

... By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them

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MY LAST column talked about RMIT's leadership role (as an expensive, government-funded tertiary educational institution) in its support of anti-globalization protests and activist training for its students in agitprop, and its drive to encourage non-rational economic principles [aka triple bottom line]. The aim of it all is to make the uni 'ethically sustainable'. The sort of place parents would love to pay for their children to attend.

Given that the IPA received a rare complaint to our column from a researcher at the Globalism Institute over our allegations, and given that the RMIT has been in the headlines for some weeks now over massive haemorrhaging of both its money and its board, we thought we should revisit the institution to see exactly what is happening. There just may be some lessons to learn from it all.

Crikey dot com has been running some pretty harsh words on the administration of RMIT and we thought it worth repeating some of them, especially since *The Age* newspaper, which has been regularly reporting on the vicissitudes of the Vice-Chancellor and her sinking ship, seems to have been loathe to give all the background.

RMIT has gone from an internationally outstanding technology university, with foreign students earning it about \$100 million per year in 2000 to a loss of over \$50 million, through managerial incompetence—indeed, they are even trying to sell some of their land to stay afloat.

The most striking element in the crisis is that, over the last few weeks, no fewer than seven board members have resigned or been sacked—all of them outsiders to the University. In any normally accountable corporation, one would have reasonably expected the Vice-Chancellor, Ruth Dunkin, to fall on her sword. But she hasn't.

It appears that the pattern of political patronage allows her to ride out the storms raging around her. But it does seem to confirm the worst fears anyone might have had about the connection between ideology, moral posturing and economic management.

Dunkin was warned privately that things were going badly wrong over a year ago, but has done nothing since to arrest the decline, except, as Crikey observes, to conduct 'ruthless purges of those critical of her management'. According to Crikey, Finance Director Ian Raines was sacked recently as he had consistently and fearlessly told the unpalatable truth about where the finances were going. It was for this reason, they allege that, out of frustration, the high profile and reputable former ANZ Bank chief Don Mercer resigned from his position as Chancellor.

The union covering most academics at the university, the NTEU, has sided with Dunkin. Why? The University conveniently funds half the salary of the union president. The only people complaining of the situation are the student union and some of the staff.

If it is really as bad as reported, how does she survive? Crikey tells

us. It's all to do with Labor mates. ALP Minister Kosky clearly supports Dunkin over the Kennett appointee Mercer. It turns out that they are Williamstown neighbours, along with Joan Kirner, and Joan is (guess what?) in line for the Chancellor's job. Joan's qualification? Well, she had the Victoria University's Business School building named after her, so she must be sharp with figures. As Crikey concludes, RMIT will become a one-party state (or narrower than that, a one-faction, Kosky-Dunkin-Kirner Williamstown Labor state).

So the second obvious question is, how did she get there in the first place? With the help of her mates, she was succession planned into the top job. It was felt that she needed a PhD. Dunkin had never been an academic, taught or researched. Through a long and sordid path, that Crikey goes into in considerable detail—'soft marking', 'special treatment' and lots of 'outside help'—she was awarded a PhD in 1999, just before slipping into the top job.

One could go on about the economic fantasies that led to a 'staggering 53 per cent of the university's costs being taken up by the administration', including the Vice-Chancellor's nice little \$120k salary increase. But we wouldn't want another letter complaining of 'blind barracking', or that we had confused economics with ethics.

We recommend our readers visit www.crikey.com for details.

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REVIEW