



Episode 1,428: From Progressive to Libertarian: A Personal Testimony

Guest: Carey Wedler

WOODS: You have been such a prolific and successful content creator, and you have some videos that – well, I'm not envious of people, because that's a bad quality to have, but let's say I've come as close as I've ever been to being envious when I've looked at videos like yours. *My gosh, how did she do this?* So I want to talk about primarily your own evolution in your own thinking, because although libertarianism is not a religion, we have our conversion stories. And I for one am a sucker for a good conversion story, and particularly one that's a little different from my own. I think a lot of my listeners had the same kind of background, like we were raised as conventional Republicans, and we cheered on the troops and all that. And then we just thought, I can't do this anymore. I just cannot do this. So what I love is talking to somebody who comes from a completely opposite wing of things, and who also came to the same conclusions that I eventually reached. And I believe that's you. So I'd like to know, how did you first start to form your political ideas? And what age would you say you began to be politically aware?

WEDLER: Great question. So I am from Los Angeles, born and raised, so you can imagine the type of atmosphere that I was exposed to growing up. So as long as I can remember, I was a left-leaning – let's not even say leaning. I was really proud to be a liberal, a progressive, not that I knew the distinctions that they like to apply to themselves. But I think the first time I really started questioning not necessarily progressivism, but government power and authority would have been in public school, of all places, learning about Operation Ajax, which the CIA conducted in Iran in order to install their chosen leader, who was the previous shah who they were reinstalling. And I just remember having this thought of like, *Hmm, that doesn't sound like something a pro-democracy country would do.* But that was just one little seed. And it took years and years of supporting Barack Obama and thinking he was antiwar, which was always my biggest issue, until I started to realize that perhaps I couldn't trust a politician to keep their promises. So once I figured out that Barack Obama had pretty much broken every single promise that I supported him for, I started to question things on a much broader scale.

WOODS: Okay, so I saw the video you made about Obama. Now, that's your biggest video ever, isn't it?

WEDLER: It is, and I did not think it would be. I did not see it coming.

WOODS: Well, it's a young woman who is a former progressive, who's washing her hands of Barack Obama. That ticks off a lot of boxes of some people's criteria of which videos to watch. So that doesn't hurt. That does not hurt. Because man, the anti-Obama sentiment was just – it was almost – I'm no Obama fan, but the anti-Obama sentiment was almost out of

proportion to the significance of the man. I mean, I find him to be bland and forgettable, and yet – it was like Bill Clinton in the 1990s. I mean, yeah, he wasn't a great president or anything, but the level of intensity of hatred among people who would cheer on George W. Bush, who was 12% different from Bill Clinton. I don't even understand these people. But anyway, that was an amazingly successful a video of yours. And in there, you gave reasons for why you might be opposed to Obama that really were reasons that a progressive might give. So what were examples of some of those?

WEDLER: Right, so for me, the first thing, before I even looked at Obama's foreign policy, the first thing that really got to me was just his entrenchment with the banking industry, which we all know is very heavily regulated and controlled by government. And we know the Federal Reserve was established by Congress. So of course, I didn't know that then. I just knew, like, corporations, bad; Barack Obama empowering corporations, not good. And it took many years of study and evolution to get a better understanding of that. But when it really came down to it, it was this expansion of the wars, which looking back on it, makes perfect sense to me that I went the way I did, because violence is such a characteristic trait of government, that no wonder I was so opposed to the biggest example of violence we could expect from government. And seeing how vastly different Obama's actions and policies were from what he had promised and how he had sold himself to the public – because it really was a sell that I had fallen for, hook, line and sinker. I never questioned it. I never looked at his voting record, which would have informed me very well. Once I got to the antiwar stuff, that was it for me.

WOODS: But I could imagine somebody being disillusioned with Barack Obama, as some honest progressives were – I know some personally, who were very frustrated that he turned out to be such a disappointment from their point of view. I mean, from their point of view, Obamacare is a middle-of-the-road disappointment. As you say, on foreign policy, he was very much status quo, which, the status quo is not good. And not to mention whistleblowers. I mean, you can come up with a pretty terrible indictment against him. But that wouldn't be enough to make them abandon *progressivism*. So how did you get pushed over beyond just abandoning Obama as a person and be willing to instead rethink your whole approach?

