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Beazley defies attacks over workplace pledge

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

OPPOSITION Leader **Kim Beazley** has come out fighting against the Business Council of Australia, declaring it should keep itself "at arm's length" from government.

Confronting attacks on his pledge to scrap Australian **Workplace** Agreements, Mr Beazley said it was no surprise that businesses liked an instrument "that gives an employer all power".

"Why wouldn't the employers like it?" he asked. "Should they have it? No. On behalf of middle Australia, I'll say to them . . . 'you can't have it' ."

Mr Beazley yesterday sent a detailed reply to the attack on him by council president Michael Chaney, who described Labor's position on AWAs as unacceptable "both in policy and economic terms".

Asked whether he saw the **BCA** as being in cahoots with the Government, Mr Beazley told The Age: "They wouldn't want to get themselves into that position with any government. They always need to keep themselves at arm's length, and that's something that they need to think about".

Mr Beazley produced figures to show that in the mining sector, where AWAs are widely used, people on collective bargaining agreements were better off than those on individual ones.

Average weekly earnings under collective bargaining were \$1624.80, while the average under individual contracts (including AWAs and common law contracts) was \$1498.30.

In a fresh attack, Australian Chamber of Commerce and **Industry** chief Peter Hendy accused Labor of "serious deception" for claiming common law contracts could replace AWAs with no loss of productivity.

As **industrial** relations dominated Parliament again yesterday, Labor MPs defied a ban on props after a series of stunts in recent weeks, waving graphs on cuts to the minimum wage.

But Prime Minister **John Howard** was unapologetic. "What matters in relation to economic performance is what you deliver," he said.

Labor also said warehouse workers at a large office products manufacturer, Esselte, had been offered a pay rise of just \$1.25 an hour in exchange for losing all penalty rates for working overtime.

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