



THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Peter Adamis - Abalinx 9 April 2016

Standing outside and soaking in the sunshine, sufficient to meet my vitamin D intake, I watched in wonder as the world passed by. Throngs of people went passed the pavement onto various activities. Most of those who passed me by made their way to the Liberal Party of Victoria State Council Convention. Others made their way to the various cafes and restaurants that lined the old docklands and the remainder appeared to be heading towards the Casino located across from the convention centre.

It was a special day for me as it could be classified as my first official outing since the heavy dose of chemotherapy and stem cells treatment. It was wonderful feeling of enjoyment to be among the living, feeling the wind on my face, the noise of the traffic going by and hearing the babble of numerous voices in the wind.

Those who passed me by hardly gave me a glance and those that I knew would not have recognised me in any case. I had changed physically somewhat, but enough of me could still be identified despite the six months of chemotherapy and stems treatment. In any case I was not standing there to be recognised but merely waiting for a friend to return from parking his car. Dr Geza Benke, my old University lecturer, family friend and political colleague took some time so I walked the long corridor to the convention alone.

It was a lonely but bright indoors corridor that had windows so large that one could be forgiven for believing they were outside.

Along the way, I met young Jack Kroger whom I have known since he was a youngster on his father's knee. Young Jack had shot up in height so quickly that I would not be surprised if he was competing with his Dad in height. Jack and I, together made our way to the convention where we chatted about life in general and of the politics of the day before parting company.

At the doors leading into the main hall, I also caught up with Gerard Sharkey (now deceased), an old mate from the military. Gerard had also a battle with cancer some years ago and knew what it was like to travel the journey so to speak. As we both entered the main hall, my eyes became accustomed to the change in environment and I was able to distinguish political friend from opponent, thought which made me chuckle.

I smiled and said to myself that I had promised myself that as soon as Michael Kroger became President, I would withdraw from all the factional battles and side with no one but for what was best for the Liberal Party. A value that I had carried on from my military career that when in doubt always do what is best for the nation.

Young Liberals of the future. As I made my way to the sofas which were located outside the Conference Centre I was greeted by Paul Mitchell and Marcus Bastiaan. Two young men with bright futures ahead of them within the Liberal Party. That's is if they put in the hard yards and work towards creating a political environment that will have positive political outcomes. They are the new young political guns coming up through the ranks along with Georgina Downer, Stephen Jury, Stephanie Ross, Nick Demiris, Aaron Lane, Courtney Dixon, Jess Wilson, Greg Hannan and Rebecca Gauci.

The likes of Theo Zographos, Michael Poutney, Andrea Hoy, Simon Breheny, Constantine Frantzeskos, Matthew Hession, Alexander Lew, Charley Daniels, Matthew Lesh, Evan Mulholland, Paul Peulich, and Michael Poutney to name a few are also potential contenders for political office providing they too put in the hard yards and prove themselves as political gladiator's worthy of respect.

After some quick chit chat, ribald jokes at each other, such as I was going to vote for them last as I didn't think that they were worth it, I left the two young guns, Paul Mitchell and Marcus Bastiaan to their own devices. I sauntered over to the Registration section, registered and only to be reminded by young Paul Mitchell that I was a delegate and not a member, I returned to registration and made a sheepish excuse that I had the wrong identification.

The official looked at me as if I was some old bastard, but the look did not deter me from putting on a brave face and walking away with my head held high. I am sure that young Paul Mitchell had a smile on his face. Oh well I guess at my age and like many other of serving the nation in one form or another I can be forgiven.

I looked around as if I was a political elder seeking reassurance that all was well, but no one came to my aid. Hmm, I had better get out of this isolation pretty quick I murmured to myself and found that I was being observed by my old mate, Mile (pronounced Mile) Kotoski from the Secretariat. Mile and I have a long history of friendship and when I came up to him, he put his arms around me and gave me a huge bear hug. This unbelievable bloke's hug gave me all the confidence I needed and I reciprocated by saying it was good to see him again. We spoke of old times, family, and chided each other as good friends always do. Leaving Mile, I made my way towards a seat near the entrance to the door.

No sooner had I sat down when a woman who looked familiar but I could not wholly recognise sat down and began a conversation. I apologised and stammered that I had forgotten her name. I felt even more foolish when she said she was Jenny Matic. Suddenly all of the past flooded back in and I remembered all the good times we shared when we were both on State Council and Policy Assembly the precursor to the current State Assembly.