WEDLER: So I actually got very lucky. I had a friend that I met in 2008, and he was already on the Ron Paul train. And I have very vivid memories of telling him that he would really regret not voting on the right side of history if he didn't vote for Barack Obama. And he assured me that he was not concerned about that, and he was very patient with me. And a few years later, the summer that I started – it was 2011, the summer I really started to pay attention to what was actually going on. And he was there with Ron Paul videos. All summer, I just sat and watched speeches of Ron Paul, interviews with Ron Paul. And a light bulb went on. And it wasn't just that Ron Paul made sense; it was that he was so optimistic. It wasn't all doom and gloom. It was like, hey, look at all these problems, and here's this amazing answer that is logically consistent and it's moral.

WOODS: Ah, so it's a Ron Paul thing.

WEDLER: Of course.

WOODS: I mean, I hate to ask – I don't really want to have to ask your age, but can I just at least say you're a pretty young person? You want to leave it there?

WEDLER: [laughing] Let's leave it there.

WOODS: Okay, all right.

WEDLER: Thank you.

WOODS: So this would have been, then, the 2012 campaign that we're talking about?

WEDLER: Yeah.

WOODS: Okay. All right, so yeah, see, that's the thing. I could imagine thinking: wow, it turns out that the establishment of which Obama was on the left side of, but still part of the establishment, boy, they have a lot to answer for, because these people aren't – even the left-leaning ones among them are not antiwar. And they're all for – whatever it is, the laundry list of crimes at the state. And I would find that very disorienting. But I think it would be hard to get me to come along on economics. If I hardcore was a progressive and I really thought that the market economy was unjust and that social programs were going to help people, I think it would be very, very hard to get on the Ron Paul bandwagon fully. How did you crack through that barrier?

WEDLER: Yeah, that is a great question. And economics is something that I struggled with in high school. And of course, I went to public school. So was it me? Was it them? I don't know, maybe a little bit of both. But it was something that always came secondary to me after the morality. So I came to libertarianism purely from a moral standpoint, that initiatory violence is wrong, that you're not supposed to take other people's stuff. And in the background of that, of course, as I explored all these philosophers, all this content, I started to understand the basics of economics. And I started to just sort of view that as the default state of nature. A free market is what – that's what we start with. That's all it is. And the more I looked at individual transactions, whether on a micro level or looking at macro transactions, I really started to understand this – I just started getting better understanding. But to be honest, I'll be totally honest here, I did not really have a great grasp of economics until I started working for FEE, the Foundation for Economic Education, which was in the past year. So everything that I sort of intuitively was sensing about economics became more crystallized in the last year.

WOODS: Oh, okay. Well, that's really good. That's really interesting. I'm curious about another video you made, when you talked about how conservatives brought you out of left-liberalism.

WEDLER: Yeah.

WOODS: That's an interesting thing, because I bet today, you wouldn't use the word "conservative" to describe yourself.

WEDLER: No [laughing].

WOODS: So what was the context – and that's okay. Look, it's okay. You're not on trial here. It's just part of your story. So what was that all about?

WEDLER: So in that video, specifically, you may or may not have noticed, I like to use clever titles on my videos, that once you watch them, they are accurate, but you might go into it expecting something different. And what I was talking about in that video is really just the tendency of both sides of the political spectrum to be okay with forcing other people to submit to their ideal view of society as imposed through government. And whether we're talking about exorbitant war spending, or whether we're talking about social services and social programs, the commonality that I started to see as I was listening to Ron Paul and as I started to step away from my indoctrination, was that while they may have different ideologies – I'm not going to argue that they're the exact same thing – at the end of the day, the way they impose those policies is through government, and it's majority rule. It's making people who may not necessarily want to fund these things pay for them. And for me, that is a deal breaker.

WOODS: Ah, okay, okay. So you found some kind of overlap with those folks, but then at some point – I'm just trying to get the timeline right in my mind of how your mind is changing and you're thinking about things. So was there a period of time that you went through where you thought, *I'm a conservative. I'm not for Obama anymore, so I'm a conservative?*

WEDLER: You know, I don't think I did.

WOODS: Okay. Good for you [laughing].

WEDLER: To be perfectly honest, I went straight from progressive to libertarian. I skipped that transitional phase. Yeah, and I really do think it's thanks to Ron Paul, and also, it was the 2012 election, because he was running as a Republican, and I was so active in that campaign. That's when I first started making videos. I was volunteering out here in Los Angeles, and seeing the way that he was treated and just the broader electoral system really disillusioned me toward any kind of political party.

