

Defend our universities! Defend our unions!

Stop the sacking of Robert Austin at RMIT

The Federal Government has lately intensified its attack on public universities, both politically and industrially. Not content with a complicit media, Nelson and Howard now want compliant and uncritical universities.

Dr. Robert Austin, a well-published academic and long-time union activist, was dismissed in October 2005 for failing to 'fit' his new work environment in International and Community Studies. Management deemed that he lacked 'collegiality'. With the exception of a Herald Sun article and a management-authorized poster, Dr Austin has never been provided with the alleged documentation on which management claimed to have based his dismissal, nor the opportunity to respond.

In the Herald Sun article of 17 August 2005, Andrew Bolt attacked Dr Austin for rescheduling classes on August 10 so that students could attend a national day of protest against the government's "voluntary student unionism" (VSU) legislation. Academic members of the NTEU had been requested by the branch president to cancel classes on August 17 and not penalise students for attending the rally. Affected students were consulted about the change and gave it almost unanimous support. But Dr Austin's probation report of 28 September 2005 describes the postponements as activities 'unsanctioned' and 'unauthorised' by management. In late October, management breached the EBA by illegally removing Dr Austin from his program coordination

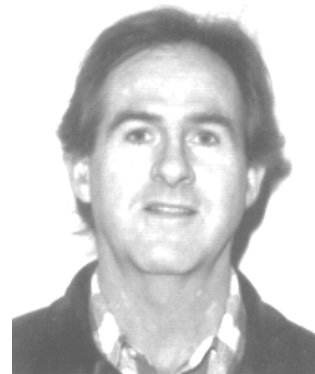
duties and then from all teaching. Nevertheless, management reports on both had been glowing.

The dispute is about to go before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The NTEU is advising the barrister. Termination will take effect on 24 April. A fighting fund has been established and we seek your support.

What can you do?

1. Send messages of protest to the RMIT Vice-Chancellor vc@rmit.edu.au (with copies to the campaign coordinators via liz.thompson@rmit.edu.au and robert.austin@rmit.edu.au).
2. Post a message of support to campaign website: <http://www.defendrobert.blogspot.com/>
3. Write to newspapers highlighting this attack on student union rights and academic freedom.
4. Contribute to the Fighting Fund: cheques and money orders made out to N.R. Zirngast & V.F. Ramirez can be sent to A/Prof. John Jackson, School of Global Studies & Social Science, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, VIC 3001. EFT deposits can be made to: N.R. Zirngast & V.F. Ramirez, Members Equity Bank, BSB 944 300, Account N° 010448055. Regular balance updates on website. Thanks in advance for your solidarity.

Solidarity Fiesta & Fundraiser, 15 April 2006 @ Comrades Bar (520 Swanston St, Melb.), 7-midnight: Latin American Food & entertainment. Full details on website.



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