

# Entrepreneur and the economy

Julie Novak reviews  
*Heroic Misadventures  
Australia: Four Decades—  
Full Circle*  
by Ron Manners  
(Quality Press, 2009, 392 pages)

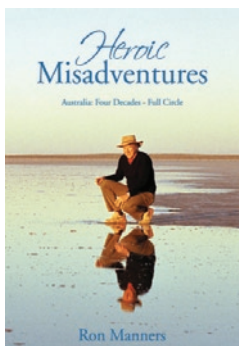
**H**eroic Misadventures: Four Decades—Full Circle is a compelling autobiographical account of the life of a unique Australian, who rose up from the newspaper rounds as a child in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, to make his mark in the lucrative gold mining industry.

But why do we so often ignore the entrepreneur? Policymakers tend to overlook the motivations and actions of the people whose production and exchange activities actually make a difference to economic failure or success of the nation.

In their view, changes affecting the economic ‘organism’—such as fluctuations in gross domestic product—are more often than not seen as a problem that can only be rectified by a pull of a fiscal policy lever here or a flick of a monetary policy switch there.

This view overlooks the motivations and actions of living and breathing individuals whose production and exchange activities actually make the difference to economic failure or success.

Amongst the population of 22 million Australian economic agents live a unique set of enterprising people who, with a sense of bravado and a dash of entrepreneurial alertness, play a pivotal role in maintaining and growing competitive markets without the need for government ‘help’ or hindrance—often



one and the same thing!

One of the leading figures who has shaped our economic fortunes is mining entrepreneur, philanthropist and advocate of economic liberalism Ron Manners, the author of *Heroic Misadventures: Australia*.

As Ron Manners clearly illustrates in his book, he has tirelessly worked to use the opportunities accorded to him in order to benefit others. From his role in establishing the Australian Mining Hall of Fame to sponsoring the economic education of young people through the Mannkal Economic Education Foundation, *Heroic Misadventures* amply dispels the erroneous caricature of the selfish capitalist.

By the same token it is clear from the very title of the book that wealth creation is necessarily an explorative process, with the very real prospect of ventures turning out to be unprofitable as they do not meet the exacting demands of the consuming public.

Manners chronicles the initial promise through to the ultimately dashed expectations of failed ventures in Indonesia’s hotel industry, a South Pacific rock cruise ocean liner and his self described brief banking career with the Nugan Hand Bank that collapsed in 1980 amidst accusations of organised crime and international political intrigue.

That Manners was able to progress

from, and in some senses thrive on, these ‘misadventures’ shows that the market economy is ultimately redemptive by its nature. Market failure provides an opportunity for individuals to learn from their errors, building an aptitude and capacity for economic self improvement.

This is a point not understood by critics of market capitalism who reflexively call for government taxing, spending and regulating to snuff out every instance (real or perceived) of economic discoordination.

Increasingly, economic discoordination is not merely attributable to the trial and error process that naturally comes with producers and consumers interacting over the production, distribution and exchange of economic resources. Government bureaucrats and political representatives regrettably retain a habit of encroaching in on market activities, to the detriment of the long-term productive potential of Australia.

