

Monday, 21 October 2019

## Free trade agreements fail working people

The Free Trade Agreements with Indonesia, Hong Kong and Peru that are before the House of Representatives today fail to protect Australian workers or our legal sovereignty. They should never have been signed, let alone won bi-partisan support.

The agreements were negotiated in secret and have never been subjected to any form of independent assessment of their economic benefit or to determine whether they are likely to deliver or support jobs for Australian workers.

They will increase the number of workers on temporary visas in this country at a time when the 1.4 million already working here are routinely exposed to exploitation.

They do not guarantee that jobs will even be advertised locally before they are filled by workers on working holiday or training visas.

The agreements contain Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses which would allow multinational companies to take legal action against the Australian government if they claim new laws would reduce their profits, such as improving the minimum wage or reducing exploitation.

The Morrison Government has also chosen not to use the Indonesia agreement to address use of child labour in that country, not only a failure of moral leadership but also meaning that Australian companies' risk being undercut on labour costs by companies in Indonesia who are exploiting children.

US Department of Labour report on child labour in Indonesia available here:

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/indonesia>

The ALP has extracted some concessions from the Government not contained in the agreements but has still voted to support agreements which do not meet the standards set out in the party platform.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"We don't know whether these agreements will deliver any benefits for Australian workers, and neither does the Morrison Government. We do know that they will increase the risk of exploitation of vulnerable workers here and overseas, expose Australia to legal challenges from multinational companies and allow child labour to continue in our nearest neighbour.

"These agreements are negotiated behind closed doors, and everything we know about them indicates that they are designed to benefit multinational companies, not Australian workers.

"The Morrison Government has created a situation where an Australian company who is endeavouring to do the right thing and create jobs in Australia might be undercut by an Indonesian company making use of child labour.

"They are turning a blind eye to the current situation in Hong Kong.

"The ALP is in breach of its own platform, which represents the commitment it has given to its members and Australian workers. To vote in favour of agreements which do not have labour clauses and include clauses which compromise Australia's sovereignty is deeply disappointing.

“That the Government and the Labor Party have supported agreements which might result in a company suing the Australian Government for improving labour conditions in this country is unacceptable.”

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