



■ NEW MIDDLE CLASS

Independent workers on Emerson checklist

Mark Davis

Political correspondent

LABOR needs to reach out to the rapidly growing army of independent contractors and small business owners, says the Opposition frontbencher Craig Emerson.

Mr Emerson said yesterday that if such workers chose to operate outside traditional employer-employee arrangements, Labor should respect their decision and ensure they were fairly rewarded.

He did not say whether a Labor government would retain the Coalition's Independent Contractors Act, but suggested it would be less relevant under a national industrial relations system.

"People who choose to be con-

tractors should be able to be contractors [and] people should not be coerced into contracting arrangements when they want to be employees," Mr Emerson said.

Labor's leader, Kevin Rudd, appointed Mr Emerson to a new portfolio responsible for the services sector, small business and independent contractors in an attempt to counter the Government's appeal to contractors.

After the last election the former leader Mark Latham said Labor needed to win votes from the "new middle class" of contractors, consultants, franchisees and small business operators.

Mr Emerson said there were about 1 million independent contractors in the workforce and 1.6 million small-business owners. But unions oppose independent contracting, concerned it is a vehicle for undercutting industrial employee awards.

Mr Emerson said he would "develop policies that support the aspirations of all working people, and that includes people who choose to be represented by trade unions, people who choose to be independent contractors and people who choose small business as a career."