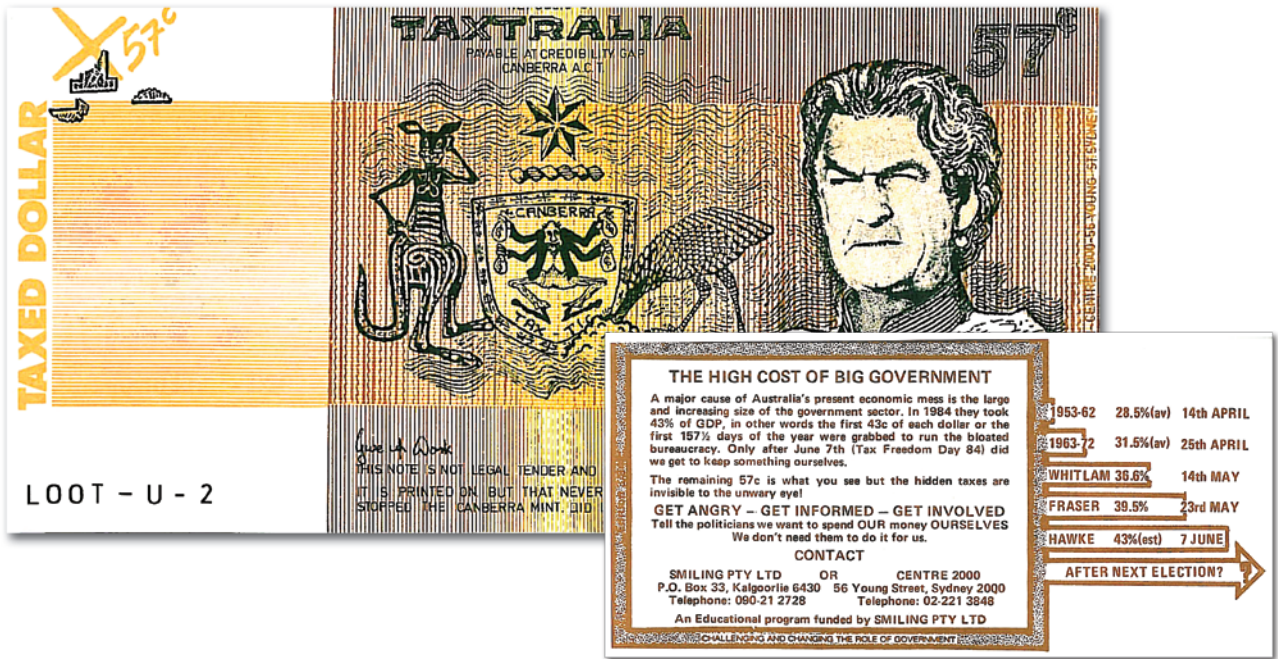
*Heroic Misadventures* outlines the often meddling tactics employed by public sector agents to expropriate the honestly attained wealth of market participants. Indeed, the over-taxing appetites of public authorities forced Manners to leave Australia for a period of time.

Therefore it is with some authority that Manners warns in the closing passages of his book that ‘it seems that Australia could again miss out on many opportunities, due to the prevailing anti-business, anti-entrepreneurship political attitudes which are driving Australia’s key people and investments to other more welcoming environments around the world.’

One of the most important and useful parts of the book is Manners’ history of the development of the Workers Party—an explicitly libertarian political party formed in the early 1970s. The

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In 1984, Manners and other libertarians distributed 57 cent notes, in the style and shape of the \$1 note of the time, to protest the government's 'destruction' of the value of the Australian dollar.

Workers Party was one manifestation of the radicalisation of the free market right in Australia—the party's role as a precursor to the ideas embodied in the New Right and a counterpoint to radical free marketeers within the Liberal Party has not received the attention it deserves.

Manners was introduced to the small libertarian fringe by a doctor, John Whiting, who described himself as the President of the Movement for Limited Government. Whiting quickly introduced Manners into a group of people across the country who were working towards forming a political party. The first name they chose for the new entity was the Independents Party, but the group settled on the Workers Party, a name which was to be controversial. A subsequent election poster described the party with this tagline:

There is no longer a political void in Australia—the workers party is the political alternative for the individual who does not consider himself represented by the socialist dominated political parties in Australia.

So why Workers Party? The name described individuals who 'work with their head, their hands, or the money they have come by previously.'

The idea was to have as wide appeal as possible. But as Manners' writes, 'having to constantly explain the reason for choosing the name "Workers Party" became fatiguing, leading to much internal debate about a name change.'

They advocated privatisation and the floating of the dollar—policies which were adopted by the major parties. The platform was radical, but not absolutist. Land titles and the legal system were described as 'legitimate government activities'.

Nevertheless, the Workers Party received the endorsement of the none other than Murray Rothbard.

While the Party did not win seats, it was judged by leading economic liberal John Hyde to have 'succeeded in seeding ideas which, in time, bore fruit.' One Western Australian Liberal member in 1977 defected to the Progress Party (the successor organisation to the Workers Party).

The Progress Party too eventually disbanded. Manners argues that the election of the Malcolm Fraser's Liberal Government was a big factor in this. Fraser was famously a fan of Ayn Rand, and Manners' writes that:

His election speeches were indeed refreshing and gave many of us the feeling we could 'pull up our political tent and go back to work'.

This initial enthusiasm for Fraser was not to last, and the New Right in the 1980s took up the mantle of the intellectual movement for free markets.

Ron Manners has produced a work that serves not only as a time capsule heralding the emergence of Australia's libertarian movement, but can serve as inspiration for future generations to show initiative and seek their own path in an increasingly competitive economy.

Written in a personable, direct style with many humorous anecdotes, Ron Manners' *Heroic Misadventures* is a compelling read on the importance of economic freedom and the individual.

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