

Police investigate Prescott claims

BY SUZY AUSTIN

CLAIMS that John Prescott broke anti-corruption laws by staying on the ranch of US billionaire Philip Anschutz were being investigated by Scotland Yard yesterday.

Police earlier received an allegation that the Deputy Prime Minister breached Prevention of Corruption rules by accepting hospitality from Mr Anschutz while the American was bidding to turn the Dome into a super casino.

The laws state that ministers should not accept hospitality from people trying to win official contracts.

Mr Prescott, who is due to take charge of the country when Tony Blair goes on holiday next week, has denied any involvement in super casino plans.

The allegation, said to have been made by Liberal Democrat MP

EX-LOVER 'OPENING ENVELOPES'



Tracey Temple

THE former mistress of John Prescott has been seconded by her employers at the Cabinet Office to an allegedly low-level job involving opening envelopes at Westminster University. Tracey Temple, 43, is understood to believe that senior Cabinet Office figures are trying to force her to quit by humiliating her. She spent more than two months on paid leave after the scandal became public in April but received a reported £300,000 after selling her story to a national newspaper.

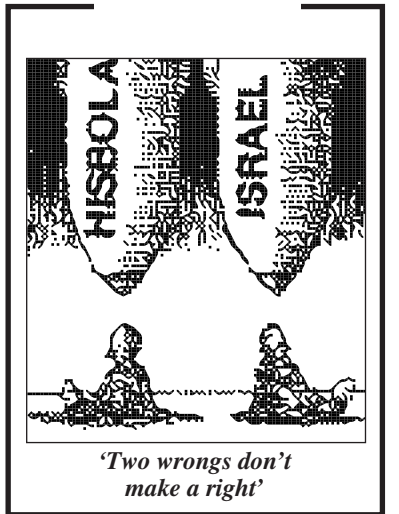
Norman Baker, was being probed by the Yard's specialist crime directorate.

Mr Prescott's spokeswoman said he had not been contacted by police.

However, another press report raised questions about his involvement with a developer hoping to build a new stadium for Brighton and Hove Albion

football club. It was reported that Mr Prescott opened the offices of club director Derek Chapman in 2002 before approving the stadium project last year.

The spokeswoman said Mr Prescott went to the offices to present an award under an employees' skills scheme.



The North-South divide widening

THE economic imbalance between the South-East and the rest of Britain is widening, a think-tank warns. Wealth creation and enterprise is concentrated in London and the South, while other regions have high welfare dependency and public spending, a report by Reform says. The North faces further migration of young people and slower business formation, while the South sees greater congestion and rising living costs. The solution is to slow down the growth of public spending and lower tax, concludes the report.

Tax offices hit by 24-hour strike

THOUSANDS of Revenue and Customs staff will stage a 24-hour strike today over working practices. The walkout by members of the Public and Commercial Services union will hit the processing of tax claims. The union postponed a strike earlier this month after reaching an interim agreement but claimed management back-tracked. Staff say changes will lead to excessive monitoring of workers, a loss of skills at work and the risk of repetitive strain injury. Revenue and Customs said the action was unnecessary.

Network Rail to end state loans

NETWORK RAIL is set to borrow money without state backing for the first time, it emerged yesterday. The rail infrastructure operator is likely to raise £3billion over the next few years without a Government debt guarantee. The move signals a shift away from reliance on state support and marks a big change for Britain's railways. It would also reduce the likelihood of Network Rail's £18billion of borrowings being counted as part of Government debt. A spokesman for the firm said: 'We will outline our plans later this week.'

Flytipping costs £50m to clear up

FLY-TIPPING by householders cost as much to clear up as the junk dumped by profiteering 'waste cowboys', ministers said yesterday.

Clearing illegally dumped waste cost councils £50million last year, said the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

More than half of that was spent on clearing household waste, often abandoned in black bin bags.

The rest was spent removing waste left by 'organised waste criminals', who make a profit by illegally disposing of large quantities of refuse.

Householders may be dumping their rubbish because there is a lack of services in their area, or an ignorance of what those services are, Defra said.

For the past year councils have been logging incidences of fly-tipping into a huge Government database.

Environment minister Ben Bradshaw said: 'Councils have tended to concentrate on clearance, but



Eyesore: Flytipped rubbish

there needs to be more emphasis on preventing fly-tipping happening.

'Prevention, coupled with coming down hard on those who are caught fly-tipping, could help reduce the problem and save money.'

He added better public information about refuse collection and longer opening hours at tips could help.

At present, 81 per cent of the money spent by councils on fly-tipping goes on clearance, while just 19 per cent goes on prevention and enforcement.

Toughen up, Britain

NINE out of ten Metro readers want to see criminals given longer prison sentences, a survey reveals today. Urbanites believe Britain is 'far too liberal at the moment'. They want to see tougher policies being introduced and enforced and believe longer prison sentences are needed to punish people who commit certain crimes. Readers were reacting to the news that some criminals serving life sentences are being paroled after as little as five years. Almost half of the 3,378 people polled said those given life sentences should spend the rest of their life behind bars.

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