

Tuesday 31 August 2021

## ACTU calls to renegotiate huge RCEP trade deal

The Morrison Government must urgently amend the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Plan (RCEP) which has not been shown to have any projected benefit for a single Australian worker and would legitimise the military regime in Myanmar which has killed more than 1000 civilians since seizing power.

Time to make changes is running out - the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT) report on the deal is tabled in parliament today.

RCEP has been negotiated behind closed doors between Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Brunei, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Despite its size, there is no evidence that the agreement will benefit Australian workers.

The ACTU is concerned that the RCEP agreement will:

- Legitimise the military junta dictatorship in Myanmar, which has already killed over 1000 innocent civilians.
- Not provide economic benefits to Australia - there has been no independent economic and social assessment 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 to 2030.
- Not protect the right of the Australian Government to regulate our aged care sector. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has exposed a system in crisis and made many recommendations regarding regulation. RCEP rules could prevent new regulation in these areas, including ensuring adequate staffing levels and qualification requirements.
- Fail to protect the rights of workers by having no reference to international labour standards or human rights standards. Many of the RCEP signatories, including China and Indonesia, have poor human and workers' rights records; the Australian Government should be using trade agreements to improve working conditions and address issues of labour exploitation, including slavery and child labour.
- Fail to ensure labour market testing for all RCEP countries which will put at risk employment opportunities for local workers and allow exploitation of temporary migrant workers.

The ACTU has joined with 13 national organisation representing millions of Australians in a joint letter calling on the Parliament to delay voting on the RCEP so that changes to the text of the agreement can be made.

The ACTU calls on the Morrison Government to delay voting on RCEP and urgently commission an independent social, economic and health assessment of the RCEP, and to renegotiate the agreement to ensure protection for workers' and human rights.

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

"RCEP is the biggest trade deal in history, covering one third of the world's population. It's critical that it goes through a proper process of scrutiny and independent assessment to ensure that it will benefit Australian workers.

"RCEP effectively trades away our ability as a nation to provide the highest standard of care to older Australians and will limit our ability to enact the recommendations of the Aged Care Royal Commission, including ensuring minimum staffing and qualification levels.

“1000 innocent civilians have already been killed by the military dictatorship in Myanmar – it is incomprehensible that the Morrison Government is seeking to sign a trade agreement with this dictatorship while the USA, UK and other countries are implementing sanctions.

“The pandemic capping off 8 years of record low wage growth has left Australian workers struggling. They need trade agreements that will benefit them, not one that has no demonstrated benefit for workers.”

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