

Wednesday, 9 October 2019

JSCOT waves through secret trade agreements that would cost jobs

The Joint Standing Committee on Trade has released its report on the Hong Kong and Indonesia Free Trade Agreements, supporting them despite the fact that they do not contain protections for local workers and would compromise Australia's sovereignty, handing immense legal power to multi-national corporations.

The Indonesian agreement increases temporary work visas, without first testing whether Australian workers can do the job. Worsening a system which is already rife with exploitation.

The deal with Hong Kong is being signed during the violent repression of democratic protestors.

The inclusion of Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses in the agreements mean that multinational companies will have the ability to sue the Australian Government if legislation in Australia impinges on their profits.

This is the method through which Philip Morrison sued the Australian Government over plain packing laws intended to lower rates of smoking-related cancers.

There are currently 1.4 million people in Australia on temporary work visas.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"These agreements trade away Australian jobs. They put the interest of multinational companies ahead of local workers, at a time of record low wage growth and when regional unemployment is already at unacceptable levels.

"Reviewing trade deals after they are signed is a farce. JSCOT has consistently recommended that there be independent assessments of these deals, calls which have been ignored by this Government.

"Without testing whether local workers can do the work the Morrison government is increasing the numbers of short-term visa workers.

"This is bad for local workers, will worsen the wage crisis and increase the exploitation for visa workers.

"The Morrison Government is bending over backwards to appease big business, even selling out Australian sovereignty in the process.

"This report from JSCOT waves through agreements which would make the youth unemployment crisis in the regions worse and would allow companies to challenge Australian law when it doesn't suit their interests or profits.

"To support the deal with Hong Kong in the midst of violent repression of democratic protests is unacceptable.

"We call on the ALP, Greens and the crossbench Senators to oppose these agreements. Trade agreements should improve the lives of working people, not put their interests second to multinationals."

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