

[[Previous](#)] [[Major News - Federal Politics - Workplace Issues](#)] [[Next](#)]

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Senate strife for Labor's work law repeal

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LABOR'S key election promise to "rip up Howard's IR laws" has stumbled over a Coalition pledge to block their repeal, even if it loses government.

The **Workplace** Relations Minister, **Kevin Andrews**, yesterday said a Coalition-dominated Senate would reject any Labor government legislation repealing **John Howard's industrial** relations overhaul.

"Unless he's got control of the Senate, he wouldn't be able to do that," Mr Andrews said.

Having "gone to this trouble to do what we believe is in the best interests of Australia", Mr Andrews said, "we're hardly likely to turn around and say, 'oh well, we'll just allow the Labor Party to rip it up'."

The Opposition Leader, **Kim Beazley**, branded the comments as "contempt and arrogance". He said an election win would deliver Labor a mandate "to rip them up".

By contrast, the Coalition had no mandate to introduce "these extreme IR laws" because they were not foreshadowed at the last election, he said, adding: "The Howard Government arrogantly rode roughshod over middle Australia."

Mr Andrews later refused to elaborate on his comments, made on Melbourne radio.

However, it appears his comments do not reflect a developed Government strategy, through which its typical response to scenarios based on what might, or might not, come to pass is to dismiss them as hypothetical.

When the Coalition went to the 1993 election promising to introduce a GST, the Labor prime minister, Paul Keating, sharpened the choice for voters by declaring a Labor Senate opposition would not stand in the way of the tax if

the Coalition won the election. Labor won the election against the odds.

The Coalition will retain a Senate majority until at least July 2008. It needs to win only half the contested Senate seats at the half Senate election, due late next year, to keep its majority for the following three years.

If both Labor and the Coalition were in Senate minorities from July 2008, and Labor was in government, the fate of the repeal pledge would rest with minor parties or independents holding the balance of power.

The importance of the repeal pledge to Labor's election credentials is reflected in its leasing of 40 billboards around the country featuring Mr Beazley tearing up the legislation and bearing the words, "these unfair laws will go".

Last month Mr Beazley told the NSW state Labor conference: "When we win next year, the first thing I'll do is ... build a new **industrial** system based on Australian values."

Mr Beazley likened the **workplace** agreements, introduced by the Howard Government 10 years ago, to the "poison tip of **John Howard's industrial** relations arrow".

"They can't be fixed; they must be rejected," he said.

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Section: News and Features

[[Previous](#)] [[Major News - Federal Politics - Workplace Issues](#)] [[Next](#)]

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