

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

Tuesday 13 June 2006



IR move a risk for Labor

Author: BRAD NORINGTON

Publication: The Australian (002,Tue 13 Jun 2006)

Edition: 1 - All-round Country

Keywords: **Kim (1),Beazley (1),industrial (2),John (2),Howard (2),Workplace (4)**

COMMENT

DEPENDING how he handles it, **Kim Beazley's** decision to make **industrial** relations a centrepiece of Labor's election strategy could be the making or breaking of his last run at becoming prime minister.

It will give him the momentum he has wanted for months to build a strong support base with voters by establishing clear differentiation between Labor and **John Howard's** Coalition.

Alternatively, the firm stand Beazley has taken -- by promising unequivocally to scrap Howard's individual **workplace** agreements -- will turn out to be an aberration.

The risk for Beazley is that public debate over Howard's **industrial** relations laws could disintegrate into a rhetorical slugging match if the evidence does not match Labor claims that community standards are being manifestly eroded.

In that circumstance, Howard could regain the upper hand, confident in his persistent line so far that it is a strong economy that counts with voters.

What Beazley needs to do is plant the clear idea in voters' minds that Howard's **workplace** regime poses a direct threat to their living standards -- almost like an automatic reflex -- while Labor offers an economically responsible alternative.

One Sydney newspaper reported yesterday that Beazley, at Labor's annual NSW conference on Sunday, had promised to ``abolish the **workplace** contracts that **John Howard** introduced 10 years ago".

It missed the point. On the face of it, it is true that Beazley wants to abolish Australian **Workplace** Agreements introduced by Howard in January 1997. But the critical factor that gives Beazley a potential edge with voters is what happened on March 27 this year when Howard made a fundamental change to AWAs.

No longer were workers' conditions for AWAs, or collective agreements for that matter, to be compared ``overall'' with a comprehensive set of 20 minimum award standards.

Instead, Howard set a new standard of just five conditions -- a minimum wage, sick leave, annual leave, parental leave and an (ill-defined) average 38-hour week.

By announcing that Labor would scrap AWAs, Beazley is flagging a revived set of penalty rates and the like that cannot simply be bargained away for nothing.

His task is to constantly remind voters what they have lost under Howard.

Headline: IR move a risk for Labor
Author: BRAD NORINGTON
Edition: 1 - All-round Country
Section: Local

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

Copyright © News Ltd