

Australian Libertarian Society Conference



The 2nd ALS Friedman conference, held at the University of Technology in Sydney from the 3rd-4th May 2014, was an inspiring and comprehensive introduction to libertarian ideas. Over the course of the two days, we heard from over 20 different speakers who explored various aspects of libertarianism. On the night of the 3rd of May, We also had the privilege to attend the Gala Dinner, where we heard from the keynote speaker Tim Wilson and watched the presentation of the Liberty Awards.

Day 1

The conference was opened by Dr Patrick Michaels, a climate scientist at the CATO institute who spoke about the politics of science, and in particular whether or not science should be privatised.

Secondly we heard from Dr Ben O'Neil, a lecturer in statistics and mathematics at the UNSW (ADFA) in Canberra. Dr O'Neil's presentation gave a detailed analysis of the libertarian view of what freedom means and the rights based approach to solving social conflict.

The third session was Young Women in Politics, which included featured a panel of three younger female activists: Trisha Jha, Rachel Connor and Lara Jeffery.

The next session was on "The Coming Fiscal Crisis", and featured three speakers: Professor Henry Ergas, Ross Cameron and Simon Cowen. Ergas began the panel by speaking about taxes, and in particular how some taxes may in fact be beneficial. The second speaker, Simon Cowen, spoke about the size of the government and the reduction in government spending. The final speaker was Ross Cameron, who spoke about the ideological crisis to promote the agenda of the rich.

After lunch we heard from Professor Jason Potts, Jen Buckingham, Leonnie Phillips, Liam Tjia and John Humphreys in a panel discussion on New Markets, which also featured discussions about the Human Capital Project. The project is a new private model for funding education based on the new financial instrument of personal equity contract instead of the conventional debt finance.

The last session of the day was called Free Press Under Fire, and was presented by the Cambodian journalist Phorn Bopha. Ms Bopha told her remarkable story of exposing government corruption despite assassination attempts and constant threats.

Day 2

The second day of the conference began with a lecture by Dr Jeremy Shearmur of ANU, on "Mickey Mouse and Liberty". He proposed a legal contract between residents and their local governments.

Next up was a presentation on "The Size of Government and Economic Freedom in Australia" by the IPA's Dr. Julie Novak. She presented her PhD thesis which revolved on the impact that the growth of government has on the economic growth and prosperity in the country.

The next session was "Identity Politics", hosted by Tim Wilson and featuring a panel of Dr Anthony Dillon, a part Aboriginal-Australian professor at ACU, Kerry Pholi, a teacher and former researcher and public servant, and Dr Gary Johns, a former Labor MP and Keating government minister.

Ms Pholi stated her strongly-held opinion that section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act should be repealed, saying that people should be free to "be as obnoxious as they want to be". Dr Dillon focussed on the idea that when there are cultural limits on non-indigenous citizens from taking an active role in speaking about Indigenous affairs. Gary Johns was the ultimate speaker on the panel, and he mused on how he perceived the debate regarding Aboriginal people in Australia to be one based on emotions, not logic.

The next breakout session was "Activism and Communicating Liberty", a panel discussion hosted by Cato Institute's Dr. Pat Michaels, and featuring Austen Erickson, a Sydney-based PhD student, and president of the Australian and New Zealand Students for Liberty network,

Jenny Lindsay, the wife of CIS founder Greg Lindsay, and Simon Breheny, the president of the Victorian Young Liberals and prominent IPA researcher.

Jenny Lindsay discussed how she helped Greg set up the CIS in the 1970s. Pat Michaels delivered some tips in communicating unpopular ideas, and Simon Breheny explained some of background work he does with the FreedomWatch project of the IPA.

After afternoon tea, UK-based lawyer Helen Dale presented a very interesting presentation on potential reasons for the decline in crime in the western world over the past thirty years.

The final segment of the conference was handed to senator-elect David Leyonhjelm. Leyonhjelm was elected from NSW in the 2013 general elections to represent the Liberal Democrats in the senate, which is the first time a libertarian party has won a seat in an Australian parliament.

In conclusion, the 2014 ALS Friedman Conference was a fantastic experience than neither of us will ever forget. The wealth of knowledge shared by both speakers and regular attendees during informal discussion was immeasurable, and has resulted in us yearning to learn more and more about free market ideals and libertarian principles. We are immensely thankful to Mannkal as whole and Ron Manners in particular for giving us this wonderful opportunity.