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Morrison signs Australian workers up to another secret trade deal

Australian workers got their first glimpse of the Australia – India Free Trade Agreement this week, an agreement which like all deals negotiated by the Morrison Government has been written in secret and has no demonstrated or even modelled benefits for local working people.

The interim agreement does not currently contain a labour rights chapter, meaning the Morrison Government has decided not to use this agreement to protect the rights of workers here or secure basic rights for working people in India, a country which still makes extensive use of child labour and has minimal protections even for adult workers.

The agreement also continues the trend of trade deals signed by this Government that prioritise temporary, employer-sponsored migration over a long-term permanent migration system. These arrangements mean that workers rely on employers not only for work but for their visa, which has routinely led to exploitation in the past.

It also contains sections which could make it harder for the Australian Government to regulate public services like health and aged care. There is also the potential the comprehensive agreement, which the Morrison Government says it will negotiate before the end of the year, could contain an Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism which would enable Indian investors to sue the Australian Government for any law or policy which could harm their investment.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O’Neil:

“Working people should know what their Government is signing them up to - we need public oversight of this process and accountability for the politicians who are signing away workers’ rights.

“We are concerned that the final FTA may end up waiving labour market testing, meaning that businesses are not required to advertise to check whether local workers are available before bringing in workers from India.

“Trade agreements should deliver value for Australian workers and protect the rights of workers here and in the countries we trade with, not erode workers’ rights and undermine the ability of our government to regulate public services.

“This agreement does not include any protections for local workers or workers in India, and instead could contribute further to a race to the bottom on workers’ rights, wages and conditions.

“This is a missed opportunity to use trade policy to raise living standards and help combat issues such as child labour. This is important of course not only to improve the lives of workers

in both of our countries, but also to ensure that businesses trying to do the right thing aren't undercut by companies using child labour.

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