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# We need skilled, not cowed, workers

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THESE are bad laws, and I repeat my guarantee: when Labor wins office we will rip up this **industrial** relations legislation.

These laws introduce an awful Americanised dog-eat-dog system into Australia. They are so bad the Government spent \$55 million of taxpayers' money to make them look good. Mr Howard wasted our money.

Australians are good workers - the hardest-working people in the Western world.

If they see something might be wrong in terms of safety or office management they often speak up. This sometimes leads to conflict with a supervisor. From now on, if the boss or supervisor does not like what they hear, they can sack the person on the basis of "operational requirements" - a vague, catch-all term.

That is one example of how these laws tip the balance of power in the **workplace** towards employers and against employees. They make workers easy to sack. They allow for the stripping away of penalty rates and overtime - crucial to peoples' mortgage repayments.

If we win Government, Labor will establish a new unfair dismissal claims process. It would be modelled on the states' small claims and residential tenancy tribunals.

Our plan would allow both parties to be heard, discouraging expensive lawyers, prohibiting contingency fees and filtering out ambit claims.

Labor would put in place a balanced **industrial** relations system, one that actually helps the economy expand. **John Howard** and **Peter Costello** say their way - the unfair way - will make the economy more flexible and increase productivity, but there's no evidence, even in multiple Treasury analyses, that productivity will improve.

What Howard wants is a low-wage economy to compete with the rest of the world. What Labor believes is Australia needs a high-skills economy. To beat the world, Australia needs its workforce to be smart, not cowed. We do not want to be forced to compete with Chinese and Indian wage levels.

A Beazley Labor government would reintroduce a fair **industrial** relations system, and policies that skill the workforce.

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