

Trade: Issues and Facts

Quick Fact:

The US Congress requires Free Trade Agreements to contain labour and environmental clauses. The AFL-CIO criticised the outcome in the recent US FTA with Singapore for omitting core ILO standards and simply prohibiting the parties from failing to enforce existing domestic labour standards to secure a trade advantage. However, even this type of clause is unwelcome to the Federal Government.

Issues For Congress

- Unions have raised a number of concerns about WTO agreements - in particular, the absence of labour standards clauses.
- Unions are also concerned about the lack of transparency of WTO dispute resolution procedures, and the absence of rights of non-government organisations to intervene in trade disputes between countries
- Another concern is that exemption clauses in WTO agreements for measures taken by governments to protect the environment, human health, and safety, can be interpreted by the WTO to challenge such measures as unduly trade restrictive.

ACTU Draft Policy

- The ACTU recognises the importance of international trade to improving living standards in trading countries and supports a system of fair trade that promotes reform of the current free trade environment.
- Trade policy needs to be consistent with economic and social policies in Australia
- The ACTU will seek changes to existing free trade agreements (FTAs) to achieve the incorporation of enforceable ILO core labour standards and environment standards in trade agreements, plus the exclusion of public services and other services of national or social significance.

More information on Trade is available on the ACTU Website

- a comprehensive Congress background paper and
- the full draft policy

www.actu.asn.au/congress2003

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