

# review

## THEY SAID IT

"If you want ... cartwheels and fireworks ... you've backed the wrong guy with me." - Prime Minister Rudd, on his first 100 days in office.

"I'm firmly locked in the underdog status." - Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson on a poll showing only 7 per cent of Aussies support him as prime minister.

## THE WEEK THAT WAS MONDAY

Wollongong City councillors nervously awaited ICAC Commissioner Jerrold Cripps' recommendation as to whether or not they would keep their jobs.

Harbhajan Singh reportedly made monkey gestures towards the crowd during the tri-series final at the SCG.



## TUESDAY



The nine remaining members of Wollongong City Council were told to pack up their belongings after ICAC Commissioner Jerrold Cripps recommended the entire council be sacked due to what he said was "systemic corruption" within the council.

NRL players Jarryd Hayne, Weller Hauraki and Junior Paulo were shot at while partying in Kings Cross in the early hours of the morning.

## WEDNESDAY

Wollongong City Council was replaced, by an administrative committee of three senior public servants, for the next four years.

Australian cricketer Andrew Symonds flattened a streaker with an impressive shoulder charge that lifted the naked Queensland man clean off his feet, during the second match of the tri-series at the SCG.



## THURSDAY



Police were investigating whether a house fire that killed Woonona man Ross Wilton was lit deliberately.

After a decade of debate and \$1 billion in taxpayer funds, the Australian Government's controversial plan to buy 11 Seasprite helicopters from the United States was finally axed.

## FRIDAY

Rock attack victim Nicole Miller rejected an apology offered by her attacker Peter Hodgkins, because he had apologised for being there on the night rather than to her personally.

NRL chief David Gallop applauded moves by Parramatta to stand down Jarryd Hayne, Weller Hauraki and Junior Paulo for their boozy escapade in Kings Cross earlier in the week.



# Stacking the

THE fallout from the Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry into Wollongong City Council has hit the state ALP hard. But Labor in the Illawarra has long been the subject of controversy, not the least because of branch stacking. **LINTON BESSER** reports.

MUNIR and Valerie Hussain had joined the labour movement in the early '90s for all the right reasons, inspired by the working class ethos that coursed through the Illawarra. The pharmacist and his wife now say they were simply naive.

For years, the couple, who now live in Balgownie, worked tirelessly to support their Labor candidates, often personal friends, at elections to all three levels of government. They manned booths, organised branch functions and hosted fundraisers. They were introduced to visiting luminaries as senior party members and donated thousands of dollars towards what they thought was the good of the party.

"When we joined we had rose-coloured glasses," says Valerie. "We were not part of any faction. We had heard of the factions, but didn't know anything about how deeply entrenched they were."

In 1993, the region was given a new federal member, Stephen Martin, who moved to the seat of Cunningham in a boundary redistribution. He replaced the staunchly left-wing Stewart West.

"We had such great trust and admiration for Steve Martin," Valerie says.

Uninitiated in the bitter factional wars that had dominated sections of the party, the Hussains did not think much about the fact that Mr Martin had come from the right. But over time, the light from the hill began to dim. Eventually it went out altogether.

"It was very bitter," she says. "We were shocked at what actually goes on. We were shocked by these people that we had thought so much of - and how nasty it all got."

So the Hussains were not surprised when, this week, the Independent Commission Against Corruption declared "systemic corruption" had wrecked the Labor-run Wollongong City Council beyond repair.

Along the way, a key figure, former council officer Joe Scimone, was revealed to have been appointed to a \$200,000



**Disillusioned:** Valerie Hussain became a target of the Labor Party after she and husband Munir complained about widespread branch stacking in the Illawarra.

per year position in the same department governed by his long-time mate, Joe Tripodi, the Ports and Waterways Minister. ICAC cleared Tripodi of involvement.

Scimone, a four-time campaign strategist for Stephen Martin, was also close to Police Minister, David Campbell. Some of the developers hauled before ICAC had donated heavily to the Illawarra's band of right-wing MPs: Campbell, Kiama MP Matt Brown and the newly elected Noreen Hay.

