



"The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong,"

John Maynard Keynes, General Theory

From backyard beginnings...



Most backyard sheds contain lawnmowers and the odd spider, not the seeds of Australasia's leading think tank on public policy. Yet from these humble beginnings, The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) has developed into an organisation at the forefront of social and economic debate.

Founded in 1976 by Greg Lindsay, a young schoolteacher with an interest in classical liberal ideas, CIS was established in a period marked by much social and political discontent. The turmoil and controversy of the Whitlam years had given way to disappointment and stagnation under the Fraser government, yet the notion that governments were the solution to any problem prevailed, particularly in the media.

Influenced by libertarian thinkers such as Murray Rothbard, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman as well as classical liberal philosophers such as Adam Smith, David Hume and John Locke, Greg Lindsay realised that he was facing an intellectual problem, not a political problem.

In particular, Hayek's famous essay, 'The Intellectuals and Socialism', helped to crystallise some thoughts on the role of ideas in politics that he had had for some time.

In April 1976, he wrote to Lauchlan Chipman, then a Professor of Philosophy at Wollongong University, to request a meeting to discuss his plans to form a centre 'to promote the study of liberty'. Things moved quickly. By October of that year, Chipman had delivered a paper entitled Liberty, Justice and the Market at the Centre's inaugural seminar, held at Macquarie University. The CIS was up and running.

...to respected research institute or 'think tank'

a conference on the role of government in 1978 proved to be a turning point for the fledgling think tank. The theme for the weekend meeting was 'What Price Intervention? Government and the economy'. Participants included economists such as Ross Parish, Michael Porter and Warren Hogan. A hundred people showed up, including Paddy McGuinness, then Economics Editor of the Australian Financial Review. He wrote a famous article, 'Where Friedman is a Pinko', giving the phone number and address of CIS at the end. There were days of messages.

Not long after, Greg Lindsay walked through the gates of Richmond High School for the last time as a mathematics teacher to concentrate on the task of raising the seed money necessary to begin building up CIS as an institution. By 1980, after receiving some much-needed financial assistance from early supporters such as Ross Graham-Taylor, Neville Kennard and Hugh Morgan, CIS finally went from being a 'spare time' backyard operation to a full-blown organisation in offices above Uncle Pete's Toys in St Leonards.

"The thing that I find most satisfying is the feeling that I have been able to germinate an idea and with tender care, watch it grow. Maybe the time was right for something like CIS."
Greg Lindsay in a letter to Bettina Greaves at the Foundation for Economic Education in the US, 28 March 1977.

From a wholesaler of ideas...

The 'C' in CIS stands for Centre. And, indeed, this is what it has become a centre for the transmission of ideas to the opinion-formers, the media and academics, as well as policymakers.

Since 1976 the CIS has played an important role in changing the climate of opinion, not only towards market solutions to economic problems but also in promoting the principles and institutions underlying a free and open society.

Seminars, lectures and conferences all play a part in the circulation of these ideas, such as the annual **John Bonython Lecture (JBL)**, named after the Centre's first Chairman of the then Board of Trustees. It has become one of the most anticipated events ever initiated by CIS. Even the inaugural JBL in 1984, delivered by American economist Israel Kirzner, created a buzz that attracted the likes of the legendary Australian cricketer, the late Sir Donald Bradman!

Over the years a number of lecture series have been generated around people or events such as The Bert Kelly Lectures, in honour of the former parliamentarian probably best known for his Modest Member columns in the Australian Financial Review, The Policymakers which allowed politicians from both sides of politics to speak their mind and Crisis Commentaries where we had experts offering analysis of the 2009 financial crisis. We also hold a range of other lectures, workshops and conferences all of which allow debate and discussion continue.

The fundamental aim of these events is to foster debate on what makes a free and open society. Discussion is always lively, and there have been many memorable moments, such as Paddy McGuinness telling Milton Friedman in 1981 that he sounded like a 'kind of socialist or perhaps a Christian'!

...to a community of scholars

Distinguished economist Milton Friedman at a CIS gathering in 1981 (Image)

The growth of CIS over the past 25 years would not have been possible without the extraordinary network of human capital that has gradually been built up, from our in-house team

to outside volunteers and contributors from academia, business and many other walks of life. CIS also benefits from strong links with respected scholars and commentators from around the world.

Through the early work and dedication of economists like Wolfgang Kasper, Ray Ball, Ross Parish, Malcolm Fisher, Warren Hogan, and Peter Swan; philosophers like Lauchlan Chipman; and lawyers like Geoffrey de Q. Walker, CIS became known not only for its focus on economic policy, but also philosophical and constitutional issues.

Indeed, the Centre has always been about the support of a free and open society. In the mid to late 1980s the focus began shifting to social policy issues, with programs such as Barry Maley's Taking Children Seriously and then Professor Peter Saunderson's Social Policy program, playing an influential part in the social reform process in both Australia and New Zealand.

In circulating ideas and influencing elite opinion, CIS has always believed that the printed word, and permanency is important. And, indeed, a quick glance at the hundreds of publications that CIS has produced is all that is needed to realise that the Centre has published very few throwaway papers. These publications from Policy Monographs, Occasional Papers and books to the quarterly journal Policy stand as a record of the Centre's research, recommendations and ideas for future reference.

From past strategies...

From the very beginning, Greg Lindsay set out to make the **'I' for Independent** in the Centre's title mean something. CIS receives no government funding and has no association with any political party. Corporate and individual supporters do not direct its research in any way. Although good ideas are always welcome, CIS remains the master of its own destiny, and jealously guards its reputation for independence.

The first CIS Board consisted of Neville Kennard, Maurice Newman and Ross Graham-Taylor. John Bonython joined later, becoming the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Since then, the Board of Directors has grown to include many prominent members of the business and wider community.

While the Board oversees the direction of the Centre, the role of the Academic Advisory Council is to assist in the Centre's research work. A long list of distinguished academics, and some honorary members such as Friedrich Hayek, have been on hand over the years to review CIS publications and to offer their expertise more generally.

...to future directions

Not content to rest on its laurels, CIS is entering another growth phase. The CIS has an expanded social policy program which is looking at health and aging, indigenous issues, family and welfare policy, it has strong work being done in foreign policy in particular China and the South Pacific. A refocussing of its economic policy work has happened with the additional of senior economists to the team of researchers.

Its student conference program, *Liberty & Society*, has received increased support and will assume a bigger role in CIS activities in the years to come. Our high level invitation only conference called Consilium has gained the reputation as 'the ideas conference to attend in Australia'.

Pathbreaking work has been the hallmark of the Centre and its reputation for lively, imaginative and scholarly work having widespread influence on public affairs will develop unabated into its second 25 years.

"Unless we can make the philosophic foundations of a free society once more a living intellectual issue, and its implementation a task which challenges the ingenuity and imagination of our liveliest minds, the prospects of freedom are indeed dark. But if we can regain that belief in the power of ideas which was the mark of liberalism at its best, the battle is not lost."

F.A. Hayek, 'The Intellectuals and Socialism' (1949).