

The CLP is writing Australia's far-right playbook

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is the independent member for Johnston.

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Imagine a government that allows children as young as 10 to be arrested off the street and moved 1500 kilometres away without their family being notified, to prisons where spit hoods are used as punishment. A government with an incarceration rate second only to that of El Salvador. Where children and adults are held in watch houses, 20 to a cell, with 24-hour lighting – sometimes with no clean drinking water. A government that makes climate refugees of its own population, selling off massive fossil fuel assets to profit-hungry corporations, with negligible return. A government that, when challenged, shuts down debate.

Most Australians have never had to think hard about the Northern Territory. It has only two seats in the House of Representatives, and barely a quarter of a million people live here. Despite roughly 80 per cent of its budget being funded by the federal government, the NT rarely makes national headlines.

That is precisely why what is happening in the territory matters so much. A government here can go further, faster, with less scrutiny and less national attention than almost anywhere else in the country. Governments here can test boundaries and set precedents for what is acceptable from a government in Australia.

I was elected as an independent to the NT parliament two years ago, amid a landslide win for the Country Liberal Party. Since then, I have watched the CLP inflict decades worth of damage without accountability, rewriting the playbook for punitive, extractive governments Australia-wide in the process.

The CLP's agenda is clear: centralising power, targeting Aboriginal Territorians, and a smash-and-grab approach to fossil fuel expansion. Critics of their regime are undermined and silenced, regardless of their role.

Nowhere is that agenda clearer than in the justice system.

A year ago, I sat in a parliament briefing with a spit hood over my face. The device, recognised internationally as a tool of torture, had been brought into the room by officials trying to justify its use on children in prison.

Later that day, the CLP misused “urgency powers” to reintroduce spit hoods in children's prisons. Urgency powers allow the NT parliament's normal processes to be suspended and a bill passed in a matter of minutes. Misusing them to shut down debate and ram through controversial changes has become a trademark CLP move. Throughout their term, this government has used urgency

powers 13 times – including on their first sitting day, to make it legal to lock up 10-year-olds.

The debate the CLP refuses to have is a simple one: the more people the territory imprisons today, the worse off we will be in the future.

Over-reliance on incarceration entrenches intergenerational disadvantage and trauma and worsens outcomes for all of society. The government knows this because they have been told again and again.

They also know that Indigenous Australians are already the most imprisoned peoples in the world, and in the NT on any given day, 88 per cent of adults and 100 per cent of children behind bars are Indigenous. They know the recidivism rate for adults is 59 per cent; a person who goes to prison is more likely than not to return.

Rather than confronting reality and working with the community to develop safety solutions that work, the CLP has resorted to undermining anyone who disagrees with them, even when those raising concern have a statutory obligation to provide the government with advice.

In mid 2025, when the children's commissioner and Aboriginal land councils warned against major regressive changes to youth justice laws, Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro dismissed them: “[they] can call me racist and whatever else they want to carry on about”, she said. “The noisy people and the apologists and the activists, they can pack up their placards and go home. We're not listening to you.”

In November 2024, Coroner Elisabeth Armitage delivered recommendations for addressing the domestic violence crisis in the NT. In response, the prevention of domestic violence minister, Robyn Cahill, labelled the report “uninspiring”, said the coroner lacked “humility”, and characterised domestic violence as a problem of Aboriginal “culture”.

Just a few months ago, the CLP exploited the tragic death of five-year-old Kumanjayi Little Baby to introduce a child removal bill targeting Aboriginal families. Leaked documents show the bill had been waiting in the wings since at least January 2025 – long before Kumanjayi Little Baby's death handed the CLP its political cover. The bill was opposed by 120 child safety experts, Aboriginal organisations, legal services and almost every minister responsible for child protection across Australia. Their overwhelming evidence demonstrated the bill would not make children safer and would undermine hard-won protections against another

Stolen Generation. The CLP passed it anyway.

In the lead-up to its passage, NT children's commissioner Shahleena Musk resigned after her “effective sidelining” from reforms she did not support. The independent Aboriginal chair of the Children and Families Tripartite Forum, Rob McPhee, resigned soon after, saying the government was “not committed to genuine partnership”.

The full weight of the CLP's refusal to collaborate hit last month when the NT's only independent Aboriginal member of parliament resigned. Yinjiya Guyula represented the seat of Mulka, East Arnhem Land, in the assembly for a decade, as the first Yolŋu person ever elected, representing some of the NT's most vulnerable and remote communities. In his statement, he described the CLP as having “no real intention of working with [Aboriginal] people to bring positive change”, and said that, through their failure of Aboriginal people, the government is committing a “slow genocide”.

Every time the CLP rams through racist, draconian laws and ignores warnings, it locks in damage that will be felt for decades to come. Territorians know the consequences, we've been here before. The ongoing harm of the 2007 Intervention showed what happens when governments respond to poverty with punishment and control.

It's not just poverty that the CLP is punishing. Our environment, already under enormous strain from the climate crisis, will suffer as the government opens new fracking projects, pushing the NT towards an unliveable climate.

According to National Climate Risk Assessment data, large parts of the territory could reach unliveable temperatures as soon as 2070. The NT is already home to climate refugees and rather than confront this reality, the CLP is bulldozing a regulation-free path for massive gas development. In early 2025, the government established a “territory coordinator” – against sustained community opposition – appointing former gas industry executive Stuart Knowles to the role. The territory coordinator has powers to override more than 30 safety, planning and environmental laws to fast-track fossil fuel projects.

At the centre of the CLP's plan sits the Beetaloo Basin, a fracking project climate scientists have labelled a “climate bomb”. Earlier this year, the government announced that fracking the Beetaloo would be a core tenet of their “climate resilience plan”, without apparent irony.

In 2023, under the former Labor

government, the NT already had the world's highest per capita emissions. During Estimates earlier this year, we heard from the NT environment minister that emissions had risen another 68 per cent, with the CLP environment minister this year admitting “we are going to be increasing our emissions in the shorter term”.

On top of reckless gas development, the CLP has branded the NT the next “data centre capital of the globe” faster than Territorians can ask where the water will come from. Robyn Cahill, who is also the minister for trade, business and Asian relations, gave an extraordinary response to genuine questions regarding water security: “We have so much water underground in the Northern Territory that it actually impacts the axis of the Earth when we have a really bad wet season, so we need to use some of it otherwise we might find ourselves flipping the poles again.”

That's ridiculous, but the reality is not. The 12 proposed hyperscale data centres will consume enormous volumes of water. Chief Minister Finocchiaro says the NT has secured approval to power them with fracked gas from the Beetaloo Basin, putting pressure on fragile groundwater systems that many remote communities depend on and increasing our emissions even more.

The CLP is only halfway through its term, and Territorians will be living with the impact of these decisions for decades. With almost no national scrutiny, the CLP has targeted, locked up and institutionalised Aboriginal children, fast-tracked a climate bomb, handed land and water to multinationals with no public consultation, and shut down and bypassed almost every accountability mechanism, as well as anyone who challenges them.

They have done all this in plain sight, and they couldn't have done it without you, the Australian taxpayer. The NT budget is 80 per cent federally funded – half of it from the GST, paid by you every time you buy something at the shops, regardless of where you live. GST revenue, of which the NT receives the most per capita of any jurisdiction, is intended to address disadvantage. Instead, the CLP is using it to bankroll human rights violations and a climate catastrophe.

With far-right ideology surging in popularity and One Nation on the rise, what is to stop future governments around Australia from trying out the CLP playbook? ●