Premier Morris Iemma declared on Tuesday he was sacking the council. But rather than allow an early election he has installed administrators for four years.

Andy Gillespie, Australian Workers Union branch secretary, says there is only

one reason why.

"If they were to go to a vote the people of Wollongong would exact such a price on the ALP that it would be decimated," he said.

If he is right, it has been a heavy fall for a city with a working class pedigree like Wollongong.

By and large, the Illawarra has been a sea of red for the ALP.

In the 1990s a branch stacking campaign by the right swept through the Illawarra and south-west Sydney. Almost 8000 people joined the NSW ALP between February and December 1996, roughly equivalent to 30 per cent of the membership.

The numbers were stark. In Berkeley, 16 out of 93 applicants who joined the party over three days in 1996

were bona fide. The same year in Kiril Jonovski's home branch of Warrawong, 227 new members suddenly arrived in just four days. An audit three years later had all but nine of these ejected from the party.

In Mt Keira, 175 people were recruited to the branch but only eight of them were eligible. Notes provided by a former member of the credentials committee that oversaw this stack show all 175 recruits were supported in writing by Mr Campbell, then Wollongong lord mayor. The list was moved by Scimone and seconded by Mr Tripodi.

These were stacks that formed part of a push for council in 1999 behind Cr Jonovski, now accused of corruption by the ICAC and George Harrison, the lord mayor who was later forced to

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"I don't do no deals with nobody."  
- Convicted cocaine smuggler Tony Mokbel, after failing to delay his extradition hearing.

"I wish people would start to get a bloody life and leave us alone."  
- Roseleigh Rose, the mother of drug smuggler Schapelle Corby.

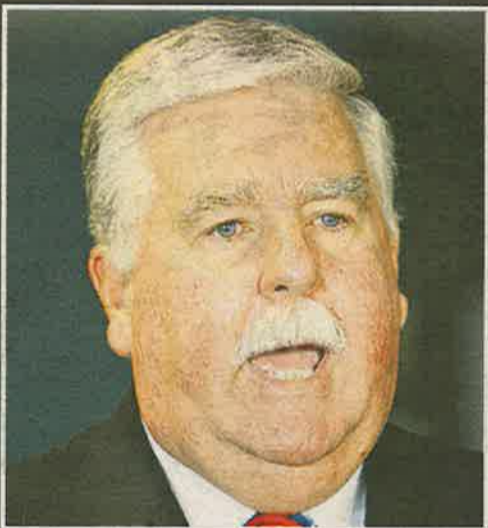
"In this day and age, the gap is appalling."  
- ACTU president Sharan Burrow on the widening pay gap between men and women.

"It was great actually ... it was just like playing football."  
- Streaker Robert Ogilvie on how it felt to be knocked over by Andrew Symonds.

# party with 'spivs'



Stacked against them: Former federal MP Stephen Martin (above) and (below) State Government MPs David Campbell, Matt Brown and Noreen Hay.



By 1999, Mrs Hussain had experienced enough of the party to know she needed Stephen Martin's blessing to run as a candidate in a preselection.

But she says he ordered her to withdraw from the race for the council and allow the incumbent, Janice Kershaw, a member of the ALP administrative committee, to remain unopposed.

"I said I feel strongly about it, if people choose her that's fine, but people should be given a choice," Mrs Hussain says.

Martin now declines to comment on the allegations, saying "my former political life is well behind me".

In June, as she and Munir began doorknocking the list of branch members, they discovered more than 35 people had never attended a branch meeting, contrary to party rules.

A sworn statement by a Bellambi woman details how the branch attendance register was allegedly brought to her home for her to sign.

Mrs Hussain claims she was stymied at every turn during her attempt merely to run for preselection - and in fact became a target. Her ambition went unrealised and as the couple took up the fight against stacking, they made themselves a target.

