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The RCEP deal a raw deal for working Australians

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal being negotiated in secret between the Australian government and 15 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including China and India could worsen conditions for working people in Australia and across the region.

The peak body for working people warns the proposed deal will expand the power of global corporations and locks in a race to the bottom on wages and conditions for working people in Australia.

Sections of the agreement may weaken protections for Australian jobs and expose a greater number of temporary visa holders to exploitation.

The ACTU is concerned that it would weaken labour market testing obligations, meaning employers would not have to advertise jobs locally first before taking on a temporary overseas worker.

The RCEP is also likely to include an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanism which gives foreign corporations the right to bypass our courts and sue our governments for making laws they don't like.

The ACTU calls for the Australian government only to support an agreement with enforceable workers' rights in line with International Labour Organisation standards.

It also calls on the Government to reject any deal that weakens protections for local jobs or allows foreign companies to sue Australian Governments in offshore trade commissions.

The priority should be on maximizing jobs and training opportunities for working people in Australia – citizens and permanent residents.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"Australia should only be part of trade deals that put working people first and benefit all working people.

"At the moment, RCEP is an unacceptable deal that lets foreign companies sue Australian tax payers if they don't like our laws.

"Working people in Australia deserve the assurance that they will have first access to Australian jobs, particularly at a time when unemployment and underemployment are high. There are also unacceptable levels of exploitation of short term visa workers.

"The Morrison Government are signing away our sovereignty by giving big overseas corporations more power to dictate domestic policy.

"The RCEP could contribute further to a race to the bottom on workers' rights, wages and conditions.

"People are not commodities and trade agreements should include commitments that protect working people in Australia and across the region."

ENDS

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