

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

Tuesday 13 June 2006

THE AGE

Beazley IR plan 'kills ambition'

Author: MICHELLE GRATTAN, POLITICAL EDITOR, CANBERRA

Publication: The Age (3,Tue 13 Jun 2006)

Edition: First

Keywords: **Kim (1),Beazley (1),Workplace (1),John (1),Howard (1),union (6),industrial (4)**

Prime Minister on attack over AWAs

OPPOSITION Leader **Kim Beazley's** plan to scrap Australian **Workplace** Agreements would cut the living standards of hundreds of thousands of "aspirational Australians", Prime Minister **John Howard** says.

Attacking Mr Beazley's tough new line, Mr Howard said it was "**union-**devised, **union-**driven, the result of weak-kneed behaviour by him in face of **union** bullying".

Meanwhile, Mr Beazley swept aside the criticism by business that his policy would be retrograde. "I make no apology for standing up for Australian workers," he said. "All these AWAs rip away conditions."

He insisted productivity improvement came from employers and employees sitting down and working out the issues. It was "proven" that productivity came best from collective agreements.

Mr Beazley - who last year indicated he would allow AWAs to stay while anticipating they would "disappear" under Labor's **industrial** relations policy - said he had decided to adopt a "hardline" opposition to them because of the experience of fabric chain Spotlight.

Spotlight workers were worse off when they signed AWAs under the Government's new WorkChoices legislation.

Government sources believe the Coalition can score points by painting Mr Beazley's policy as lacking economic credibility, and him as under the thumb of trade **union** leaders who had been demanding he strengthen his position against AWAs.

Labor sources said getting rid of AWAs had "near universal" support in the Labor Party. Internal debate had been about how to go about it: whether to scrap them or neutralise them.

ACTU secretary Greg Combet said last night ACTU polling had indicated people "well understand they will be disadvantaged by individual contracts".

He said Mr Beazley's policy would not create any problem with voters and "the more the business community comes out against Labor on this the better".

Mr Combet disputed the Government claim that people on AWAs were better off, saying the figures were distorted by including executives, managers, and miners in north-west Australia. For ordinary people, they were "vastly inferior" in pay levels, he said.

More than half a million people are on AWAs.

Mr Howard said Mr Beazley's policy would take Australia back to **industrial** laws that obtained when Australia had more than a million people out of work.

He said Mr Beazley was telling people who wanted to better themselves via AWAs, "I won't let you do so." The real test for policy was the strength of the economy.

"In 1990, we had all the alleged protections under the sun in **industrial** relations but it didn't stop people being thrown out of work and it didn't stop their wages being cut," Mr Howard said.

Mr Beazley was "flying in the face of modern day reality to take us back to a system that is going to be **union**-dominated when fewer than 20 per cent of workers employed in the private sector belong to a **union**".

But Mr Beazley said "working" businessmen - as distinct from business lobbies - to whom he had spoken believed Mr Howard had gone too far in **industrial** relations.

Headline: Beazley IR plan 'kills ambition'

Author: MICHELLE GRATTAN, POLITICAL EDITOR, CANBERRA

Edition: First

Section: News

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

Copyright © Fairfax