In February 2001, a fellow branch member brought a charge against Mr Hussain for writing four letters to the *Illawarra Mercury* about the rorts. It sparked a round of hearings by committees all dominated by the right. By the time the Hussains had compiled their evidence, a 26-page dossier, it was too late. "We knew it was a joke from the start," she said.

The mud from the ICAC hearings won't wash off easily. Running campaigns and buying memberships costs money.

In 1999 the four Illawarra state MPs raised just over \$70,000 between them. Last year, the present crop - Hay, Brown, Campbell and Shellharbour MP Lylea McMahon - raised well over half a million dollars, much of it from developers. At the last council elections, at least \$127,000 was raised for the winning candidates.

Those disenfranchised by the decade-long factional war say there is a clear link between the Illawarra's torrid history of branch stacking and the problems that subsequently ate away at the council.

Fay Campbell, a long-serving member of the Dapto branch, believes the dysfunction exposed within the council had its beginnings in the rorting of preselections.

"The branch stacking promoted people into the positions that they hold today," she said.

South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris, goes further. "At every turn, we have spivs acting as lobbyists for developers who have the expectation that the union movement on the South Coast will just stand back because they seem to have the imprimatur of the political machine in Sydney."

□ LINTON BESSER is a reporter with The Sydney Morning Herald.

resign after giving false evidence in the Supreme Court.

In 1998, a member of the Warrawong branch accused then assistant state secretary Eric Roozendaal, now the NSW Roads Minister, of ordering a 1996 branch stack to influence a preselection. In a sworn statement to Labor's review tribunal, he wrote: "I asked Roozendaal, 'How many members do you want, 100? He said 'More'. I said '200?' Roozendaal said 'More like 300? I said 'Okay'." Mr Roozendaal denied the conversation.

But complaints from rank and file members in the Illawarra kept coming. Numerous sworn statements alleged pervasive branch stacking across the region.

In 2002, the unions demanded the national executive conduct an inquiry into the party's activities in the Illawarra.

"During the 1999 Wollongong local council preselections, the

NSW head office was forced to deal with over 500 applications," it reads. "However the stackers were not dealt with and in some cases were rewarded by being preselected to local government positions ..."

Documents obtained by Fairfax show Campbell, Hay, Scimone, Tripodi and Jonovski all participated or turned a blind eye to the rorting of branch numbers during the late-90s, and that for some years Roozendaal, then state secretary, and his assistant, Mark Arbib, failed to act.

The stacking continued apace in Warrawong and Mt Keira in 2000 and 2001.

"In some cases vacant blocks of land and abandoned houses were listed as addresses. In one case the person actually lived and worked in Queensland, whilst in another case the person was housed in Junee Gaol," the document says.

Finally, the party had to act.

In November 2002 the former NSW Supreme Court judge Bill Fisher undertook a cross-factional audit of Wollongong and ruled "there is no real doubt" of the extent of the stacking.

Roozendaal vigorously defends his conduct: "At all times I acted in accordance with the party rules and refute allegations of inappropriate behaviour ... I instituted the toughest membership reforms in the country to stop branch stacking."

Ports Minister Joe Tripodi said: "I had no involvement in the Illawarra branches in the late 1990s other than as a member of the NSW ALP credentials committee which processes membership applications from across the whole state."

"The Mt Keira applications were processed as per the party rules at the time but these rules have since changed to forbid large

numbers joining branches at the same time."

Arbib, now a federal senator-elect, says he played an important role in implementing the Fisher inquiry recommendations.

"During my term branch memberships in the Illawarra were frozen and over 500 members were purged from the party."

Hay told Fairfax she took no part. "These are old allegations which I strenuously deny," she says.

"If anyone peddling this nonsense has an allegation or evidence they should take it to the relevant authority."

The inquiry came too late of course to prevent disaster. The union movement threw its support behind an independent candidate in the Cunningham by-election, splitting the Labor vote, and it directed preferences to the Greens candidate, Michael Organ, who took the seat from Martin.