

Thursday 21 September, 2017

## **ChAFTA: Secret government trade deals see migrant workers exploited and leave Australians behind**

An ACTU submission to a review of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) being conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) shows that secretive agreements have opened the door to more exploitation of migrant workers.

The submission outlines issues with the agreement ranging from the deeply flawed negotiation process to legalised underpayment of workers and the threat of law suits from multinationals against our government.

Australian unions believe that free trade agreements should raise living standards for all parties, not encourage worker exploitation to line the pockets of big businesses. The ACTU advocates for the removal of labour mobility clauses from trade deals and a well-developed permanent migration system to stamp out exploitation and rising inequality.

Chinese investment and temporary migration rose dramatically between 2014- 2016. While the ACTU is pro trade, there is no information available about how much of this is covered by these secret arrangements, or how many workers are being brought in under these conditions.

ChAFTA undermines local jobs by removing requirements for labour market testing and making it easy for corporations to bring exploited, underpaid workers into Australia under secret deals where workers have no right to bargain for wages and can be paid as little as \$10 an hour.

### **Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:**

"The exploitation which ChAFTA allows shows absolute contempt for working people and demonstrates why trade agreements should be exposed to open and democratic scrutiny."

"This trade deal has effectively legalised underpayment for migrant workers. Apparently the Turnbull Government does not believe that migrant workers deserve the pay and rights which all workers in this country should be able to rely on."

"ChAFTA allows for secret deals between the Department of Immigration and Chinese firms, under which workers have no right to bargain for wages and can be paid as little as \$10 an hour."

"We have seen stories of migrant workers being paid well below the minimum wage and being pushed through vital safety briefings which they had no way of understanding. The Turnbull Government is endorsing the exploitation of migrant labour that ultimately means Australians needing work cannot get jobs."

"In order for workers to benefit from the increased investment that free trade agreements bring, it is essential that all workers in Australia be paid the industry wage and have all the protections and rights that Australian unions have fought for and won."

"The Turnbull Government is allowing this agreement to place massive downward pressure on wages and trading away jobs at a time when unemployment, and especially youth unemployment, is at crisis levels."

"Australians expect its government to make deals that raise the living standards of all Australians, creating local jobs for local workers, and to ensure migrant workers are not traded like pawns on a chess board."

**ENDS**

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