

You want change? (What are you going to do about it?)

By Ron Manners
Presentation to the Young Liberals
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What are you all doing here today at the Young Liberals Federal Convention, on a Saturday afternoon, when you could all be at the beach or at the pub?

No, don't apologize, it simply means that you are the pro-active minority that seeks change.

You seek a better state, a better nation and a better world.

Not many people are actually prepared to step forward and take on this responsibility so I wish you every success.

The strong desire to improve our surroundings is admirable and it marks one of the differences between our human race and the animal kingdom.

Just flying back from Melbourne last night I reminded myself of the importance of you, the audience today, as being the most important audience I have ever faced.

Now why is this?

You all seek change, you are activists and, furthermore, you are young enough to set a longer time-frame to your goals than exists for either an older audience or those already in political positions (where populism has driven them to think only in terms of the political cycle).

So, let's do a bit of thinking out loud.

Once you've set your goals, and I've set mine, quite simply as being

"To show how the application of free-market principles, can improve the lives of all Australians."

Once we've set our own goals then we can look at how best to move forward.

We can think of Australia as an athlete preparing themselves to enter a race called 'international competitiveness', where we seem to be slipping a few notches each year.

Or, thinking medically, we could identify a couple of diseases that Australia is suffering and prepare to surgically remove these to give our budding athlete, Australia, a chance to successfully compete.

Each of you will identify different diseases or problems on which to focus.

Personally, I identify two major 'diseases' as being:-

1. **Appeasement**, currently expressed as weak management avoiding any confrontation with labour unions, environmental groups or the many tentacles of the politically-correct Gestapo.

2. The **entitlement mentality**, where we see a growing trend of Australians feeling that they have a right to live at the expense of others. (The recent disability entitlements and proposed parental leave schemes now all form part of this ticking time-bomb.)

We can talk about these problems of 'appeasement and entitlements' later, if we have time.

Now, how many ways are at our disposal to get stuck into instigating change in these directions?

I can think of at least four in my quest to increase individual and economic freedoms for Australians:-

1. Political action and its use to roll back the power of the State and restore the rights of individuals. Possibly a high priority for you because this is a federal convention of the Young Liberal Movement.
2. Non-violent peaceful forms of civil disobedience, against government and bureaucrats.

Particularly when they go beyond their legitimate functions.

3. Is economic self-protection and self-preservation of concern?

This is essentially how we, as individuals, can protect ourselves against inflation and other government policies. Unless we can maintain our own economic independence we are not much use to ourselves, our families or our country.

4. The educational method.

This is a slow, but sure, method requiring time and patience.

Think of those four methods; political action, civil disobedience, economic survival and education, as being four weapons in your arsenal and you can be ready to pull out the correct weapon to assist your survival, no matter where the next threat comes from.

I've been around long enough to have had a go at all four, at different times, whenever appropriate and I'm still here to tell the tale so I must have kicked a few goals so please let me give you some personal anecdotes covering those four methods.

During question time you might remind me that there are a lot more methods than just four, however:-

1. On the political front. Back in 1974 I got together with a bunch of guys and we formed our own political party because we found that any of the existing political parties were absolutely unacceptable. I've got a book called *Heroic Misadventures* and one of the chapters is *Starting Your Own Political Party* and I'll recount in the chapter where the Australian political scene back in 1974 we had a person called Gough Whitlam running a dreadful government at the time and we'd emerged from a fairly stable period.

We, as young people, were looking around and wondering what we could do to make a difference. So, we asked if somebody could give us a copy of the political platform from the Liberal Party. There seemed to either be no such thing or it was well hidden. Consequently, we searched around and found a platform from the Labor Party which was easy to get and if

you were in the Labor Party you had a copy. It was very honest and said exactly what they were going to do, how they were going to do it and we admired their honesty and frankness about it but we couldn't find a Liberal Party one.

However, we did find one that had been written some years before but not circulated very widely. It wasn't encouraging.

So a few of us got together and formed this political party, calling it the Workers Party because we felt that we were the real workers. There is a bit of a play on words and toward the end we changed the name to the Progress Party, as it became fatiguing explaining why we were called the Workers Party.

We communicated with a very interesting group of people who formed a network all around Australia. There were some remarkable people and I was running the Western Australian branch. The book states how I linked up with the other people. Ten of them were really the nucleus of it and we had John Singleton who was a famous advertising identity. Is he still a high profile advertising person? Anyone heard of John?

He made some public comments that sounded as though he was very much on our side, he'd read all about Ayn Rand & individual responsibility. A few of us got together and met with him thinking he might support us opening up a book shop to promote free enterprise.

Singleton sat back and said, "a book shop, be buggered, let's start a political party." So that's how it started. We got a few people into politics and they are still around, in various walks of life. Even after all these years, we are often in contact with each other and seek each other's advice.

