

## **Shorten's failure of will sends shameful message to people-smugglers**

Greg Sheridan, Foreign Editor, 12:00AM February 14, 2019

If Bill Shorten becomes prime minister he can be sure of one thing — people-smugglers will challenge his new government.

He has just made it vastly more likely the people-smugglers will win that battle of wills.

If Labor wins in May, a wide variety of international actors will challenge it in different ways.

Beijing will challenge a new government, mixing flattery with subtle, and perhaps not so subtle, intimidation.

Allies might challenge — they frequently make their maximal requests of a new government.

The bureaucracy will challenge. Generally, the bureaucracy favours existing policy, whatever that is, but it also always has a raft of favoured spending ideas the old government has nixed.

No challenge will be more ruthless than that mounted by people-smugglers, an industry worth tens of billions of dollars.

Shorten has just contrived to send the people-smuggling industry this fateful message — once again, they have broken the will of Australian politics.

This is the most disappointing decision Shorten has taken as Opposition Leader.

He and his colleagues in the Labor leadership shed their own political blood at Labor's national conferences to win support for the bipartisan policy that has ended deaths at sea and secured Australian borders. Now he has broken that bipartisan policy.

Two Coalition prime ministers, John Howard and Tony Abbott, at enormous cost, re-established control of our borders and put an end to people-smuggling to Australia.

Labor's pattern is to make notionally humanitarian gestures which unravel the policy. They then lose control of the situation and it becomes an immigration, policy, border security and humanitarian catastrophe, and then they need to take more draconian measures to try to regain control.

Shorten has guaranteed that people-smugglers get this message: Labor is soft on this issue and has no will to enforce tough measures.

Limiting the new medical evacuation procedures to the existing cohorts on Nauru and Manus is largely meaningless for people-smugglers. The "positive desperation" in people who can see what a new life in Australia offers is an overwhelming motivation if there is any chance of success. Shorten has now shown his will can be buckled on this issue so people have every incentive to try again.

Living in Australia is an unbelievable blessing. We should all be thankful for it and be willing to share it, through immigration with a humanitarian component, including generous refugee provisions.

Australians are up for this. When Howard established control of our borders, he was able to massively increase our immigration program.

But the Australian people rightly will only support this if it is the Australian government that chooses who comes here, as a skilled immigrant, a family - reunion entrant or a refugee.

This shameful capitulation by Labor is bad news for Australia.