



## Crown Consorts

From the Big House to the Big Time

What is it that **Lloyd Williams** and **Kerry Packer** have about high-rollers by the name of Tom? Spotted in the Mahogany Room at Crown Casino one Saturday night earlier this month was none other than prominent Sydney identity **Tom Domican**, who was with a group of several exceedingly burly chaps at the bar. Who knows, maybe Big Kerry has decided to contract out security at Crown to Tom, who is a known fixer. The former ALP numbers man even did time for the attempted murder of hitman **Christopher Dale Flannery** back in the 1980s, but this was subsequently overturned by the High Court in 1992. The other Tommy who has featured in the Mahogany Room over the years is a **Mr Suharto**, son of the former Indonesian president, who has spent a good deal of his ill-gotten gains at the high-roller tables of Australia's casinos. This Tommy has been a slightly less frequent visitor in recent times. Asked about the Tom Domican sighting, Crown e-mail person **Gary O'Neill** replied: 'We don't discuss anything to do with our customers and that includes whether certain people visit here or not.'



Toe-cutter Tom Dom: Gotta light?

## The Burdens of Blonde Ambition

She's smart, savvy and young – but is she high profile enough?

The Democrats' rising/falling blonde senator, **Natasha Stott-Despoja**, is fast developing a reputation for being a limelight seeker — and a sensitive one at that. Newspaper gossip columnists are noticing more and more that Nat is overly prone to pick up the phone to complain when she is not mentioned in the most positive light. Maybe this is a character trait she picked up from her mother **Shirley**, the former literary editor, columnist and editorial writer on Rupert's *Adelaide Advertiser*, who was known to be rather difficult to manage. Shirley took successive *Tizer* editors **Piers Akerman**, now a humble columnist for the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, and **Peter Blunden**, now editor of Melbourne's *Herald Sun*, to the industrial tribunal. Anyway, Nat's new-found celebrity status found her on the arm of Channel 9 'personality' **Hugh Riminton** at the \$10 million Packer wedding, even though she had been

invited to old friend **Amanda Forbes**'s wedding in Daylesford, Victoria, on the same day. Nat insists that media and political commitments in Sydney necessitated an apology to her old student politics friend *before* she even knew she'd be at the Packer wedding, mentioned in the gossip columns and featured in the Packer spread in *Women's Weekly*. The description of her dress in the *Daily Telegraph*'s Page 13 column elicited a call from Nat and a clarification was published the next day. We also hear Nat had a vigorous conversation with ARM campaign manager **Greg Barns** when she was not allowed to go to Melbourne and share the stage with **Steve Bracks**, **Malcolm Fraser** and **Gough Whitlam** at one of the last rallies. Nat argues she was 'the top female Republican' in Australia, but in the end Barns prevailed and she stayed in Adelaide for a local rally where the Yes votes were harder to come by.

## Sleeping With the Enemy

At least there's no confusion about which side of the bed they prefer

Career changes among senior political advisers have thrown up an interesting story which we can only say happened some time since **Bob Hawke** was first elected prime

minister. A senior adviser to an Australian opposition leader tells the story of an affair that was had with his/her counterpart on the prime minister's staff. The story goes that at 6 am, one mobile phone would ring and one party to the liaison would roll over and find themselves on the other end of the phone to the PM. Five minutes later, a different mobile would ring and, sure enough, the other party to the liaison would roll over and be chatting with the then opposition leader. Naturally, both conversations would be overheard by the other side who, after a farewell kiss, would depart to their respective jobs for another day's jousting. The Canberra scene really can get a touch incestuous at times.

## Liberal Attitude to Ex-rated Shenanigans

Hot seat up for grabs in Melbourne's messy marry-go-round

It's a tale that almost beats **Dominique Collins**, the wife of former NSW treasurer and opposition leader **Peter Collins**, running off with former Victorian treasurer **Alan Stockdale**. Yes, we can tell you that **Helen Kroger**, the former wife of Liberal powerbroker **Michael**, is now romantically involved with **Peter Poggioli**, the Victorian Liberal state director. This makes for a fascinating matrix around the manoeuvring to get Helen Kroger up for pre-selection in Jeff Kennett's former seat of Burwood. Poggioli is the man responsible for running pre-selections, and he is believed to be a supporter of Helen Kroger's nomination. Just as importantly, former



Stott-Despoja in the spotlight again.



The Shafts at Melbourne's gateway...



in the Exhibition Centre...



the Centre itself...