Why did it fail? I think, in essence, it failed because Malcolm Fraser came into power with his Liberal Government and we felt comforted that he had at least heard of Ayn Rand and he knew about limited government and he said all the right words and after listening to his election speech came to the conclusion that it sounded pretty good. He was voted in.

As a result we decided it was time to pack up our tents and go back to work. We were all relieved because none of us were really political animals and had work to do.

A few years later we started asking ourselves, why is nothing happening? It's still as bad as ever. What's going wrong?

We questioned who had written those speeches and after our investigations discovered it was Dr. David Kemp who had written the speeches and was in Malcolm's office, later becoming Minister for Education. A very strong free-market person but it became obvious to us that Malcolm Fraser had neither written the speeches or understood them.

I'll talk more about Malcolm Fraser later, if we have time. I've got some thoughts.

If anyone is politically interested I have a copy of the Workers Party platform and one of the policy documents that I still find lying around my office. The objectives were to offer an intelligent and practical alternative to socialism as practised and preached by the Labor & Australia Parties and as practised by the Liberal & Country Parties. Also to put principles before votes.

Since then, my political interests have mainly been confined to finding out what's on the mind of the enemy because it is terribly important in any sort of strategy to know what they have planned for you. I attended some Labor Party conferences and even went to the intellectual inspiration and became a delegate to the Socialist International Conference in Sydney in 1992. My visit was reported in the U.S. publication *Freedom Network News* as follows:-

Libertarian Crashes Meeting of Socialist International!

If you were present at the Socialist International Conference in Sydney, last March (1993), you would have seen me there in the back row, fitted up like all the other delegates with the mobile ear piece translating device. I had some difficulty getting in without documentation but when interrogated by the gaunt-faced registration attendant I admitted to being a poet of the revolution. However, she still wanted to see my identifying documents but accepted my reply that, "poets of the revolution don't carry identification."

My interest in attending was simply to find out what they had planned for us.

You would have seen Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke, Gareth Evans and other prominent members of the Australian Labor Party. Willie Brad who was the Chancellor of West Germany at the time was the Chairman of the entire gathering – an amazing gathering of world leaders. The main discussion was that because Communism seemed to be losing credibility around the world what should they call themselves from here on. A very very serious discussion was taking place. The outcome was the redefine their plans under the general terms of Social Democracy and all the various communist parties and the countries represented at that conference now call themselves Social Democrats.

In some of those Eastern European countries the word Communism is in such low esteem that the Communist Party by that name has been outlawed but of course the Communist bureaucracy lives on and it's keen to expand membership so they have devised a new recruiting scheme.

Members of the Communist Party who recruit a new member are excused from membership fees for a year. Members who recruit two new members, no longer need to remain members themselves, those who recruit three new members are presented with an engraved silver plaque which states that they were never members in the first place. They may change their name but they haven't changed their philosophy and it's consistently that philosophy which has enabled them to do so much damage.

Gough Whitlam was a raging success by the way they measure success. He transformed Australia in the vision of H.C. Coombes and the other backroom socialists so that over the three years of Whitlam rule although productivity rose only 1% wages rose 70%, the size of the public service rose 12.6%, parliamentary salaries increased 36%, federal spending rose by 80% and inflation to 20%. He had bought the minds and souls of the public sector and their hangers-on who now represent 1 in 3 of those termed employed as defined by our official statistics.

Some years before that the noted writer, Ayn Rand, had written these words:-

When the livelihood of producers depends on having a licence issued by non-producers you will know that your world is doomed.

She picked the trend, some years ago. What interests me is that the *Washington Post*, a month ago, came up with some figures that 38% of people in the U.S. are now reliant upon government licences, otherwise they cannot practise their livelihood.

I've been trying to find the figures, here in Australia but it's impossible because our ABS doesn't provide any disaggregated occupations over data. They state 'for confidentiality reasons'. It's of concern that so many of us rely on government licences to simply provide a livelihood.

My company, Mannwest Group which does mining consultancy, hasn't got a licence to give investment advice so I can't give it in Australia. So I give it everywhere else. Strangely enough they get my advice at a 10% discount because they don't have to pay GST. Isn't that an unintended consequence?

The other unintended consequence is that there is no GST levied on the fruits of my labour – I feel almost bad about this but I'll enjoy it while I can.

That's probably my second interest in politics, collecting examples of unintended consequences and that file gets thicker as we go.

Another unintended consequence flowed from the live sheep and cattle export industry. However not the most recent events that we have been hearing about but back in the 70s when the farmers in Western Australia were trucking their stock to load on ships when the Wharf Labour Unions decided that that should not be allowed and it became common knowledge that Australian producers of livestock could export them to Singapore where they could be butchered, packed, frozen and sent back to Australia and sold at one fifth of the price of the locally butchered product. Pretty staggering difference.

