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Tuesday 13 June 2006



Reversal on AWAs reprieves Beazley

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

Edition: 2 - All-round First

Keywords: **KIM (1), Beazley (1), workplace (2), Stephen (2), Smith (2), industrial (8), John (1), Howard (1), union (8)**

KIM Beazley's about-face on **workplace** agreements has won him a reprieve from leadership pressures and kept alive **Stephen Smith's** chances of keeping his frontbench job as Opposition **industrial** relations spokesman.

Despite some discontent within the Labor Party over Mr Beazley's sudden decision to dump personal contracts, the move has soothed raw relations with the labour movement.

The Opposition Leader, supporting a campaign by Qantas baggage handlers, said yesterday that **John Howard** had ripped up the rule book and ``what we're going to put in its place is a fair and balanced system''.

Mr Beazley said the new **industrial** laws came into effect in March and ``there is no amending them''.

``There is no saving them. These laws posit an evil prospect for ordinary Australians just struggling to make sure that they work in a safe environment, make sure that they get proper remuneration.''

Mr Beazley said that was why he had decided to do away with all AWAs.

On Sunday, the Labor leader told the NSW ALP conference of his surprise decision to dump AWAs and adopt the hardline **union** position of complete opposition to individual contracts.

The Prime Minister said Mr Beazley was giving in to **union** bullies who wanted to take Australia back more than a decade in **industrial** relations.

``This used not to be Mr Beazley's policy. Only a few months ago he acknowledged the unrealism of trying to get rid of AWAs,'' Mr Howard said.

``He is clearly being bullied into this policy by the unions, particularly the unions in NSW. His **industrial** relations policy will take us back to a set of **industrial** laws ... when this country had more than a million people of out work.

`` This policy declaration by Mr Beazley is **union**-devised, **union**-driven, the result of weak-kneed behaviour by him in the face of **union** bullying.

`` It ... neglects the longer-term interests of Australia and it completely misunderstands the need for this country to have a flexible **industrial** relations system to take full advantage of the globalisation of which Australia is permanently part."

Some Labor figures were dismayed that Mr Beazley made his announcement without fully consulting his front bench, and expressed disappointment at the policy turnaround.

There were suggestions that Labor's **workplace** spokesman, **Stephen Smith**, who has been under pressure from the **union** movement over **industrial** relations, had opposed the idea of abandoning AWAs.

But some ALP frontbenchers said Mr Beazley's decision had to be made at the NSW conference, and said Mr Smith had put all sides of the argument to the frontbench team.

Plans for a reshuffle of the front bench, including a shift from **industrial** relations for Mr Smith, were played down yesterday. Mr Beazley's leadership and Mr Smith's role had been queried by sections of the labour movement in recent weeks.

There was widespread dissatisfaction within the **union** leadership over Labor's performance as the Howard Government introduced its new labour laws.

But Mr Beazley's weekend decision to do away with AWAs, while feared by some, has been welcomed by **union** leaders and ALP frontbenchers, boosting his flagging leadership.

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