

## Government's industrial relations laws hitting home

**SPECIAL EDITION**  
Industrial Relations  
Pay cut or lose your job

### Chris Bowen writes ...

■ The Howard Government's new industrial relations system has now been in place for two months, however it is already starting to affect people's lives.

It's important that you know what these changes mean for you and how you can best protect yourself against these changes.

It will be several years before the full effect is felt. Page 2 provides a ready reckoner about how industrial relations policies have changed since the Howard Government came into power.

We also take a look at the well-publicised Spotlight Australian Workplace Agreement. This contract dramatically slashes the working conditions and take-home pay of their workers.

On page 3, I have provided some examples of the affect of the work place relations changes so far and some advice on what to do if you are dismissed under the new laws.

The new laws have come in at the worst possible time. Interest rates, health insurance premium rises and petrol prices have meant that the family budget is under real pressure.

Also on page 3, I have included details about Labor's Small Business Plan.

This is our strategy to help save small businesses time and money.

We have a great number of small business owners within Prospect, and this plan is designed to make life easier for these people.

As a part of this plan, I will be moving a Private Members Bill regarding Commonwealth Government Payment to small businesses when Parliament resumes in August.

The next election is still a long way away, but Labor has been developing policies to help families and make the economy stronger.

If you have any feedback or questions about Labor policies, please feel free to get in contact with me by phone, letter or email.

### Spotlight on Spotlight

■ Under the cover of the Howard Government's IR changes, Spotlight, a major national retailer, has slashed the working conditions of their staff, trading away penalty rates and overtime for a 2 cent per hour pay rise.

An employee who works weekends would be \$90 a week worse off.

The Spotlight AWA has also eliminated paid rest breaks and breaks between shifts, minimum and maximum shift lengths, as well as an existing cap on the number of consecutive days which can be worked.

The scary part is that everything that is laid out in Spotlights AWA is legal according to the new minimum standards set out by the IR Laws.



Fighting for job security: Kim Beazley and Labor are fighting to protect workers' rights, jobs and wages against attacks from the Howard Government.

# Brave new world... Pay cut or lose your job

■ The Howard Government's workplace relations laws are already taking a toll on working Australians.

Here are some real examples of the new laws in action ...

## 16 year old: Sign or else

16 year old Amber Oswald turned up for her casual job at Pow Juice bars and was given an Australian Workplace Agreement contract. The contract cut her wages from \$14 an hour to \$8.50 an hour. She refused to sign. The company eventually re-instated her full wages, but lawyers agree that the company's actions are legal under the new laws.

## Conditions slashed

A network of childcare centres placed their staff on Australian Workplace Agreement contracts

that cut salaries by between \$138 and \$313 per week and abolished:

- Sick Leave;
- Rest Breaks;
- Annual Leave Loading;
- Supervisor Allowances;
- Overtime Payments beyond an extra 2 hours work; and
- First Aid Allowance.

## 29 sacked: Then told re-apply for fewer jobs

An abattoir at Cowra sacked 29 meatworkers and immediately invited them to apply for fewer jobs at lower wages. The abattoir caved into public pressure but, as ACTU Secretary Greg Combet has said: 'It is clearly possible for people to be sacked and re-employed on lower wages and conditions under the laws.'

## Petrol prices: Driving up the cost of living

■ One of the biggest problems for family budgets in the last 12 months has been petrol prices.

Higher petrol prices mean higher inflation, which leads to higher interest rates.

The Howard Government has refused to do anything.

There is no doubt that the world economy has had the biggest impact on petrol prices. That doesn't mean that governments should sit on their hands and do nothing.

A Labor Government will:

- Ask the Competition Commission to monitor and report on petrol prices. Why do they go up so much just before holidays? Why are they so much higher in some areas? The Competition Commission itself has said 'something fishy is going on.'
- Develop different fuels and fuel sources so we are not so reliant on foreign oil. These would include CNG, ethanol, biodiesel, and hydrogen.
- Develop a fuel industry plan.
- Examine tax rebates for converting cars from petrol to LPG.
- Change the tax and grants systems to encourage investments in different types of fuel.



Concerned: Interest rates, petrol prices and health insurance increases have put the squeeze on family budgets.

