

# How a plot took shape

by Alice Jones

SUE Robbins yesterday named herself, David Power, Ted Shepherd and Bob La Castra as the main players in the election plot to take over the Gold Coast City Council.

The plan began as a vendetta against outspoken councillors Dawn Crichlow and Eddy Sarroff, but grew into a fully-fledged attempt to control the city.

According to Cr Robbins, she, Cr Power and Cr La Castra helped to recruit candidates to run against other sitting councillors.

The revelations came a day after Coast developers Brian Ray and Soheil Abedian told *The Bulletin* they and other businessmen had contributed to a trust fund to support the campaigns of the bloc candidates.

In a day marked by backflips, conflicting stories and failing memories, a clearer picture emerged of how the plot unfolded.

Initially Cr Robbins and Cr Power stuck to previous claims that they knew nothing about the bloc. But after one of the candidates, Rob Molhoek, told *The Bulletin* yesterday about the involvement of the two councillors, they 'consulted their diaries' and realised they had attended a meeting with a team of challengers.

Mr Molhoek, who said he had not taken any money from the trust fund, was approached at his campaign launch by Southport Chamber of Commerce president Ian Solomon and real estate agent John Lang, who is acting as campaign director for Division Three candidate Brian Rowe.

"They were wanting to check me out," said Mr Molhoek.

"I spoke to them after the speeches. They said the chambers were concerned about the quality of some of our councillors and I had done a great job and they'd like to support me.

"I said 'With or without you I am running. If the chambers want to contribute there's my fund-raising director over there. You need to talk to him'.

"A couple of weeks later I was invited to a meeting at Robina with a bunch of aspiring candidates and a couple of existing candidates."

He said the meeting was attended by Crs Power, Robbins and Shepherd, as well as candidates Grant Pforr, Brian Rowe, Roxanne Scott and Greg Betts.

"There was some discussion about the quality of the council. David Power, Sue Robbins and Ted Shepherd were leading that discussion. There was a bunch of other people in the room."

"The tone of the meeting was 'no commitments, but anything we can do to help you guys, any strategic advice, a briefing of how council runs, some of the frustrations'.

"I got there about 20 minutes late and left for another meeting."

Mr Molhoek said two weeks later he was contacted by a staff member from marketing consultancy Quadrant, to offer advertising services. The services were being funded by the Lionel Barden Trust Fund, it was revealed yesterday.

Mr Molhoek declined the offer.

When *The Bulletin* contacted Cr Robbins with Mr Molhoek's story, she initially denied having attended the November meeting at Quadrant.

When asked whether she stood by her story she replied: "Yep."

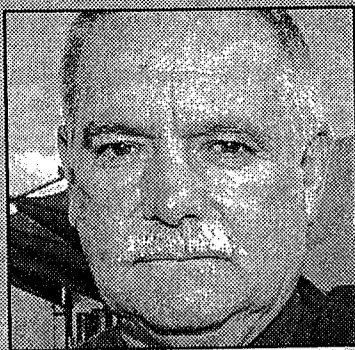
But she contacted *The Bulletin* yesterday afternoon to express a change of heart.

"I have been over my diary. I thought I did go to a meeting in

**Our say**  
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## THE POWER BASE

### THE CHAIRMAN



Lionel Barden

### THE COUNCILLORS



Sue Robbins



David Power



Ted Shepherd



Bob La Castra

### THE CANDIDATES



Grant Pforr  
(Division 3)



Roxanne Scott  
(Division 6)



Brian Rowe  
(Division 5)



Greg Betts  
(Division 12)

### THE MONEY MEN



Brian Ray



Soheil Abedian



The others

OF GRAND

EXHIBIT No. 164  
CLERK



Southport Chamber of Commerce president Ian Solomon

people ... I have given advice to lots of people.

"I'm not denying it. The simple fact is I'm not getting any assistance. You seem to want to make it out we're running it. We're not, we have been giving advice."

"The candidates have from day one handled their own campaigns."

"I don't remember whether there was a meeting in November."

"There's a big difference between a team and, as you put in your article, like-minded people who at least show respect for each other. That is the difference between the two concepts."

Cr Power said he could not remember if Cr Shepherd attended the meeting that he could not remember attending.

Initially he said Cr Robbins was at the meeting, then he wondered whether she was.

"Sue and I talked to the others, but whether that was at Quadrant I don't recall," he said.

"Without sitting there and looking through my diary I can't be specific."

Later in the day, after the admissions by Cr Robbins, Cr Power called *The Bulletin* to say he had consulted his diary and he had in fact attended a meeting last November at Quadrant.

"I have looked in my diary. The only thing I can't tell you is whether or not Ted was there, I can't answer that," said Cr Power.

Cr Shepherd confirmed he attended the November meeting.

That, he said, was as far as his involvement with the candidates went.

