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PM faces IR friendly fire

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PRIME Minister **John Howard** repudiated a former Liberal MP for suggesting the Government's **industrial** relations changes could cost it the next election.

Gosford party branch president Malcolm Brooks, OAM, -- a former state MP -- used his newsletter, The Way Ahead, to describe the \$40 million WorkChoices advertising campaign as ``gobbledygook" that turned voters away.

``If this trend continues, we will lose support among the majority of workers, and when this happens we will have no one but ourselves to blame," Mr Brooks wrote.

Labor confronted Mr Howard with the newsletter in Parliament but he said Mr Brooks was wrong.

Business also yesterday added to the row over **workplace** contracts.

The Business Council of Australia compared **Kim Beazley** unfavourably with predecessor Mark Latham.

BCA president Michael Chaney warned that he regarded Mr Beazley's vow to scrap individual **employment** contracts in the same dim light as the famously anti-business Mr Latham.

Labor's IR stand dominated Question Time as Mr Chaney warned Mr Beazley his pledge to scrap Australian **Workplace** Agreements put Labor's economic credibility on the line.

In the lead-up to the 2004 election, Mr Latham made no secret of his belief Labor should not trust **industry** leaders because their allegiance lay with the Liberal Party.

The low point was Mr Latham's reported early departure from a **BCA** dinner after reportedly behaving in a petulant and disinterested fashion.

Mr Chaney left little doubt about his feelings yesterday in a letter urging Mr Beazley to drop his plan to abolish individual **employment** contracts.

``Prior to the last election, the **BCA** was critical of the ALP for seeking to re-regulate the labour market and reverse the direction of **workplace** reform," he wrote.

``The **BCA** views your announcement in the same light."

The **BCA** represents some of the nation's biggest companies.

Those companies employ almost a million people between them and account for nearly one-third of the country's exports.

Mr Beazley hit back at the **BCA**, saying business leaders actually believed the Government had gone too far with its **workplace** changes.

``I have talked to hundreds of business people over the course of the last year, and not one of them who's spoken to me believes that **John Howard** has gone anything other than too far in the **industrial** relations legislation he's put in place," Mr Beazley said.

``It's important to understand that business did not ask for these **industrial** changes.

``They didn't."

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Australian **Workplace** Agreements

COVER about about 3 per cent of the workforce.

63 per cent remove penalty rates, but 84 per cent pay above the award.

MUST meet basic conditions on wages, leave and hours.

Collective Agreements

COVER about 40 per cent of the workforce.

SET out wages, conditions and annual pay rises.

ARE usually negotiated by unions.

Awards

COVER about 20 per cent of workers.

SET out minimum wages and conditions such as penalty rates and shift allowances.

Common law contracts

COVER about 30 per cent of workers.

WRITTEN or verbal contracts enforceable by the courts under common law.

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