

Saturday 7th July:

Trading places

John Connell, John Buchanan, Tim Harcourt, Colleen Ryan

(Chair: Mark Cully)

Mark Cully, the panel chair, sends the following introduction of the issues:

I see this session as an opportunity to have a reasonably sophisticated conversation about the impact of trade upon workers, both here and abroad.

There is, on the one hand, the fair rather than free trade line pushed by the AMWU. On the other hand, is the argument that free trade is advantageous to workers in the exporting country, who are often poorer. This sets up a tension for the progressive left: trade may improve prospects of workers in poor countries at the cost of job loss in Australia.

Recent developments are

- The offshore re-location of back-room processing and telemarketing jobs, taking advantage of the relatively low wages, cheap telecommunication costs and English language proficiency of people in, for example, India.
- The huge growth in recent years in temporary migration, particularly class 457 visas, which are employer-demand driven and can be seen as an expedient way of employers solving problems of their own making with skill shortages. This last might literally be seen as trading places.