

Wednesday 20 October 2021

## Morrison Government passes trade agreement with military dictatorship

The Morrison Government has made a dangerous decision passing legislation enabling the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade agreement without amendments. There has been no independent economic analysis of the impact of RCEP on the Australian labour market, and there is no evidence RCEP will create a single new job.

By ratifying RCEP, an agreement that includes Myanmar, the Morrison Government has legitimised the violent military dictatorship that seized power on 1 February 2021. Since the start of the coup, the military dictatorship has murdered over 1000 civilians, and unlawfully detained another 7000. Australia's international peers have responded to the coup by imposing sanctions against Myanmar's military rulers and their business interests to isolate the dictatorship – meanwhile the Morrison Government is deepening trade links with the military junta through RCEP. The Myanmar community in Australia has urged the Australian Government to exclude Myanmar from RCEP until democracy is restored.

There have been no independent economic or social assessments of the agreement and the only empirical economic study, from the Asian Development Bank, suggests the incremental change to Australia's GDP will be 0.0 per cent by 2030.

The agreement will put local jobs at risk by entrenching waivers of labour market testing and will encourage further abuse and exploitation of migrant workers.

Ratification of RCEP may also prevent the Australian Government from effectively regulating Aged Care, including implementing the important recommendations of the Aged Care Royal Commission to mandate minimum staffing levels and improve training standards.

RCEP fails to protect the rights of workers by having no reference to international labour standards or human rights standards and no mechanisms to hold a country to account for violations of rights. Many of the RCEP signatories, including Myanmar, China and Indonesia, have poor human and workers' rights records.

The ACTU opposes Labor's decision to side with the Morrison Government in supporting this agreement.

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

"1000 innocent civilians have been killed by the military dictatorship in Myanmar thus far – it is reprehensible that the Morrison Government has signed a trade agreement with this dictatorship while the USA, UK and other countries are implementing sanctions.

"The Morrison Government supported by the Labor party have ratified a trade agreement that gives legitimacy to a military junta, limits local workers access to jobs and risks our ability to regulate and improve Aged Care.

"The pandemic is capping off 8 years of record low wage growth has left Australian workers struggling – they need trade agreements that benefit them and the economy.

“RCEP will put local jobs at risk by locking in agreements which waiver requirements for employers to offer jobs to locals first before bringing in short term visa workers, who are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.”

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