So the move was to export live cattle and have them butchered in Singapore.

The wharf labourers were worried about their comrades in this little secure situation of butchery so they prevented their cattle and sheep from being loaded. There were the farmers who had arrived with truckloads of cattle and sheep but unable to load them. What they did was simply go and buy some shotguns and they brought their trucks, which they owned, down to the wharf and some of the farmers sat on the front with loaded shotguns and they got their stock through, loading the stock themselves.

They made a pledge amongst themselves that never in their lives, or their descendants running the farm would ever purchase an Australian Union built car, utility or truck again.

Again, an unintended consequence from the comrades who were trying to help their other comrades but the unintended consequence is that there are several generations of people who refuse to buy union built 'stuff' and their probably getting angry also. The taxpayers of Australia have contributed \$1.8B in support money to the unprofitable Australian car industry.

Moving onto the second method. This is the non-violent forms of civil disobedience.

I'll speak on one example of civil disobedience.

It shows shows you that if you use that weapon you can have a lot of fun with it.

I had a friend, Adam Dollar, who used to run Dollar Rent-a-Car business out on Great Eastern Highway. I won't go into the details of how I met him but it was equally interesting.

I liked this man, he was a real hard core libertarian – a free marketeer and I gave him all my car hire business. I came in from Kalgoorlie, via the airport, one morning to pickup my hire car and there was Adam being arrested by the Federal Police. They not only arrested him for what they said was defacing the currency but they had raided his safe and were stealing \$4,000 of bank notes on which he had meticulously stamped on each, with a small rubber stamp, an imprint – 'As government expands, liberty diminishes.'

That was his way of making a statement.

The Federal Police arrested him and I asked Adam what he was going to do about this.

He replied, "I'll defend myself in court."

I suggested he didn't do that because they would tie you up in all sorts of legal jargon and you won't stand a chance. I suggested he let me get a lawyer to defend him in court. He agreed.

I contacted Ron Cannon who was very famous at that time. He was the real person. If you were a murderer, a rapist or a drug dealer, you really wanted Ron Cannon. He was a firebrand in the courtroom and I told Adam this was the man for him.

The day in court was absolutely magnificent.

Ron Cannon steered the magistrate, steered the discussion. He kept saying to the magistrate, "but what was stamped on those bank notes, Your Honour." The magistrate would pick up one of the bank notes and read it out – "As government expands, liberty diminishes."

About the tenth time that Ron Cannon had got the magistrate to actually say this, the magistrate sat back, looked at it and said, 'that's not bad you know.' He dismissed the case and sent us all home.

It civil disobedience can be fun.

The third way is economic protection and self-preservation.

Around about the mid-70s I had a problem with Taxation Department who sent me a dreadful tax account. I was a prospector and had a bundle of vendor shares and they were the market at \$8 per share at 30th June so they taxed me this absurd account. I just looked at it and said, "This is a joke". I humoured them for a while. I used to write them poetry instead of sending the money and none of that worked.

They kept charging me 10% interest and then wrote a letter saying the interest rate had gone up to 20%.

I replied advising 20% of nothing is nothing so it didn't matter. Give it up. I left the country.

It was my way of telling them to get knotted.

From that I had probably the most interesting 8 years of my life.

I'd heard some advice from an investment guru, Harry Brown, who said, "remember when you are choosing your country there is no such thing as the best country." He said, "There is the best country in which to work, the best country in which to invest and the best country in which to live." Rarely would you get the one country to cover all three criteria.

Consequently, I had the ability for eight years to live in the best country, to work in the best country there was to work and to invest in the best country. That went on for eight years and my children were missing me so I wrote a polite letter to the Taxation Department saying that their plan of extracting all this blood from me was not working, if they agree to tear up their file then I would happily come back and become a grubby little tax payer.

To which they replied, "Okay."

So, I've become a prolific tax payer ever since then and I'm not proud of it but that is the price we pay to live in a civilized society.

When we look around at some of the other societies in the world it doesn't matter if the tax is zero or negative, you could not live there, so this is not bad.

The fourth method we have tried is the 'educational method' and that is where I'm putting most of my focus at present.

So many people who I have met in earlier political and investing lives (if I had time I'd tell you what I did for eight years overseas and you would eat your heart out).

On the education area we have found that a lot of people have gravitated towards the education way, slow but sure. I was introduced to economic education by Leonard Reed who started the Foundation for Economic Education in New York in 1947. He thought I was a bit impetuous at sixteen and used to say to me, "Ron, you've got no authority to change anyone else's life, all you can do is change your own life. Work focus on that. All you can do is bring an idea to the threshold of some else's consciousness and if they accept that idea it will be with them for life. It has to be their idea that they are accepting."

