



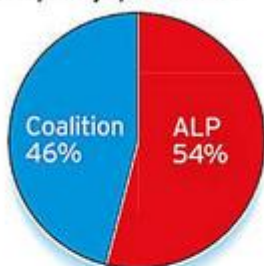
PM's industrial revolution gets a poll shock

By Mark Metherell Political Correspondent

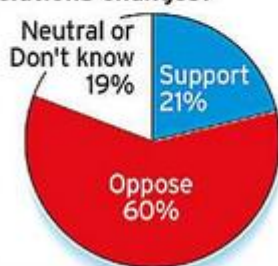
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HERALD POLL

Two-party-preferred



Do you support or oppose the planned industrial relations changes?



SMH GRAPHIC 5/7/05

SOURCE: NIELSEN

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Voters have emphatically rejected the Federal Government's pledge to dilute union power and slashed their support for the Prime Minister and the Coalition.

The latest *Herald Poll* shows John Howard has incurred the biggest single plunge in his personal approval since taking office after declaring his tough industrial relations changes as his top priority for a Senate now ruled by the Coalition.

Despite troubled times for the Opposition, support for Labor has surged ahead of the Coalition - 54 per cent to 46 per cent in two-party-preferred terms.

After a week of nationwide protests and an ACTU television advertising campaign against the changes, the poll shows 60 per cent of Australians who are aware of the plans oppose them, including 23 per cent of Coalition supporters.

The pollster ACNielsen says the dramatic upturn in sentiment for the labour movement is a significant pointer to the first clash in a long time between the Government and Opposition on an issue of importance to many voters. The changes include a significant winding back of unfair dismissal protections and award conditions.

Labor's primary vote has risen above the Coalition's for the first time in a year, to 41 per cent. This is despite a four-point slump in voter approval for the Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, who faced internal criticism over last month's frontbench reshuffle and last week was dismissed as a "stand-for-nothing type leader" by his predecessor, Mark Latham.

It is the third successive monthly fall for Mr Beazley, equalling his lowest rating of 42 per cent in September 2001.

But Mr Howard's personal approval rating slumped in the past month by a record 10 points to 49 per cent, taking him below 50 per cent for the first time since August 2001. Mr Howard's rating as preferred Prime

Minister also dived by five points to 50 per cent, while 39 per cent prefer Mr Beazley, up by four points.

The national poll of 1416 people, taken at the weekend by ACNielsen, recorded a three-point rise in primary vote for Labor to 41 per cent, while the Coalition slid four points to 40 per cent.

Last night the Treasurer, Peter Costello, said he was not unduly worried by the results, although he conceded the Government had a long fight ahead of it to win over the public. He told ABC's *Lateline* the unions had been "first out of the blocks" with their campaign, adding it was always easier to sell a negative than a positive. However, once people had time to "think about it maturely and soberly", opinion would swing the Government's way.

ACNielsen's research director, John Stirton, said the protests against industrial relations changes "appear to have hurt the Government and Mark Latham's recent attacks on Mr Beazley have not helped the Opposition Leader. While the Labor Party was distracted by internal bickering last week, the unions appear to have scored some significant hits against the Government."

However, Mr Stirton said the results on industrial relations may change once the Government begins its TV campaign in support of the changes. "The Government has not yet put its case to the same extent as the unions ... and so these results could be the high-water mark of feeling on this issue," he said.

Mr Stirton said it was important to note that the poll measured support for the reforms as a whole and did not test support for individual elements.

"Of greatest significance is that for the first time in a long time there is a clear point of differentiation between Labor and the Coalition on a matter that is very important to many voters."

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