

Swing in Orange may lead to Coalitions of the unwilling

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FIGHT FOR ORANGE: "The very idea that the Nationals would be usurped by the SFFP for a lower house seat is an indication of how the conservative base is fracturing."

Great news, everyone: “deplorables” is now officially part of the lexicon. You're welcome, language!

Yes, Hillary Clinton’s withering description of Donald Trump supporters has been artfully subverted into a term for the politically disenfranchised, or at the very least anyone that doesn't like the major parties very much.

And, problematically for the governments of Australia generally and NSW specifically, it looks like the major parties the deplorables are deserting are the ones in the Coalition.

There were three byelections over the weekend in NSW which were generally declared as being a referendum on the state's opinion of the Coalition government of Mike Baird. And if so, they were not exactly flattering.

In Orange the hitherto safe Nationals seat is in for a nail-biting finish between Philip Donato of the Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party (SFFP) and the Nationals' Scott Barrett, which SFFP upper house member Robert Borsak declared "a win for the deplorables".



Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party candidate Phil Donato (right) had reason to celebrate on Saturday night after a huge swing against the Nationals. Photo: DANIELLE CETINSKI

And it's not like the close result was unpredictable either. Baird's passion for sacking entire councils and then amalgamating them into large, unwieldy organisations under the command of compliant administrators didn't exactly endear him to the voters, and the inelegant reversal of his government's ban on greyhound racing made him look beholden to lobbyists.

And Orange could yet remain in National hands, depending on how Labor and minor party preferences flow, but the very idea that the Nationals would be usurped by the SFFP for a lower house seat is a disturbing indication of how the conservative base is fracturing in Australia, particularly outside the metropolitan areas.

Overall the Nationals experienced a 35 per cent swing against them in NSW, leading to Deputy Premier Troy Grant’s resignation on Tuesday – which is just the sort of enlivening drama with which the last sitting week of State Parliament could really do.

And the SFFP are predictably triumphant in not-quite-victory. “We are a real alternative to the National Party,” Mr Donato declared. “The message to Macquarie Street is clear: Orange deserves better.”

And while this is going to be a bloodbath for Grant and another added pressure for Baird, the bigger issue is that this battle merely illustrates the greater war to come. The Nationals are no longer merely able to be the remora of Australian politics, nibbling on the scraps left by the Liberals.

Now it’s a matter of survival.



Put the Nats Last and No Forced Amalgamations sends a clear message to voters and the Government.

The issue is that the Liberals' main support is in middle Australia, while the Nationals' support is in the more reactionary elements of the often-overlooked heartland.

Up until now that's worked for both parties – the Libs win the fancy suburbs, the Nats win regional areas, both agree to keep their contempt for one another in check when they get into Parliament.

Up until now the Liberals have shouldered the blame, but now the Nationals are being held to account – and that's an exciting new development. For the first time it's looking like the Liberals could be adversely affecting the Nationals' electoral hopes rather than vice versa.

And the thought of a desperate National Party fighting against the Liberals in order to maintain their own voter base should give both Baird and Malcolm Turnbull some sleepless nights ahead.

Either way: if this is indeed the rise of the deplorables, we're gonna need a bigger basket.

<http://www.centralwesterndaily.com.au/story/4291123/comment-swing-in-orange-may-lead-to-coalitions-of-the-unwilling/?cs=103>