



14 November 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
ADDRESS TO THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES**

E&OE.....

Frank Devine, Bob Carr, Roger Douglas, Greg Lindsay, and as I look around the room, a very large number of people who have participated in different ways in the intense and exciting debate and battle of ideas over a very long period of time.

Your mention of Boris Yeltsin of course reminds me of the invitation I received from Kerri-Anne Kennerley to dance in public yesterday and I said Boris Yeltsin was the last head of a government to do that and look what happened to him!!

Can I say what a tremendous pleasure it is to be here tonight to mark the twentieth anniversary of a remarkable organisation that has played a very significant role in an unfolding debate about the future of our country. The way in which people should relate to governments and the role of governments in our society. If you go back twenty years there were not only a lot more monopolies in Australia commercially but there were also a lot more monopolies when it came to the generation of ideas and the generation facts. I think it went beyond the Federal Treasury and the Reserve Bank and the economic partners of one or two of the major banks and insurance companies that was about it as far as economics was concerned. As far as think tanks are concerned apart from the tremendous contribution of the IPA there wasn't really much around and the Centre of Independent Studies has played a tremendous role over that period of time. There has been a quite extraordinary saga throughout the world that watched of course the most amazing event this century and that is the implosion of communism and the ultimate triumph of individual political liberty over political territory which of course is the most remarkable even that I've experienced in my lifetime and a vindication of the philosophical basis of those who opposed political tyranny.

And we've watched over that 20 year period a remarkable transformation in the economic debate the most profound questioning of the role of government in our society this century and there are a lot of people who have been great heroes but I am going to be bold enough tonight to say that the two people in my book who stand out

above the others, one of them is here tonight and that's Roger Douglas - I think Roger Douglas at a political level.... (applause).

I suppose in a generic sense he started off from my point of view in the wrong Party but in a sense ideas transcend Party disciplines in these things, and I think the other person who deserves an accolade is Margaret Thatcher. (Applause) I think some of the sort of modern revisionism, sort of ignored the fact... I mean the real test is whether when you've left the job you've changed the country in an identifiable way and I think both Roger Douglas and Margaret Thatcher have certainly achieved that.

And I think the debate here in Australia there have been some sort of high points of it, I guess and I might be accused by some of you of being a bit sort of self pre-occupied or egocentric in saying it but I think of all the debates that have sort of raged around the role of government and the role of the State as distinct from the role of the individual, none has been more important in Australia over the last twenty years than the deregulation of Australia's labour markets and I think that has been a tremendously important debate intellectually and the power of ideas triumphing even in political banishment is well demonstrated by that particular debate and it is a reminder that the force of a good idea is something that can never really be stopped and many of the people who have played very significant roles in all of those debates are here tonight and I think at State Government level a lot of very complimentary things can be said about what Nick Greiner did in blazing the trail as far as benchmarking of efficient State services are concerned ..(applause).

Now that we have put away mobile telephones I have to pay enormous tribute to my good friend Jeffrey Kennett who also has played a tremendous role and I very freely acknowledge the tremendous contribution that Bob Carr is making in areas like education. Can I say that, having said that, I mean we obviously have some profound differences on other issues but that brings me to saying something serious about the future.

The last 20 years may have been about economic issues such as the labour market but I think the next twenty years really ought to be about some of the non-economic issues.

I think education is a very important part of that debate and the other of course is about having a decent sensible family policy and I applaud the Centre of Independent Studies for the emphasis they are placing on that. I mean we really do, all of us, who are worried about the future of our nation and all of us have to be concerned about a culture that has been far too dominant for far too long in our society that believes that it doesn't really matter any more as to what kind of sense of responsibility or irresponsibility some parents in our community display towards their children.

And until there is a greater focus on the lasting damage that that generation of irresponsibility in many parts of our society has produced, then I think we are going to be a poorer community. I do congratulate the Centre of Independent Studies for the focus that it is placing on social policy, particularly on family policy.

We've had a lot of debate over the last couple of years about whether so-called economic rationalism has gone too far and I think I'm the first speaker to dare utter

those two words tonight. I mean, if you were looking for a generic term to describe all of us, a lot of people out there would say that we were sort of economic rationalists and a lot of you might think others are more sort of economic rationalists than you individually might be. We would describe ourselves perhaps differently. I would describe myself as an economic liberal although albeit self-confessedly a bit of a social conservative. Others would describe themselves by some other label but whatever it is I think we have a rough understanding that we have certain threads in common and those threads in common consist of profound scepticism that Governments can solve all of our problems. I think that's the first thing that we have in common. We have a passionate belief in individual self-fulfilment and achievement. I think we all have a passionate belief that a sense of civic responsibility and a view that we ought to care for people and not in some kind of patronising way or suffocating way but in a sense of civic responsibility and I think finally we also have as people I think as a sense that you do need cohesive units and stabilisers in our society and the greatest stabiliser of all still for all its imperfections is the family unit, and I would like to think that the bonds that bind us together, let's not have a simplistic slogan of economic rationalist or this or that. Some of us in different ways may find those terms offensive but perhaps those four things bind us together in a very very powerful way.

I salute the Centre of Independent Studies. I think it has made a tremendous contribution to the intellectual debate. It has made better policy, we have better governments on both sides of the political equation as a result of organisations like the Centre of Independent Studies and I think it is a magnificent thing that a body like this can have Bob Carr and Peter Collins and John Howard and Nick Greiner and Roger Douglas and Mary Easson and Mr Egan and everybody in the same room. I think that's a good thing and I think society is better for that. I think Australians want their political leaders where they genuinely agree on something to acknowledge that agreement and then get on with the debate in areas where they don't agree with each other. I think Australians are fed up with ritualistic eye gouging ... (applause)... and I think Greg, to you and your organisation has helped do that. It was after all a former Labor leader and Foreign Minister, then Governor General of Australia, who I attended with six years ago when your new headquarters were opened and I think it is very typical of the way in which you've been able to gather people of both sides of politics so I congratulate you, and in doing so can I acknowledge one very obvious fact that you have been, and it's very evident tonight, it is a family occasion, it's not only the CIS family but there's also plenty of Lindsays and Lindsay associates. They're a prolific lot, and I know what a tremendous intellectual and personal support and moral support your wife Jenny and your three children have been.

I suppose it is the oldest cliché in the book, but any man or woman in any kind of position of responsibility needs a man or woman to support them. And I know that, I know that very very well indeed and I'm very grateful for the support I've had from my wife and children and I know that the support that you've had from your wife and three children has been priceless, invaluable and incalculable, and an occasion like this oughtn't to go by without that being acknowledged by me on behalf of everybody here. So happy birthday, congratulations, and particularly to you Greg, for the intellectual stewardship that you've given to this great organisation.

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