

Xenophon threatens massive retaliation against any Lib-Lab deal against him

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Labor is heaving a sigh of relief after Malcolm Turnbull's announcement that the Liberals will put the Greens below Labor everywhere.

In particular, the embattled Labor MP for Batman, David Feeney, under serious threat from the Greens, has been given extra life support, although it remains to be seen on July 2 whether he will survive politically. The Liberals' action gives the ALP an incentive to put extra resources into the area.

Greens leader Richard Di Natale said he was still "very confident" about Batman, arguing voters would be "outraged" at the Liberal-Labor deal.

Victorian Liberal president Michael Kroger had been keeping the ALP on tenterhooks with the prospect the Greens might get Liberal preferences in inner-city seats in Melbourne.

But directing preferences to the Greens would have sat badly with Turnbull's oft-repeated message that a vote for the Greens or other minor players is a vote for instability. It would also have gone down very poorly with many in the conservative wing of the Liberal Party.

Turnbull said he had made a call against preferencing the Greens in the national interest. "The big risk at this election is that we would end up with an unstable, chaotic, minority Labor-Greens-independent government as we had before."

Labor has been worried about the Green threat in several seats – Batman and Wills in Melbourne and to a lesser extent, the NSW seats of Grayndler, held by frontbencher Anthony Albanese and Sydney, occupied by deputy Labor leader Tanya Plibersek.

ABC electoral analyst Antony Green told *The Conversation*: "In those inner-city seats the Liberal preferences will probably flow about 70% to Labor. So the Greens would have to outpoll Labor significantly on primaries to have a chance to win." But Green did add that "if Batman is as bad [for Labor] as people say" the Greens could still have a prospect there.

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The decision about preferences brought a furious response from Di Natale. He accused Bill Shorten of telling “appalling lies” in Labor’s earlier claims of a Liberal-Green deal on preferences. Di Natale said he had called Shorten and left a message telling him to take down billboards and any other material suggesting such a deal. Shorten should also apologise, he said.

Sunday’s preference announcement from Turnbull comes ahead of the opening of pre-poll voting on Tuesday.

Labor will preference the Liberals ahead of the Nationals in the three-cornered contests in Murray in Victoria and the Western Australian seats of O’Connor and Durack. Green said Labor’s past record in controlling preferences in seats of this type was poor, largely because it didn’t campaign much in them.

Turnbull declined to be drawn on the Liberals' position in relation to the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT). The NXT is polling 22% in South Australia, according to an analysis [published by The Australian](#) on May 30 of Newspoll figures from the previous two months.

In a pre-emptive attack, Xenophon told Sky he feared the major parties were about to “get into bed with each other” to exclude his party, despite it being in the political centre.

The NXT needs Labor preferences to have a chance of taking the Adelaide Hills Liberal seat of Mayo from former minister Jamie Briggs.

A ReachTEL poll in the SA Liberal seat of Grey taken last Thursday produced a surprising result, suggesting a win for the NXT candidate.

Xenophon said that NXT intended to run open tickets but if the Liberals and Labor preferenced against him “one option might be [for NXT] to preference against incumbents” of whichever party. That could cause huge problems in marginal seats on both sides where NXT came third on first preferences.

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Labor has had talks with Xenophon. But it is frustrated that while he seeks preferences he also wants to run an open ticket himself. Sources said the ALP at this stage had done no preference deal with either the Liberals or Xenophon in SA and is having an open ticket for the start of pre-polling.

Social Services Minister Christian Porter told Sky on Sunday night that those who voted for a Xenophon candidate for the House of Representatives would be “wasting” their vote.

The Greens and the NXT had in common that they could not get productive outcomes for their electorates, Porter said. Neither the national interest nor local electorate interests would be served by having Green or Xenophon members in the lower house, he said.

Green says that if Xenophon carried out his threat against sitting members “he would cause havoc”, making South Australia even harder to read than now.

As if he isn't causing plenty of havoc already.

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