

One of the things that first attracted me to Mannkal was the focus on ideas, as opposed to politics and political parties. We look to common sense grounded in limited government and free enterprise and adapted to fit the real world around us. We don't do lobbying and we certainly don't support one party or another; in fact we tend to eschew politics, which has evolved in the modern age to be a top-down process. People however tend to operate in a bottom-up manner, which is why we prefer to talk to people and share ideas and opportunities to learn. You can't force your ideas on someone – you can try, but you're likely to fail. At best, they will be able to regurgitate your ideas, but having not gone through the intellectual process of discovery themselves, they will be unable to explain them or defend them. I don't mind if a student goes through their entire Mannkal career and ends up believing in revolutionary Marxism (well, I might be a bit puzzled!) as long as they have thought about their position, tested their ideas and listened to other people's perspectives. I'm proud that at Mannkal, while most of our talented students are actually not involved in party politics, those that are belong to a range of parties – Labor, Liberal and Liberal Democrats (no Greens, but I would be keen to welcome them!) Competition works in economics and it also works in philosophy – the best ideas are only those that are first tested against all the others.

I was also proud to lead a Mannkal delegation to the Mont Pelerin Society meeting in Seoul in early May. The MPS was founded by free-market heroes including Friedman and Hayek and our Mannkal students were in their element, listening to expert views on issues from the North-South Korea divide to central banking, economic development, welfare, tax and entrepreneurship. Having always seen the North Korea issue as little more than “geostrategic theatre”, the moment that stands out for me was the blunt warning from a very experienced US-Korea expert that the US would not tolerate a threat to the US homeland. Has China overplayed its hand in allowing the DPRK to develop nuclear weapons?

I spent a few days in Beijing before the conference and was lucky to be shown around by a former Tiananmen Square protester. He claims that most Chinese are unaware of both current and historical oppression, given internet censorship and population control. We spent time talking over issues like property rights and he was fascinated that in a free country like Australia there could still be restrictions such as planning/zoning regulations, building codes and environmental (e.g. native vegetation) regulations. “So they can't just take your land but they can make it very difficult or impossible to use it?” he asked. He was disgusted with his own country and kept in touch with news from outside thanks to friends in America. Walking up to Tiananmen Square, the footpath narrows and visitors must pass through a security screening checkpoint. It's often the small things that tell a strong story, and for me seeing the light poles plastered in CCTV cameras, covering every possible angle multiple times each emphasised just how scared this regime is of its own people. [This AFR article](#) reports how they even hope to mark Chinese citizens on their social behaviour. How, then, can China ever be a great nation?

Tough times are ahead for South Africa, with a [Zimbabwe-style land reform program](#) to be introduced in the months ahead. The corrupt ruling ANC is being pulled to the Left by the “Economic Freedom Fighters Party”, who model themselves on Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. It's a shame that South Africa may take a plunge into anarchy as the opposition [Democratic Alliance Leader, Mmusi Maimane, is quite a classical liberal](#). But will there be room for a voice of tolerance, co-operation and productivity when so many want revolution, looting and tribal enmity?

Finally, some good news on the technology front with [German trials confirming an experimental fusion power machine is working as intended](#). Fusion is the “holy grail” of electricity supply – we’ve been trying for decades without success. Theoretically it could supply limitless and basically costless energy, with some designs small enough to fit on the back of a truck that would provide the same amount of power as one of the big stations on the Kwinana strip. Imagine what that would do, particularly for remote or resource-starved locations. From Fijian islands to Japan, this would be a game-changer. Theory is good, the real world is what counts – and fusion appears to have come just that little bit closer.