WOODS: What kind of topics – have you covered just a wide array of things, or are there particular ones that you feel like you're especially good at convincing people on that you focus on a lot?

WEDLER: That's a great question. So of course, my main issue is being antiwar. That's just something that, when I see the all the suffering, all the waste, it is just such a great representation of everything that is government incompetence and evil. So I think that that's probably my strongest issue. But I've also taken a very strong interest in the drug war, for the same reasons as being antiwar. I like to make a gun rights video every once in a while, but I try to be careful about what I talk about. I don't want to ever make a video unless I'm really confident and feel really comfortable with what I'm saying. I don't like to make content just to make it. I'm making it because I feel like I've reached a conclusion on something and I feel like I have something to say about it. But I'll cover anything, whatever is breaking, whatever is coming up, whatever speaks to me.

WOODS: I can't get over that that burning your last bridge with Obama video has over 2 million views. I mean, that is just astonishing.

WEDLER: It helps that there was fire, I think.

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah, it doesn't hurt. That's really, really great. Not that I'm looking for more competition – there's so many libertarian podcasts these days. When I first started about six years ago, I was not the only game in town, but pretty darn close. And now it's like everybody's got a libertarian podcast. I'm promoting half of them on my show. And I have to remind people, *Hey, folks, I was here for a while. Don't all go.* But given the content you produce, have you ever thought about doing a podcast in addition to the YouTubes?

WEDLER: You know, I have thought about it. I have a cousin who keeps insisting I do it. I'm not there yet. And I guess I just think, I don't know that I'm interesting enough to talk for that long. You certainly are, and you have these amazing guests. But I'm like, I don't know. I talk like a Valley girl. Is that something people really want to listen to? It's something I consider, though, because there's so much to talk about.

WOODS: Yeah, there's plenty to talk about. And you know what? If only half the podcast hosts out there had enough willingness to reflect on their own worth to ask themselves that question, *Who really wants to listen to me?* the world would be a better place. But you know, you keep producing pretty interesting content. So I'm looking at your channel right now, and it does look like the kinds of topics that you're hitting on these days are more philosophical and abstract as opposed to issue-based. So for example, "Government Is Violence. Change My Mind" is not really tied to any particular issue.

WEDLER: Right.

WOODS: What kind of feedback do you get on these, let's say? Do you think you make people think?

WEDLER: You know, I'd like to think so. I certainly get pushback from people, which, that's easy to focus on, so I try to remember that if you read the comments – which I do not, but if I scan them every once in a while or I check my email inbox, people are really supportive. I just got a comment yesterday about that video, someone saying, *I never thought of it that way, but it's so true.* And I don't know how much of the work I do actually changes people's minds versus triggering them and upsetting them. I'd like to think maybe that's planting a seed. But I think overall, it's been well received. And I think for me, it was just something I felt I needed to do, because I'm a bit of a people pleaser, and I spend so much time thinking, *Well, what are these people going to think? Am I going to change their minds?* It's not a reflection of my worth, but it's like, well, how can I best serve these people? How can I change their minds? And the first time I ever dropped that mentality was when I made that Obama blowtorch video. I said, too bad. I want to make this. I'm doing it. And so it was wildly successful beyond anything I could have ever imagined. And so that's the approach I've decided to take now, which is, well, I don't want to dance around it anymore. I don't want to try to please the left or please the right. I want to express what I believe and what I'm learning and the information I've been synthesizing and my growth process, which is really what I've always tried to do with my videos. So it's been quite liberating to go straight to the philosophy.

WOODS: Isn't there a part of you, though, that's drawn to looking at your channel, seeing that you have a series videos that went more or less viral, and it's like, there's a formula there? I mean, the production value is very good. The subject line is not clickbait, because I'm very sensitive when people talk about clickbait. Clickbait is when you don't deliver on a headline. If you deliver on that headline, even if it is a really provocative headline, it is not strictly

clickbait. And likewise, your headlines are not clickbait, but they do practically compel the user to click on them. Whereas your more recent ones are more basically descriptive, more sober. And there's a sense in which you might feel better about yourself doing that, but it doesn't give people that burning desire to click. How are you balancing this in your mind when you decide these things?

WEDLER: Totally. That's a great question. So usually, if you look at my most viral articles, all of those are – or, I also write – my *videos*, you'll find that the ones that got the most clicks, all of those, the title came to me first.