## Jeff's Final Message to Melbourne: You're Shafted!

Welcome Steve Bracks to Jeff City, and what will you leave us?

In the boom years of Victoria's Kennett era, the premier commanded the erection of public memorials to celebrate his epoch. Architects Denton Corker Marshall developed a special signature for their leader — The 45° Shaft. The first to arise were a series of Shafts pointing ever heavenward from the roof of the Exhibition Centre. Perhaps it was because of the roofline's more-than-passing resemblance to the premier's hairdo that it became known as Jeff's Shed. Regardless, he was obviously taken with the concept, as a spectacular arcade of red and yellow Shafts was erected to greet visitors to Melbourne at the gateway of the city (after paying the toll). Now there's the new Melbourne Museum — a final and memorable tribute, if a little less erect.



and the Museum. Wow!

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAIME MURCIA

Burwood MP **Jeff Kennett** is also a supporter, apparently pleased to strike one last parting blow at his old foe Michael Kroger. Kroger and **Peter Costello** have long been at war with Kennett, ever since they were seen to be too closely aligned to the plot to install **Alan Brown** as Liberal leader in 1989. Where it gets complicated is that Michael Kroger is now married to **Annie Peacock**, the daughter of Jeffrey's best friend Andrew Peacock. And Helen Kroger remains best friends with **Tanya Costello**, who remains happily married to Michael Kroger's best friend, Peter Costello, who is publicly supporting Helen's plans to stand in Burwood.

## Kerry Cuddles Up to Bill

And don't it tug at the purse strings ...

**Rupert Murdoch** might dismiss the success of **Kerry Packer's** Australian Internet business as being more a product of his PR department than anything real, but the \$1.8 billion valuation of PBL's stake in ecorp would suggest otherwise. Kezza's rocketing wealth is in no small part due to his cuddling up with the world's richest man, **Bill Gates** (right). We hear the latest element of this courting process will see Bill staying on Kerry's converted tug boat, *Artic P*, for 10 days during the Olympics. Gates likes



to regale Australian visitors to his Redmond, Washington, office about how the Microsoft-Packer Australian joint venture vehicle ninemsn came to be born. The two were at one of the World Business Forums in Davos, Switzerland, a few years back and Kerry sneakily swapped the name tags around on Bill's table at a dinner to perch himself right next to one of Bill's ears. Kerry then spent the evening forcefully expounding the virtues of his Nine Network and Australian magazine empire, while professing to know nothing about the Internet. As many politicians, business opponents and regulators have done over the years, Bill found Kerry's arguments persuasive to say the least, and so ninemsn was born.

## Come in Spinner

Rainmakers find themselves high and dry

Spin doctor Hill & Knowlton has had a major makeover of its Melbourne office, with most of the heavyweight rainmakers sprinting for the exit. Former general manager **Rob Masters**, the man who had the tough job of advising Esso through the Royal Commission into the Longford gas disaster, has called it a day after 10 years. Given that almost half the Hill & Knowlton Melbourne staff have quit this year, it is a touch ironic he is setting up a 'change management' outfit. The problem in Melbourne appears to be the purchase of boutique spinning outfit Timmins & Ray for about \$1 million late last year. The firm's Melbourne-based owner, **Greg Ray**, leapfrogged everyone onto the five-

member Hill & Knowlton Australian board. The next two most senior people under Masters, **Trevor Rowe** and **Barbara Inglis**, have also gone out on their own. Ray is hoping the hiring of **Nick Maher**, a seven-year loyalist to the Victorian Liberals who was last chief of staff to former treasurer Alan Stockdale, can turn things around in Melbourne. However, with Labor now in government Nick will be working hard to meet the high expectations of his new employers. Maybe Hill & Knowlton should send southward the man running their Canberra office, former Bob Hawke senior adviser **Col Parkes**. These global spinners are world-famous for hiring government advisers and were credited with turning **Richard Nixon** into a 'respected elder statesman' through the use of **President Eisenhower's** former cabinet secretary **Robert Gray**. **Maggie Thatcher's** press secretary of 11 years, **Sir Bernard Ingham**, is now a director of the UK division, while US chairman **Howard Paster** headed the Washington practice a few years back before becoming **Bill Clinton's** director of intergovernmental affairs. He later returned to Hill & Knowlton as chairman on double the salary.

THIS FORTNIGHT'S  
**TIMEBOMB**  
One last offering from the Packer wedding of the decade. Bitch hears an attractive Sydney blonde did the full monty in the toilets at the Packer compound with the partner of a famous Australian mum. When she finds out, there will be hell to pay.