

Joint Statement on a possible U.S.-Australia Trade Agreement
American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and
the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)
April 5, 2001

As the Australian and U.S. trade ministers meet this week to discuss a possible free trade agreement, the trade union federations of both countries are also meeting to exchange views and coordinate strategies around discussions of trade and investment rules. Sharan Burrow, President of the ACTU, and John Sweeney, President of the AFL-CIO, vowed to work together to pressure their respective governments to ensure that any bilateral agreement will work for working families in both Australia and the United States. They issued the following statement:

The ACTU and the AFL-CIO welcome our governments' discussions aimed at fostering deeper social and economic integration between our countries, so long as any resulting agreement emphasizes equitable, democratic, and sustainable development – and does not simply extend and enforce corporate privilege and power.

In order to ensure that the benefits of economic integration are broadly shared, any bilateral agreement must incorporate enforceable workers' rights and environmental standards and allow for ongoing and meaningful participation by broadly representative civil society organizations, including the ACTU and the AFL-CIO, in both the negotiation and implementation of the agreement.

Workers in both Australia and the United States have experienced many negative impacts from current corporate-dominated globalization policies: loss of high-paying manufacturing jobs and downward pressure on wages and benefits, as well as pressures on federal, state, and local governments to loosen environmental and public health regulations or government procurement standards. These pressures are increasing, as trade agreements and the international financial institutions continually widen their scope and reach.

We therefore call on our governments to address the following concerns in any bilateral trade and investment agreement:

1. **CORE WORKERS' RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS** – Any bilateral agreement must incorporate a binding commitment to respect, realize, and promote the core workers' rights identified by the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, as well as a commitment to effectively enforce domestic labor and environmental laws and all international treaty obligations undertaken in these areas. These provisions should be included in the core of any agreement and covered by the same dispute resolution provisions and remedies as the rest of the agreement.
2. **TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY** – We call on both parties to agree, with respect both to any bilateral FTA, as well as to their joint World Trade Organization (WTO) panels, to release draft negotiating text at timely intervals, to consult with their respective publics prior to initiating dispute proceedings, to release relevant documents

and open dispute panels to the public, and to accept friend-of-the-court submissions from interested parties.

3. **GOVERNMENT SCOPE** – No trade agreement should undermine the ability of governments to provide public services, enact and enforce legitimate regulations in the public interest, or use government procurement policies to achieve legitimate social goals.
4. **WTO** – We call on our governments to pledge in the context of any bilateral FTA to work with global unions to ensure that core workers' rights are adequately addressed by the WTO before any New Round of multilateral trade negotiations is launched.

The ACTU and the AFL-CIO vow to work together to oppose any Australia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement that fails to meet these key objectives.