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Secret RCEP trade deal to be signed without oversight

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal has been negotiated behind closed doors between Australia and China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam .

It will cover 2.2 billion people - almost 30 per cent of the world's population - and will be signed this weekend despite there being no evidence it will benefit Australian workers.

Thanks to our broken and anti-democratic trade system the details of the agreement will not be released until after it has been signed. The system requires no public or even parliamentary oversight of deals as they are negotiated and has frequently resulted in trade deals which fail to protect local jobs and enable the exploitation of migrant workers while providing no protections for workers or the environment.

The ACTU is calling on the Morrison Government to immediately commission an independent social, economic and health assessment of the RCEP to determine its value for Australian workers.

There are serious concerns that the deal will displace local workers during the worst recession in a century and with unemployment nearing 8 per cent.

In addition several of the signatory countries - Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Korea, Laos, the Philippines, and Thailand – have records of labour and human rights abuses, including the use of child labour and forced labour, arbitrary arrests, and detention or imprisonment of trade union leaders and workers.

It is understood that the agreement will do nothing to address these issues and may see Australian labour undercut by child or slave labour.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

“This is one of the biggest trade deals in history but the Morrison Government doesn't know if it will create a single job in Australia.

“With unemployment nearing 8 per cent and still in the depths of a historic economic downturn we need an independent assessment of the value of this deal for Australian workers.

“Workers deserve to know what is being negotiated on their behalf. The system is broken and anti-democratic.

“The Australian trade union movement supports expanding exports and trade deals that are fair.

“Despite Government claims, past trade deals have delivered negligible benefits for the Australian economy and left Australian workers worse off.

“The deal includes countries where there is significant evidence of labour rights and human rights abuses such as China, Brunei and Cambodia. But we know of no provisions in the agreement to deal with issues like forced labour or child labour.

“The agreement could also open up essential services like health, education, water, energy, telecommunications, digital and financial services to private foreign investors and restrict the ability of future governments to regulate them in the public interest.

“We need greater accountability and oversight to protect Australia’s national interest in this process.”

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