running feud. Both belong to the dominant right-wing faction of the union movement and Labor Party in NSW, but have clashed over personalities and competition for members in western Sydney. Earlier this year, two NUW officials were charged after the assault of a TWU delegate at the DHL transport company in western Sydney.

Mr Belan said the "website stuff is right" but dismissed the rest as nonsense. "The website stuff happened a couple of years ago in retaliation for the TWU setting up a hotline against us," he said. "It's never been activated. Tony Sheldon's known about the websites, they were even raised in commission hearings. I'll be seeking legal advice in regards to the other matters."

Mr Ptolemy said: "In regards to the comments made about me, I would like to say that Tony Sheldon has lost his bundle.

"I have never heard such paranoid nonsense in my life. This man is desperately looking for any excuse to explain away his current problems."

Mr Sheldon said the decision to engage a detective agency was authorised with agreement of his union's branch committee of management and "various expenditure" was authorised by its finance committee. The TWU chief said Lyonswood was first engaged in May to take photos of people involved in alleged violence at the DHL worksite "and surveillance of other potential problems that might arise".

Mr Sheldon's claims against the NUW came as his union's federal committee of management held an urgent meeting to discuss issues including allegations raised on the Sunday program about multi-million-dollar "side deals" with many companies involving Mr Sheldon. The TWU chief said state TWU secretaries had given him their full support.