"I was simply asked to go along to the meeting and give candidates advice on how we ran our campaigns last time," said Cr Shepherd.

"I have no involvement with any fund. I have received no money from any fund. I have no involvement in any slush fund."

"I resent what's in the paper. I'm getting legal opinion, and if it affects my re-election I will be suing your newspaper, end of story."

Cr La Castra, speaking on radio, said *The Bulletin* story was due to a personal agenda of a journalist.

He denied outright to *The Bulletin* of having had any involvement in the campaign to recruit candidates, despite Cr Robbins' remarks to the contrary.

"I don't accept donations. That's totally out of order," said Cr La Castra.

"I'm not involved at all. I'm not involved in putting any candidate forward. No, I have never recruited any candidate to run against a councillor."

Businessman Lionel Barden has been identified as the unofficial 'chairman' of the team. On Wednesday he denied involvement in the fund, saying: "I promise on my heart, cross my heart, I have not."

But yesterday he said he had told the truth but no one had asked him the question: "What was your involvement?"

He said had he been asked that he would have admitted setting up *The Lionel Barden Trust* so businessmen could deposit campaign donations to the chosen candidates.

December, (but) I did go to a meeting in November," said Cr Robbins

She said because she was asked about a November meeting, and she thought it had been held in December, she did not mention it.

"It all started four years ago when Dawn and Eddy took the unprecedented action of lobbying and campaigning against a sitting candidate. It's an unwritten rule that you don't do that," said Cr Robbins.

"Dawn was handing out how-to-vote cards against Bob La Castra, and Eddy was backing this floodplain guy against Jan Grew."

"So this time what happened was there were a number of councillors who said 'we were really jacked off by Dawn and Eddy doing this to us last time, let's have a look around and see what's going on'."

"There were a few people who came up with different candidates in different areas."

"David Power was talking to a few people, Bob La Castra stumbled across Roxanne Scott."

"In my situation I was doing a lot of work in Division 12 (Peter Drake's division). It was becoming quite a workload for me."

"Paul Gamin said to me 'Who are we going to have in Division 12'. I said 'I don't know, you had better come up with somebody'."

"Greg Betts was found by the Gamins. I gave him some advice."

"Then we got this ring around from Quadrant: 'We want to know the viable people who are the candidates, who are sensible ... we have got some funds. We want to back sensible councillors. Who's your recommendation?'"

Cr Robbins confirmed that Brian Rowe, Grant Pforr, Roxanne Scott, Rob Molhoek and Greg Betts were the chosen group.

"What we did at Quadrant was we sat down and told them the dos and don'ts of running a campaign, the issues that were pertinent to the city; flood mitigation, traffic water. My thoughts on some things differed to Ted's and David's," she said.

"We said to them: 'We talk, we debate in a rational manner, we don't launch into personal attacks, it's bad for the city image, bad for the working environment, it does nothing to get the job done. We want a sensible working group of people'."

When asked why she had been reluctant to reveal their plans Cr Robbins said: "Because you guys would castigate us for it. Because we felt as a group we wouldn't be treated fairly by the Bully. You're always on about a bloc."

"We were there to give a briefing. That's what we gave," she said.

"The thing is, Peter Young was in there just totally mentoring Karen Coates from December onwards. Eddy has proved to be doing that himself at the last election."

"Dawn was there (at the last election) screaming: 'Don't vote for Bob La Castra'."

"None of us have ever done anything like this before."

Cr Robbins said councillors like Cr Crichlow — who has been elected unopposed at the previous two elections — did nothing for the image of the Gold Coast as a city to do business.

Cr Robbins said she knew

nothing about the trust fund and had not accepted money from it.

"Greg Betts has rung me on a number of occasions. Roxanne Scott, Bob La Castra's been giving her some advice. Grant Pforr, I've spoken to him on a couple of occasions. Brian Rowe, David Power has given him some advice."

"The key thing we hammered into them is they must at all times ... respect one another, not get in the gutter with personal attacks."

"We're trying to deliver an ethos, a personal ethos into this organisation. It's very embarrassing for this city when it's trying to promote it as a serious place and you've got Dawn on TV chasing chooks around someone's backyard."

When he was contacted by *The Bulletin* yesterday morning Cr Power also was vague about whether he had attended the meeting at Quadrant.

He replied that he had attended hundreds of meetings and had had 120 phone calls on Wednesday alone.

He could not remember the details of all the meetings he attended.

"Oh God, I don't remember. I met with a number of them (candidates)," said Cr Power.

"Ahhh I don't remember. I remember meeting with Rob and some of the others. They asked for advice."

"I didn't convene any meeting. Perhaps it was convened by the people who are assisting them in their campaigns."

"I can't remember. I have had lots of discussions with lots of

It all started four years ago ... with campaigning against sitting candidates