We shared our experiences and it was during our conversation that I found that Jenny has also undergone treatment for a brain cancer. A tumour had been discovered after some years of pain where it involved radiation amongst other medication to remove the tumour which had been affecting her eyesight.

During our conversation, I found that Jenny was doing well in her current role and had not ruled out a political career in the near future. I encouraged her to pursue her passion citing others such as Louise Staley and John Pesutto making a political comeback and entering the political arena. Jenny has a bright future ahead of her and she is willing to do the hard work to achieve her goals. I wished her well and soon after some further discussion we found that it was time we joined the remainder of the delegates and members in the convention room.

However, prior to going in I was pleasantly greeted by Kevin Andrews, the former Defence Minister and his bright political staffer Andrew Ananievski. I was pleased because I have fond memories of Kevin as I also present on his initial preselection some many years ago. For someone who had just completed riding Pollie Pedal for 1000 kilometres in New South Wales with the Tony Abbott the former Prime Minister, Kevin looked well and fighting fit.

The Convention was choc a block with delegates, members, secretarial staff, media, politicians and convention service staff. The environment reminded me of being in an indoor Roman coliseum observing the political gladiators in the main ring far below. Various speakers were presenting their reports and in response received a warm welcome of clapping from the audience. This was nothing unusual as all speakers no matter what they had to report were always made welcome.

As I stood in the back of the room, I noticed that Tony Snell the past President was standing close by watching the proceedings below and in conversation with another member of the party. I wondered how he must feel after stepping down as President and what did all the changes come to mean to him. After all it was under his watch that the Mantach Scandal had developed which was not conducive to long term political relationships. In essence, I have said this in the past that Tony Snell is a relatively good bloke and one can forgive him for placing complete and utter faith and trust in a director whose designs of making a personal fortune clashed with his responsibilities as Director.

With regard to other speakers, I found the past Treasurers report of considerable interest, especially after he made a surprise withdrawal from the role of Treasurer and paving the way for Russell Hannan to take on the job unopposed. Although this withdrawal was well received by those present, one could not but feel a tinge of sympathy for him as it appeared to me at least that he took on the ills of the Mantach financial scandal upon his shoulders.

Others felt that his withdrawal meant that some sympathy was bound to go towards the Female Metropolitan Vice President Caroline Elliott who won by the slimmest of margins. However, on reflection as far as this 'black duck' is concerned the ultimate responsibility is that of the person at the top of the political food chain who should have taken the brunt of member's criticism and not leave others to be made scapegoats. Others speakers of interest were Malcolm Turnbull the Prime Minister and Julie Bishop the Foreign Minister who jointly presented an award to Aaron Lane.

However, my thoughts I must admit were not what they said but more on the arrival of the Prime Minister as he arrived at the convention. I noticed that he was flanked by his personal security team which sadly reminded me of American politics where the President is always surrounded by his bodyguards. It is a far cry from many years ago where our Prime Ministers did not need such protection but sadly it's a sign of the times in a world that is under constant surveillance, hampered by threats of terrorism upon our shores. On conclusion of the Prime Minister and Foreign Ministers speeches, there was nothing else to do but wait for the voting to commence.

A break in the convention meant we were able to have lunch, meet old friends, discuss the day's proceedings and 'chew the fat' over a glass of lemon lime and bitters. Lunch was with my mate Peter Vlahos, who just happens to be also my best man and Sandra Mercer Moore. Peter Vlahos is a fountain of knowledge, well versed in political history along with natural history and has an excellent eye for strategic political scenarios that others fail to grasp or comprehend.

Peter over the years has been grossly underestimated and it is my opinion only that had he been a member of the opposing political Party, like Labor or the Greens he would have been a Minister. My personal contacts have advised me and I have witnessed overtures made to Peter over the years by other political parties, all of which he has resisted because of his Liberal ideology and conservative social views. Peter is a wordsmith like no other and many a candidate has sought out his skills to enhance their political resume, many whom were and are in parliament to this day. A man who deserves better and who should do well given the opportunity.

Lunch was kindly provided by a friend whom I classify as an astute, wily and strategic political conservative activist, Sandra Mercer Moore (now deceased), a past female Metropolitan Vice President. A good friend who again in my opinion should have been a politician had she been given the opportunity and provided with the necessary support to achieve that lofty ambition had she chosen that path.

I had asked Sandra many years ago why she did not choose the political gladiatorial arena and take her place amongst those she always supported. Her response was admirable and one for others to emulate should they decide to be a part of a political party. She said that she thoroughly enjoyed the jousting, the battles, strategic manoeuvring and behind the scenes struggles for influence, ensuring that political environments that were conducive to the best interests, relevance and longevity of the Liberal Party. In retrospect, I felt that despite the high regard and respect she has by others, Sandra deserves far more acknowledgment from her peers for her numerous contributions to the Liberal Party.

