

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

**Tuesday 13 June 2006**

---



## Unions push ALP for more

Author: Brad Norington, Tracy Ong

Publication: The Australian (001, Tue 13 Jun 2006)

Edition: 1 - All-round Country

Keywords: **KIM (1), Beazley (1), Union (7), industrial (6), John (1), Howard (1), Workplace (7), BCA (1), Stephen (1), Smith (1), industry (1)**

---

**KIM Beazley** is under pressure from unions to reinstate a swag of minimum working conditions wiped out by the Howard Government -- as a way of pushing up pay packets -- if Labor is re-elected.

The demand came as unions also stepped up an anti-government campaign with multi-million-dollar fighting funds and a new round of television advertisements.

Many of Australia's 1.8 million **union** members in the finance, media and public sectors will be levied \$50 to \$100 a year in extra dues to finance campaigns in the lead-up to the next federal election.

Senior **union** officials want Mr Beazley to match his weekend pledge to make **industrial** relations central to Labor's election strategy by committing to the reintroduction of about 10 conditions over and above the five allowed under **John Howard's** new **workplace** laws.

Unions NSW secretary John Robertson confirmed yesterday the list included penalty rates for working overtime, public holidays and weekends.

As well, he said unions wanted Labor legislation or stronger awards to set standards on maximum weekly working hours, minimum breaks between shifts, meal breaks, leave loadings, picnic days and access to **union** training courses.

Mr Robertson said that if these conditions were traded off under "flexible" **workplace** agreements, then employers should pay compensation equivalent to any financial loss -- contrary to the Prime Minister's new **workplace** laws.

The **union** position, which follows Mr Beazley's pledge on Sunday to abolish individual **workplace** contracts, further inflames Labor's conflict with big business.

Mr Beazley said last night voters were more concerned about businesses

strong-arming workers than they were about being forced by unions to comply with their agreements.

``There is not an issue out there these days of a difficulty with unions," he told ABC television.

The Business Council of Australia warned yesterday that Mr Beazley's promise that Labor would scrap Australian **Workplace** Agreements had invited the **union** demand for **workplace** ``prescription and re-regulation" under a Labor government.

**BCA** spokesman Mark Triffit said: ``The danger of going backwards is that it invites a whole range of matters being re-introduced that were resolved in an **industrial** relations sense.

``It throws uncertainty into the mix and we are now seeing policy on the run.

``Labor has used the abolition of AWAs to demonstrate their credibility to one particular interest group without showing how an alternative system would work."

Opposition **industrial** relations spokesman **Stephen Smith** confirmed that federal Labor was working on a new set of minimum standards higher than Mr Howard's list of five: a minimum wage, four weeks annual leave, 10 days sick leave, 12 months unpaid parental leave and an averaged 38-hour week.

Mr Smith said Labor's policy -- which appears to have won him and his leader a reprieve over internal leadership tensions -- would amount to re-introducing a ``no disadvantage test" that had been abolished by Mr Howard.

The important point, he said, was that **workplace** flexibility under Labor would be ``up but not down".

``Our job is to persuade business that general flexibility and productivity does not mean screwing down entitlements," he said.

Confirming that Labor's national standards -- either legislated or as awards -- would include penalty rates and overtime, Mr Smith added: ``We need to do more work on what the minimum standards will be."

Mr Howard yesterday accused Mr Beazley of being bullied by unions, saying Labor's **industrial** relations policy would reduce the living standards of hundreds of thousands of workers who wanted flexible conditions.

Continued -- Page 2

From Page 1

The Prime Minister also rejected that Labor was attracting voters fearful of losing conditions under his Government's cuts to minimum standards.

``The real test is the strength of the economy," Mr Howard said. ``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."

ACTU secretary Greg Combet said unions wanted Labor to adopt a stronger set of minimum standards, but their final position would be determined at a congress in October.

Australian Manufacturing Workers **Union** national secretary Doug Cameron said Labor should introduce a new ``no disadvantage test''. The award system could be expanded without any detrimental effect on productivity, he said.

``The pendulum has swung too far to employers, and we need to restore the balance," he said.

Mr Robertson said he wanted a strong award system restored but accepted that some previous minimum conditions could be left to **industry** negotiations.

With new ACTU-funded television ads attacking the Government going to air this week, more unions are preparing to fund the fight against the **industrial** relations reforms, using levies.

The ACTU will pour \$9 million a year, raised from **union** members, into a publicity campaign before next year's election.

Headline: Unions push ALP for more  
Author: Brad Norington, Tracy Ong  
Edition: 1 - All-round Country  
Section: Local

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

Copyright © News Ltd