

Is it time for the CLP to change?

THE proposal to change the Country Liberal Party into the Liberal Party deserves serious considerations for at least two good reasons.

It would mean that Territory conservative politics would join Australian mainstream politics and it would open up opportunities for dialogue with the Coalition leading to statehood.

The proposal has been openly canvassed by high-ranking CLP members including its campaign director and former secretary, Mr John Hare, and the president, Mr Shane Stone.

It is well known that the former president, Mr Graeme Lewis, could also be persuaded to join the push if enough substantial arguments in favor are put forward.

They are a pretty formidable trio. Capable and intelligent, they have been clearly frustrated by a perception of ineffectiveness among some CLP MLAs.

They see that perception as the single biggest obstacle to another term in government for the conservative side and want a new broom through every nook and cranny in the party.

They are not alone. Simmering discontent with the parliamentary wing's performance has developed lately into open dissent at branch meetings.

The common denominator of rank-and-file anger is the looming belief that Labor could win the next Territory election unless there is a brand new approach with brand new people.

There is genuine concern at the possibility of a Territory Labor Government dominated by the socialist left faction. The concern may or may not be based on reality. But there is no denying it exists.

It is in this context that the proposal to change the CLP into the Liberal Party has to be examined. The proposal is driven by real anxiety that Labor is ahead in the polls.

That is the downside. The upside is that joining Australian mainstream politics really means a chance to join the vast Liberal Party network and tap into its funds.

It also means entering into serious negotiations (always based on good personal contacts with key people) towards statehood, vital for a much more predictable and consistent financial relationship with the Commonwealth.

Of course there will be resistance to changing the venerable CLP into the Liberal Party.

NT Party

The CLP is, after all, the Territory Party. It has no formal affiliation with the Liberals or Nationals and claims to be a party of Territorians, for Territorians and by Territorians.

At least that is the proud slogan which, it must be said, was probably true during the Everingham years.

But it is probably not true any longer. The population of the Northern Territory has changed substantially since 1978, the year of self-government. Many Territorians, maybe most, know little or nothing of the exciting period that followed the granting of some constitutional rights in that year.

They identify the CLP firmly with the Coalition and any claims to the contrary by party faithful are nonsense.

It follows that it makes sense to make public perception reality.