Once lunch was over and we made our way back to the convention centre we were met by that great man, Michael Kroger, a political giant, a friend indeed and a political gladiator of the highest order. For me, it was personal moment as Michael was one of the few who visited me in hospital whilst undergoing chemotherapy and also a personal friend to my family. Relationships can change over time and political friendships can morph into other forms, but I am one of those who despite any changes in relationships will steadfastly retain that friendship against all odds.

Prior to voting I was introduced to the new chairman of McEwen, a John Butler who was a young Lieutenant in the 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment in 1978 and at the same time as I was just returning from another tour of duty in Malaya. The introduction was made by Peter McWilliam, the outgoing country Male Vice President. I had first met Peter back in the early 1990s when I was the Chairman of the Scullin Federal Electorate and together, we made a good team.

Peter was seconded to become the Chairman of McEwen where he made a name for himself and had risen through the Liberal Party ranks to achieve the status he was now resigning from. Peter is well known and respected but after years of campaigning and supporting the Liberal party in Victoria has decided it was time to hang up his boots and stop kicking goals. I wish him and his family all the best for the future.

Back at the convention centre I parted company from Sandra Mercer Moore and Peter Vlahos and sought out my friend and now Chairman of Scullin Dr Geza Benke to make arrangements for the trip home. Once arrangements were made it was time to vote and like always, electronic checks were made against our identity cards and in we went for the voting of the Administrative Committee amongst other positions. It was an easy task for me as I like others had studied all the biographies prior and had made my own judgement calls who would merit my vote.

Suffice to say, I am on record as having supported a new wave of political activists who had the same points of view as myself on an ideological basis and felt that the political paradigms of the past needed to be tested and if they failed to be replaced with concepts that meet with the will and aspirations of today's society. I am also a great believer in the youth and that they deserve to be given the opportunity to develop and not take on the responsibilities with political mentors providing them with the political advice necessary to make decisions that would be in the best interests of the nation and that of the Liberal Party. Life is far too short to be making rash decisions, especially when one is bestowed with the responsibilities of a nation and it's important that they have the credibility for people to believe in them.

Gone are the days when one felt that they had to go to the alleged right schools, have financial backers, powerful political influencers amongst other mundane and outdated methodologies. Today we live in a world surrounded by an iridescent, fluctuating technological environment that constantly spews out information that overwhelms an individual's capacity to make the appropriate decisions without some form of coach or intervener well skilled in the art of understanding and unravelling the wheat from the chaff.

My advice therefore to the youth of today is to knuckle down, identify what you want to achieve politically, work hard to achieve your political ambitions and don't expect political handouts because of your own heightened status and station in life. Remember that even an ant has the unknown ability to carry heavy loads back to the ant's nests without seeking acknowledgement from his peers.

As I write this article, the results have come in from the Secretariat and a quick glance is an indication that the hard work of three years planning has come to fruition. Planning that was conducted with the aim of returning the Liberal party in Victoria in becoming once again the jewel in the crown all under the leadership of Michael Kroger.

I can see Michael once again putting factions to one side, bringing together the various groups that have gone astray, creating new alliances, realigning the negative and destructive political fiefdoms that were created under previous leaderships. He would be creating an environment where members can feel secure in the knowledge that the Liberal Party has once again become relevant in the minds of all Victorians and not just the few who I can say without fear or approach led to the development of the Mantach financial scandal. Tomorrow is but another day that once again will be full of pleasant surprises.

Last but not to be forgotten, I met young Andrew Kroger on my way out. Young Andrew had come in to observe the day's political proceedings. Young Andrew is a delightful young bloke demonstrating a respect for his elders that is seldom is seen in today's society. I wish the young bloke all the best and hope he achieves his lifelong ambitions. Dr Geza Benke and I had left early as it had been a rather taxing time for me and I needed time out. However, despite that feeling of fatigue I must confess I felt great and alive. My yearning to write again became a pleasant and rewarding obsession once again.

As always, I apologise for the poor grammar and punctuation, but make no apologies for the content as it's a personal view as I see life developing and unfolding for the better. It is of interest to note that when lying in a hospital bed for nigh on five months a person sees life from a different perspective. Please note that this my first complete article since completing my heavy dose of chemotherapy and stem cells treatment in January of this year. Nothing personal and I thank readers for their perseverance.

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