Before Howard Government elected	New Howard laws blocked in the Senate	Post-introduction of new laws
<b>JOB SECURITY</b>		
Dismissals had to be procedurally fair. Unions and workers had to be consulted once an employer decided to retrench 15 or more employees.	Introduce exemption for businesses with 20 employees or less from unfair dismissal. Employees can be unfairly dismissed in the first 3 months.	Unfair dismissal laws abolished for businesses with less than 100 employees. Redundancy pay abolished for businesses with less than 15 permanent employees.
<b>AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACE AGREEMENTS – INDIVIDUAL CONTRACTS</b>		
Must provide better conditions than those under the award or collective bargaining.	AWA's introduced. Subject to the 'No-Disadvantage' test, where the conditions in the AWA must at least be equal to those in the award.	Only need to meet 5 minimum conditions. Don't need to be approved before they can begin, and can last for up to 5 years.
<b>AWARD RIGHTS AND CONDITIONS</b>		
Industrial Relations Commission decided on award conditions without government interference	20 allowable matters cover conditions to be covered in awards.	20 allowable matters abolished, and replaced with 4 minimum conditions.

## Keeping interest rates low: Labor's guarantee

■ Mortgages are bigger than ever. Keeping interest rates low is more important than ever.

The skills and infrastructure crises in Australia have put more pressure on interest rates.

This has been said repeatedly by the Reserve Bank, and Labor's plans to fix these crises will put downward pressure on interest rates.

Also, Labor will keep the budget in surplus, keeping interest rates low.

**Broken promise: At the 2004 Federal election John Howard promised to keep interest rates low but since then we have seen two further interest rate rises.**

### John Howard's record: Six straight interest rate rises.

DATE	CHANGE IN INTEREST RATES %	REPAYMENTS ON AVERAGE MORTGAGE* \$
8 May 2002	<b>UP 0.25%</b> ▲	<b>\$ 826.26</b>
5 June 2002	<b>UP 0.25%</b>	<b>\$ 863.18</b>
5 November 2003	<b>UP 0.25%</b>	<b>\$1,076.48</b>
3 December 2003	<b>UP 0.25%</b>	<b>\$1,099.82</b>
2 March 2005	<b>UP 0.25%</b>	<b>\$1,288.81</b>
3 May 2006	<b>UP 0.25%</b>	<b>\$1,386.48</b>

\*Interest only. Source: Reserve Bank of Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics  
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# Labor's plan for a better Australia

The next Federal election is still a long way away. However Labor has been developing a set of policies for a better, fairer Australia with a strong, innovative economy. Kim Beazley set out Labor's approach in his budget response.

## When you put in, you get back

Kim Beazley's pact with Middle Australia begins with 5 simple commitments:

1. Fix the skills crisis by introducing free TAFE for traditional trades and child care workers.
2. Build 260 new child care centres on primary school grounds, giving Australian parents places where they need them.
3. Equip our children with a national super-fast computer network so they can compete in the high tech future.
4. Train young Australians instead of importing foreign workers.
5. Help families secure their future prosperity by job security back into the industrial relations system.

## Fix climate change: Sign Kyoto now

Labor's policy is clear and straightforward: Sign Kyoto now.

Labor believes we must reduce emissions now, and avoid the massive costs of adapting the economy years down the track.

In Government, Labor will adopt a target of reducing our greenhouse emissions by 60% by 2050.

We won't do this by introducing nuclear energy, which doesn't stack up for Australia and would create a whole new set of problems with nuclear waste.

A Beazley Labor Government will invest in technology like clean coal and combined natural gas to meet our environmental targets.

## Protecting children from Internet porn

Many parents have raised concerns about their children accessing violent and pornographic sites on the Internet.

Labor has a plan that all Internet Service Providers (ISPs) must offer a filtered 'clean feed' Internet service to all homes, schools and other public Internet points accessible by children.

This 'clean feed' system would prevent users from accessing any content that has been identified as prohibited by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, including sites containing child pornography, acts of extreme violence or cruelty, and X-rated material.

Internet filter software just won't do! Almost two-thirds of parents don't have Internet filters on their family computers.

Research shows that the exposure of children and others in the community to this sickening content can lead to aggression towards women and child abuse.

Labor would also look to put extra resources into the Net Alert program to promote Internet safety and strengthen ties with international law enforcement to bring publishers of illegal content to justice.

## Children's health

■ Australian children are facing an epidemic of juvenile diabetes and obesity.

A Labor Government will:

- Invest \$5 million for research into the causes of serious food allergies, that affect 1 in 10 Australian children; and
- Provide \$12 million extra over 4 years for Beyond Blue to help combat teenage suicide.



Tackling the childcare crisis: Chris Bowen with Labor's Shadow Treasurer Wayne Swan (centre) at a local childcare centre.

