

Friday, 10 July 2015

## Fewer job opportunities for Australian workers under free trade agreements

The number of 457 visa applications that require employers to advertise the jobs to Australian workers first could slump to just 25 per cent because of Australia's free trade agreements (FTA).

In the nine months to May this year, 38,134 primary 457 visas were granted to overseas workers with only around one third of those (12,084) requiring the employer to test the local labour market first to ensure there was no Australian who could do the job.

New ACTU analysis based on these Department of Immigration figures shows 2,416 fewer jobs would have been offered to Australian workers during the same period under the new China FTA and a future India FTA

This would mean labour market testing would only cover one-in-four 457 visa nominations.

It's outrageous that at the same time a Senate inquiry into temporary work visas in Perth today will hear evidence of abuse of the temporary visa system, the Abbott Government is making it easier for companies to hire workers from overseas without advertising those jobs to Australian workers.

Under new Investment Facilitation Agreements in the China FTA, companies with projects worth more than \$150 million will also be able to negotiate to bring in lower-skilled workers at wage rates that fall below the current wage floor for the standard 457 visa program of \$53 990 per annum.

Unions fear the same will happen if the India FTA is signed later this year.

Australia currently has FTAs with Thailand, Chile, South Korea and Japan that have labour market testing exemptions.

When the Government announced the conclusion of negotiations for the China FTA, it tried to argue that labour market testing would still apply to workers from China but the recent release of the text of the agreement clearly shows this will not be the case.

Once again when it comes to the needs of workers, the Abbott Government has blinkers on with the interests of big business solely in its sights.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:

"Australia's temporary visa system is reaching crisis point and instead of fixing the abuse and exploitation, the Abbott Government is making it easier for companies to bring in temporary workers at the expense of local jobs.

"Our temporary visa system needs more regulation to protect job and training opportunities for Australian workers, not less."

"Free trade agreements must support local jobs and industry and the deal with China does not do that."

### Quotes attributable to Owen Whittle, Acting Secretary, UnionsWA:

"West Australians are at greater risk than most if free trade agreements with India and China further weaken labour market testing requirements – tests that help ensure businesses employ locals before using temporary overseas labour."

"WA's economy is highly dependent on the resources sector and over the past three years unemployment has been rising."

"It is also important that temporary overseas labour in Australia are not exploited through poor wages, poor safety or, in some cases, slave-like conditions."

"Stronger monitoring, penalties and whistle-blower protections are urgently needed."

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