WOODS: Yeah.

WEDLER: It was like, it was just a sentence, and I thought, okay, I'm making a video around that. Whereas some of the other ones, I get the idea first and I write it out, and then right before I'm about to post it, I go, *Uh oh, what am I calling this?*

WOODS: Yeah, oh, I hate that. When I'm sitting there thinking of subject lines for my emails, I think this email is great; how do I get people to open it? I mean, I'm telling you, I know you folks are going to want to open it, and when you've opened it, you'll be glad you did. But how do I get you to do it? That is the struggle.

WEDLER: Right. And I really like working from a title first, because I know the theme that I want to address, and it's almost like filling in the blanks. I have my outline; I write it out. And I make sure obviously it aligns with the title and that all of that aligns with my values and what I'm trying to communicate. But I had one recently, which I'm sure you can imagine was clickable. It was called "Why I'm Breaking My Silence on the World's Most Dangerous Religion."

WOODS: Yeah, that did well.

WEDLER: Yeah, it did. And I'm also struggling against algorithms, of course, and to what extent, I don't know, so I prefer to just take the responsibility for myself, because I can't prove anything.

WOODS: Right.

WEDLER: I know it's something other people struggle with. But I think my goal is to play off of people's biases and let them project onto the title whatever they assume I could possibly be talking about because of what they want to hear. I think that's when things do really well. It's just kind of hard to pinpoint, especially the last few years. The political spectrum has become so, I want to say chaotic, even. I think a lot of people are very confused about what they believe. Even if they think they aren't, I think a lot of people are getting mixed up, and they don't necessarily know what their principles are. So it's become a difficult world to navigate, but I'm just grateful that I have the opportunity to put that content out there.

WOODS: Well, as a content creator yourself, who do you look to as being – now, let's exclude me, just for this segment, okay?

WEDLER: [laughing] Yeah, okay.

WOODS: Who do you look to as really good content creators that you appreciate or look up to or get inspiration from or anything like that?

WEDLER: That is a great question. So I'm big on historical figures who are not currently creating content, but I have been heavily influenced by Lysander Spooner. I'm trying to think of people today. Honestly, I don't spend a lot of time on the internet outside of my social media. But honestly, I stick with Ron Paul. I know that maybe that's a cliché and expected answer, but he's doing such great work, and he's still so active, which is so wonderful. So I love listening to him. I have to be honest: I'm not much of a podcast person. But I actually listen a lot – and this may sound counterintuitive, because I'm so actively political, but I listen to a lot of spirituality podcasts, like mindfulness and meditation, because something I've realized and something I believe strongly, which some people may disagree with me about, I really believe that if we want a more peaceful world that is actually free, there's a lot of internal suffering going on with a lot of people that I think needs to be addressed before we can actually learn to truly be harmonious in how we live as a broader society.

WOODS: I could get very sappy and sentimental here on that kind of topic, but just to say that sometimes I've been kind of nasty to people who have been nasty to me.

WEDLER: Me too.

WOODS: And I've hit back in a very nasty way about, you know, *Look, this person obviously has – I'll just say it – a sh**y life, and he's trying to impose his misery on everybody, including me, and so I'm going to ignore this sh**head, okay?* I have to probably have to bleep those words out. But the point is, I mean, that's how I – and the thing is, I'm not wrong. I bet in 90% of cases, that is exactly what's going on. This is a miserable, self-hating person who wants to spread his misery around to others. But geez, you know, not that it excuses it, but there's so many ways in which almost any individual is suffering or struggling with something, and I don't want to be the guy who rubs his nose in it further.

WEDLER: Right.

WOODS: And so I do sort of reproach myself for that, even though he shouldn't have started with me. But I don't want to rub his nose in the fact his life sucks, you know [laughing]? Just block him on Twitter, and just move on. So I appreciate that point that you're making there.

WEDLER: Thank you. Yeah, it's been a big lesson for me, too, because it's so easy to snap back. I can be very biting. I can be very sarcastic. And it's really been a practice for me to when I am being spoken to that way, it's really challenging to not say something mean, to the point where I'll write it out, and then I have to go back and do a sweep of proofing, where it's like, *That's not necessary. That's not nice. Let's remove this. You don't need this to make your point.* And so it's been a fun practice for me. But it really does come down to for me to actually living what I'm preaching. If I'm talking about peace and I'm talking about a free world, how can I be – not that I'm using violence, but how can I be mean to people when I want a society that's actually compassionate, where we know how to be nice to each other. So it was a long, long learned lesson, and I'm still learning it every day. But it's something that's very important to me.

