

WINEWS

Politics

Clive Palmer's NT team both slams and supports party behind Darwin port lease to China

By Emilie Gramenz and Matt Garrick

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PHOTO: The UAP is preferencing the CLP in the NT, despite Clive Palmer's animosity to port leases. (AAP: Kelly Barnes)

The leasing of Darwin's port to a Chinese company for 99 years has reared its head in the race to claim the Northern Territory seat of Solomon, with two "strange bedfellows" at odds over the issue yet still offering each other their top billing on the ballot paper.

The Country Liberal Party (CLP) is standing behind its decision to give its highest preferences to mining magnate Clive Palmer's United Australia Party (UAP), despite the fringe party coming out swinging vehemently against the "sale of our ports" to China.

"Labor and Liberal have sold our ports, airports and important infrastructure to companies run by the Chinese Communist Government," read a full-page UAP advertisement in yesterday's News Corp-owned NT News.

"Is our sovereignty for sale? No Australian company could control a port ... in China."

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Key points:

- The Country Liberal Party is standing by its decision to give top preferences to Clive Palmer's party, despite its key policy against leasing ports to China
- Both parties have pointed blame at the federal preferencing system and the necessity to preference as their reasons for supporting each other
- A Charles Darwin University academic has weighed in on the cooperation,

The former CLP government's leasing of the port to Chinese company Landbridge, which has long been linked to the nation's ruling Chinese Communist Party, made international news when the deal was forged in 2015.

calling the opposing parties "strange bedfellows"

The ABC News Chatbot explains

Although the decision sparked controversy in high-level sectors at the time — including a reprimand from then-US President Barack Obama — the CLP has long defended the move.

CLP President Ron Kelly said last night that the two parties were entitled to hold their own policy views on the Darwin port issue.

"United Australia Party has got their policies, the Country Liberals have ours," Mr Kelly said.

"Look, to have a vote in this election, you've got to have a number in every box. You can't not give preferences."

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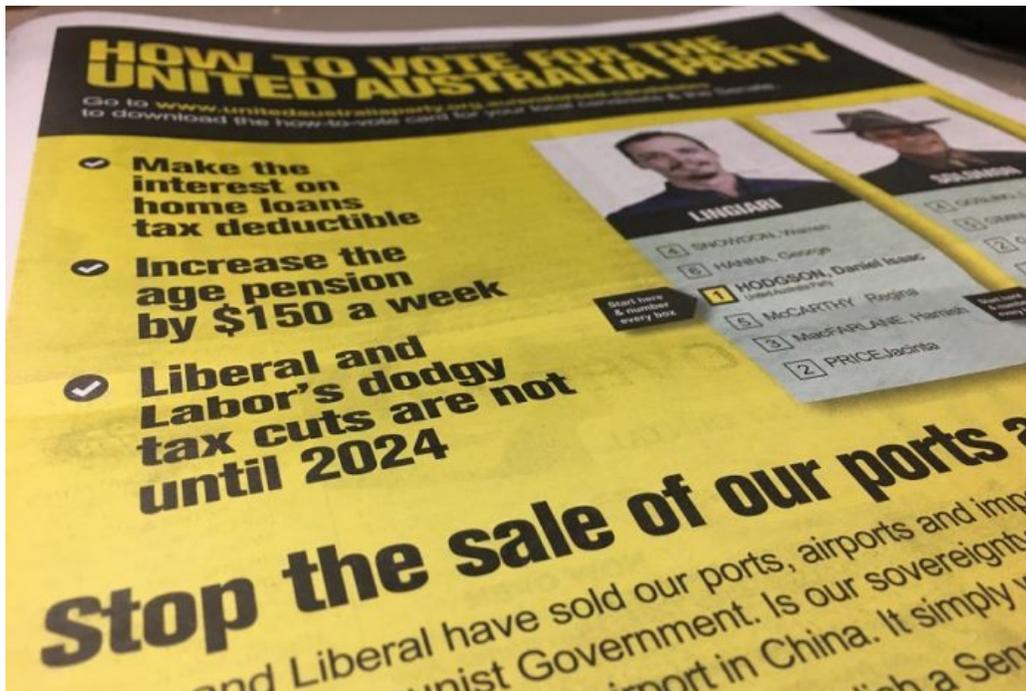


PHOTO: The UAP's NT ad slams the sale of ports to China. (Source: NT News)

For the NT's Senate position, the CLP have preferred the Help End Marijuana Prohibition (HEMP) party ahead of Labor and the Greens.

Labor — who is fielding just one Senate candidate after their number two pick Wayne Kurnorth was disendorsed over an antisemitic post on Facebook — has also preferred HEMP ahead of UAP and the CLP on their Senate ticket.

Palmer's man in Solomon sticks by move

UAP's candidate for Solomon Raj Rajwin, who has run previously under different names for different parties in both the NT and Darwin Council elections, gave a long, at-times rambling defence of why he stood by UAP's policy against the Darwin port lease.

"Look the [major parties'] agenda — they want to sell this thing, they want to sell other things, they want to sell everything," Mr Rajwin said.

"But I [have] never seen where they will start earning money."

In a promotional video on his candidate Facebook page titled "China Control", Mr Rajwin said: "China controls Port Darwin, Newcastle Port, Melbourne Port, Port Cape Preston Western Australia. Whoever controls

Where do you stand?

our ports controls what we export and to who."

More than 40 other UAP candidates running for seats across the country have recorded the same video.

The UAP was predicted to spend tens of millions on advertising during this election campaign, and its social media channels feature several videos focused on sovereignty with titles like "Fuel Reserves: Australia must prevail over foreign powers".

He also stood by his party's decision to preference the CLP's candidate Kathy Ganley first.



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"Look, we have to preference. There is no way of not preferencing in this system," Mr Rajwin said.

'Politics makes for strange bedfellows': Gerritsen

Charles Darwin University academic Rolf Gerritsen compared the preferencing to another odd partnership during World War II, between the leaders of warring nations Britain and Russia.

"Politics makes for strange bedfellows, as Winston Churchill once said, explaining his alliance with Stalin," Professor Gerritsen said.

"So it's strange — it means that UAP obviously do not think that issue is sufficient to shift their final vote.

"That when push comes to shove, they prefer the CLP to Labor."

The Alice Springs-based professor also said it "wouldn't surprise me if they didn't really know that it was the CLP [who leased the port]."

"Put it this way, there are no Nobel Prize winners in the UAP," he said.



PHOTO: Chinese-owned Landbridge Group has a 99-year lease for Darwin Port. (Supplied: NT Government)

Palmer's long, bizarre history in NT politics

Mr Palmer's political parties have had a colourful recent history in the Northern Territory, prior to running candidates for UAP in the upcoming federal polls.

The ABC News Chatbot explains



The now defunct Palmer United Party (PUP) last entered the fray in NT politics in 2014 by recruiting three disaffected CLP backbenchers — Alison Anderson, Larisa Lee and Francis Xavier — after a fallout with the leadership of then-chief minister Adam Giles.

At the time, PUP called for a federal inquiry to look for misconduct within the NT CLP government.

The inquiry never happened, and the three rebel bush backbenchers quit PUP before the 2016 election, with Ms Anderson branding Palmer's party a "national disgrace".

Topics: political-parties, politics-and-government, advertising, advertising-and-marketing, darwin-0800, canberra-2600, china

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