## Labor's 5 point plan for small business

■ A Labor Government plans to implement a set of policies which will save small business time and money.

Chris is heavily involved in this area of policy, and will be moving a Private Members Bill regarding 'Commonwealth Government Payments to Small Business Policy' when Parliament resumes in August. Labor's plan for small business includes:

1. Improving business skills.
2. Creating a Superannuation Clearing House to handle all employee superannuation payments.
3. Cutting red tape.
4. Reforming Commonwealth Government Payments to Small Business Policy.
5. Making telecommunications cheaper and upgrading lagging IT infrastructure.

We need a government which makes the lives of small business owners simpler, that frees you up from red tape, and makes things easier, not just talks about it.

Labor's Small Business Plan will work to improve the environment in which Australia's thousands small businesses operate.

# Fix the skills crisis now

When Australians want to learn a traditional trade to become one of the skilled workers the country desperately needs, they shouldn't have to pay.

■ A Labor Government will get rid of TAFE fees for the traditional trades and childcare workers. If you do a traditional apprenticeship, you won't pay TAFE fees.

A Labor Government will set up Skills Accounts to help Australian families save for training and skills. And we will make an initial deposit of \$800 per year, for up to four years, in an apprentice's Skills Account to get rid of up-front TAFE fees.

Also, a Federal Labor Government will get rid of TAFE fees for eligible childcare courses by making an initial deposit of \$1200 per year,

for up to two years, in a trainee's Skills Account.

Young people training to teach and care for our kids can use this to pay up-front fees at a TAFE

or eligible provider. Or they can use it for materials and resources charges.

Labor will give every Australian student the opportunity to study at specialised trades schools.

We will give younger students the chance to try their hand at a trade with the Trade Taster Program.

For older students there'll be more school-based apprenticeships.

Labor will deliver a \$2000 Trade Completion bonus to encourage kids to finish their courses and produce an extra 10,000 tradespeople – the plumbers, the builders, the childcare workers that we need now.

**Labor's priority is clear: Train Australians first and train Australians now.**

## Labor to abolish AWAs

■ A Labor Government will abolish Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs). There will be no statutory individual contracts.

These AWAs are at the very heart of Howard's unfair and extreme industrial relations changes. The Federal Government is using them as nothing more than a means to cut wages, cut conditions, and undermine decency and fairness in our workplaces.

Labor's Pact with Middle Australia is: when you put in, you get back.

Under a Beazley Labor Government, when working Australians put in, they will get back a decent wage, security and reward. Since John Howard's extreme IR laws came into effect:

- Every AWA has cut out at least one 'protected' award condition – such as leave loadings, overtime and penalty rates, shiftwork and public holiday loadings;
- Two thirds of AWAs scrapped leave loadings and penalties;
- More than half of the AWAs abolished shift loadings; and
- One in six AWAs took away every single protected award entitlement, leaving those workers the barest minimum conditions.

Three months ago that sort of conduct would have been illegal. Now, that sort of behaviour is sanctioned and protected by the Howard Government.

AWAs cannot be fixed. They can't be made good. They must be rejected. When Labor wins Government, common law contracts will be underpinned by new minimum standards that will allow flexibility up, not down. There will be sensible transitional arrangements in place for current AWAs to run their course if both parties genuinely want them to.

**Labor will rip up the Coalition's extreme laws and build a modern, flexible new industrial relations system based on Australian values.**



Chris Bowen and Labor will abolish AWA's.



Tackling the skills crisis: Australia needs to fix its skills crisis, for the good of the economy.

## Introducing Labor's fair dismissal laws

■ Labor will introduce a system that is fair to employees and small business.

A Beazley Labor Government will tear up John Howard's extreme and one-sided unfair dismissal laws and establish a new claims process. Labor's new system will be modelled on the small claims and residential tenancy tribunals.

Labor's plan focuses on fairness, not legalistic processes. It's a plan that takes the lawyers out of the system and balances the interests of employers and employees. The new process will involve informal mediation but, where a dispute cannot be resolved, it will be resolved by an independent umpire.

Labor's unfair dismissal plan is small business friendly. It will:

- Ensure mediation and other hearings are conducted at the convenience of small businesses;
- Encourage the use of telephone conferencing to assist small businesses that have difficulty attending hearings in person;
- Allow costs to be ordered against applicants who pursue speculative or vexatious claims; and
- Make better information available to small businesses to help them understand their obligations about termination of employment.