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Coalition losing its 'bark' on IR: PM

Author: MISHA SCHUBERT, POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT, CANBERRA, With
PAUL ROBINSON

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JOHN Howard yesterday conceded the Coalition had "lost a bit of bark" over its contentious **industrial** relations reforms as fresh polling reaffirmed Labor's solid lead with voters.

But the Prime Minister told Coalition MPs they would be vindicated once predictions of doom under the new laws came to nought.

"It's not surprising we've lost a bit of bark - because of the fear campaign that has been waged, particularly on IR," Mr Howard said. "But when the public realises the sky has not fallen in, and that the legislation is in fact in the nation's interest, we will be vindicated for the positions that we have held strongly and delivered on."

Opposition Leader **Kim Beazley** insisted **workplace** relations had become a "blood feud" - one that the Government had started but Labor would finish.

"(The Government is) out of touch, out of control, arrogant . . . and un-Australian," he told Labor MPs. A nine-member Labor taskforce will travel the country over the summer break seeking out stories of injustice and fear from workers to keep up the heat on the Coalition.

The **union** movement is also taking a campaign against the laws across Victoria warning regional workers of the threat posed to their pay packets under the work changes.

Trades Hall Council Secretary Brian Boyd said unions would not let up on their campaign against the "extremist" legislation.

"The struggle for justice for Australian workers will be a long one and going to regional and country Victoria will send a signal that we are fighting for not just the organised workforce but the whole community," he said.

The war of words over **workplace** issues came as the Howard Government's contentious welfare changes were also expected to pass the Senate late last night, despite last-ditch pleas by welfare advocates for a rethink on slashing welfare payments for some sole parents and partially

disabled people. -- With PAUL ROBINSON

Caption :PHOTO: Taking it to the people: Pip Kelly from the Australian Education **Union** and protesters take their campaign against work laws to Bendigo. PICTURE: SIMON O'DWYER

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