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Former Liberal warns of growing IR backlash

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A FORMER Liberal MP has warned that voters are deserting the Howard Government over **industrial** relations, as the mining **industry** insisted Labor's plan to abolish Australian **Workplace** Agreements would cost \$6.6 billion a year.

The clash over **workplace** laws dominated question time again yesterday.

Labor revealed that Gosford councillor and former NSW state MP Malcolm Brooks, writing in his Liberal branch newsletter, had warned that workers wanted guarantees that wages and work conditions would be protected.

"Many workers who voted for **John Howard** over the last decade are not 'cutting loose' over the **industrial** relations reforms," he wrote.

As Labor seized on this as proof of the need to soften the new laws, the Prime Minister rejected the analysis. He said similarly dire predictions of **workplace** reforms 10 years ago had not been fulfilled.

Labor also demanded the Government rethink its axing of unfair dismissal appeal rights for millions of workers, citing the sacking of child-care worker Emily Connor.

But Mr Howard said he made no apology for scrapping laws that had "destroyed jobs".

The clash came as the International Monetary Fund's managing director, Rodrigo de Rato, warned that it was vital to balance **workplace** flexibility and social safety nets.

He said governments should ensure "societies have to understand the rules and be able to live with them".

Meanwhile, the Australian Mines and Metals Association warned that a

move to axe AWAs could cost the mining sector \$6.6 billion a year in lost productivity gains.

Chief executive Steve Knott said the agreements had brought wage rises by slashing the time taken to change work practices.

Minerals Council of Australia chief executive Mitch Hooke said axing AWAs would be "silly . . . like rolling back the GST".

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