WOODS: In what areas would you in your experience say that the so-called liberty movement – which is kind of an awkward term that I hate, but I don't know what else to call it – where do you think we're doing well, maybe institutionally or the individuals that you meet, and where do you think we could use improvement? And this could be anything from: we should write better articles to we need better social skills, because it's embarrassing how inept we are. Anything that comes to your mind, I'd like to hear.

WEDLER: Okay, great. Well, something I love about the liberty movement is that there's so many different voices and so many different perspectives, that to me, it's just such a beautiful illustration of what liberty is. There are so many different individuals who are able to reach different people. Like you can reach people I will never reach, and I love that. And I may reach people on the left, for example, that say, Eric July won't reach. Or who knows? And he's awesome. He's probably reaching leftists too.

WOODS: Yeah, right. Right, yeah. I know exactly what you mean, though, yeah.

WEDLER: Right, yeah, and I think that's such a beautiful strength and it embodies liberty. So I love that. And honestly, we have the best memes. And I know maybe that sounds trite or inconsequential, but memes really matters, and communicating on social media really matters. And when I go on Instagram, and I look at the libertarian meme community, oh my gosh, it makes me very excited, because it's these little bites of information that really tend to click with people. So I love that. I really do love all the different approaches people take.

But I think, to call back to what we were just talking about, something that could potentially be improved upon in some circles is that tendency to be very condescending, to make fun of people, to just call them stupid and ignorant. And, you know, I'm guilty of this too. If you watch my videos, especially from a few years ago, I can be extremely sassy and very insulting. And this is, again, something I'm working on. And it's so hard, because on one hand, it's like, but I'm right. I'm allowed to be frustrated about this. It's fair. I'm not having an abnormal reaction. But on the other hand, it I think it really does help to temper ourselves and to try to understand where people are coming from.

So I think a lot of people assume that progressives and leftists aren't capable of coming to libertarianism, and I just want to say that, using myself as an example, I really do think that's possible. And I do find that when I can meet people where they are, coming from that side especially, and acknowledge their compassion, right – like, okay, you want to help the poor. That doesn't mean you're stupid. You might be misguided, and maybe the government is exploiting your compassion, but I don't have to insult you and call you a communist and write you off. I think it might be productive if we could just learn to be a little more patient. And again, everything I say is coming as advice to myself as well.

WOODS: I want to tell people how they can find out more about you and follow your stuff. So I see you're on – are you still actively using Patreon?

WEDLER: I am.

WOODS: Okay, so I'm going to link to your Patreon. Then I also want to get people to your YouTube channel, so we'll do that. Is there a quick – what's the name of the channel? Is it Carey Wedler?

WEDLER: It's just Carey Wedler, yeah.

WOODS: Okay, so we'll do that. Do you have your own website?

WEDLER: You know, I don't, and everyone keeps telling me I need to, and it's just not something I've done, so we can skip over that [laughing].

WOODS: Okay, well –

WEDLER: It's coming at some point.

WOODS: Okay, and if you have an archive of articles, you can send me a link to, I'll be glad to post those too.

WEDLER: Okay, great. Thank you very much.

WOODS: Okay, good. All right, so that's a pretty good overview of what's been going on, but I'm going to make sure and – I'll link to your Obama video. Let me write that down.

WEDLER: Okay.

WOODS: That one in particular, just for the sheer fact of how many views of it got. I mean, that just blows my mind that that happened. That's tremendous for you.

WEDLER: Thank you.

WOODS: And right now, you're doing some work with the Foundation for Economic Education?

WEDLER: Yes.

WOODS: And what has that consisted of so far?

WEDLER: So I'm an editor and a writer. At this point, I'm doing I think a lot of the heavy lifting on the daily original article edit. So that's my main job, and then when I have time, I do write. So I wrote something – I think my last piece was on Memorial Day.

WOODS: Okay, very good. Very good. All right, so if I can dig up something over there, I'll put that on there too. So TomWoods.com/1428 is where I'll have all the links I've been mentioning, so you can find out more about Carey Wedler. Well, thanks so much for your time, and continued good luck.

WEDLER: Thank you so much for having me. It was an honor.