Leonard softened me, somewhat. Twenty years later he invited me to go to talk to the Board of the Foundation for Economic Education and explain what we were doing back here as a result of some of their ideas. Consequently, they thought some of their ideas had been smuggled down to Australia and we were starting again.

We started the Mannkal Economic Education Foundation as a branch of the Foundation for Economic Education in New York but it's developed over the twenty years and we have now sent over 650 young Western Australians to internships, conferences, events – just so that they can get an introduction and brief exposure to the free market economics because it is not readily available at so many of the universities.

Twenty years ago it was pretty lonely being a libertarian in Western Australia but I've now got 650 young people accusing me of being a boring old conservative and I should stiffen up a bit. It's great having company like that and I'm actually having more fun running Mannkal than I would if I had a \$10M yacht. The Foundation is expanding and we have just appointed

C.E.O., Dr. George Bowen who is here today. Any questions about our program, which is expanding so quickly, can be directed to George. We also have Rebecca Vidler, our Scholarship Co-ordinator, Ashley Klingenberg, right here who is departing for Lithuania within the next couple of weeks and he'll return mid-year as our European expert.

We also have Mannkal scholars in Vienna, Dubai, New York – they are everywhere and we communicate with them on a regular basis.

Apart from Mannkal's activities I'm kept pretty busy as an Advisory Board member for the Atlas Network in Washington DC and they have generated 485 think tanks in different countries around the world. Their leadership academy just produced 27 graduates from their think tank MBA program. This keeps me involved in things like the Arab Springs Revolt and the disturbing events currently happening in the Ukraine.

These are all examples of where very bad governments can take their people.

However, I'm not here to talk about me. Let's talk about the other effective organizations in Australia.

Let's talk about The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) in Sydney. They are bringing to Perth Daniel Hannan, the well known British Member of the European Parliament, on 24th February, 2014. So, watch out for Mannkal's e-Focus newsletter coming out the first week of February for full details.

Another extremely effective organization is the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and you are fortunate to be hearing Chris Berg, from IPA, today. Chris is one of the best communicators of ideas in the world. He is a match for Tom Palmer from Atlas Network. His blog site is inundated as he is a relentless networker, a great communicator.

Then, sitting on top of the CIS, IPA, Mannkal and others is the international organization called The Mont Pelerin Society, set up by F.A. Hayek and Milton Friedman with 37 other intellectual leaders in 1947.

Mont Pelerin in Switzerland was where they had their first meeting but Pelerin is a French word for pilgrim and their task was, in the very dark dim days of 1947 where the whole world was at war, to store the secrets of a good civil society and have those ideas available for any world leaders if they ever regained their senses.

The Mont Pelerin Society is very good at explaining how otherwise good people, running governments, can fail. They may have explained why the Fraser Government failed. Essentially, they were good people. You can't say they were bad people.

Good governments fail by concentrating on politics in the narrow sense, i.e. focusing on who shall govern, who can get the jobs, instead of concentrating on politics in the larger sense which is waging the battle of ideas in order to establish a thriving independent population.

So that's the task of the educational method.

Let me now conclude.

What can each of you do at this federal convention, while you are here or as you depart?

Well, if I can think of a few things.

Remember that right now is when public perception of politics, big business, trade unions, and almost every form of authority is at an all time low. So, you have an enormous challenge and will need a tremendous effort to restore credibility to our various institutions with your behaviour, the choice of words you use in your press releases as we desperately want to believe in a better society and if we look at the daily press and it's just not there.

You can help by explaining what the Young Liberals are all about.

I presume that they are here to train the nation's future political leaders which are an admirable objective.

You could also send a message to Tony Abbott congratulating him on his comments to the Davos gathering yesterday. I bet nobody else at that gathering used words like this. He challenged them to promote private sector led growth and employment and to avoid government knows best action for action's sake. Wonderful words.

I like your resolutions that you have before the convention, including the one about compulsory student unionism or similar words. I recall the Howard Government taking years to abolish compulsory student unionism and I was amazed when so many Liberal members actually voted it back in. When I tried to find out exactly who they were I discovered, to my astonishment, that Australia does not have a register of how members vote – as is the case in America.

So perhaps that could be a good resolution for next year. To establish a voting record register for MP's so that we can nail them.

There are other things to do, get rid of the Potato Board. What are we doing with a Potato Board? Everybody knows that potato boards, egg boards and all these other boards do not produce better potatoes, eggs, onions etc. They just produce more expensive potatoes.

Don't play around with the regulations, get a saw, hack the roots.

The other thing you could do is keep sending Tony Abbott a copy of those words to remind him what he said at Davos yesterday.

Thank you for having me here today.

25/1/14