Women, aged care, and jobs were to be the focus of the 2021-22 federal budget – or so we were led to believe, prior to its release. Women, aged care, and jobs are the sales-pitch façade for what is an election budget. Putting aside a few token measures, the main thrust of the budget is pro-business. These measures are sweeteners that will not last. When the sugar coating comes off, it will be back to business in pursuit of a budget surplus based on harsh austerity measures.

“Australia is coming back […]. Our plan is working,” a smug Treasurer Josh Frydenberg claimed, as he played down the massive $151 billion deficit. Not that a deficit is necessarily a bad thing – it depends on what it is spent on. For example, the more than $40 billion per annum spent on war preparations, the millions more in tax cuts for the rich, the $20 billion in tax concessions for the corporate sector, and fossil fuel subsidies do not justify running up a deficit. But these are the real focus of the budget.

Such measures are evidence that the Coalition government is still pursuing its neoliberal agenda and still as subservient as ever to US imperialism. The main thrust of the budget is a private-sector led, fossil-fuel driven recovery. The budget deficit and accumulated debt is recognition that stimulatory measures are still required to lift the economy from crisis.

The unemployed are still condemned to poverty, as they wait for crumbs to trickle down from the rich and big business. Iron ore is keeping the Australian economy afloat. In the past twelve months, the price has soared from US$87 to US$230 (AU$112 to AU$295) a tonne, primarily due to high demand from China and Brazil’s present difficulties. The underlying economy, iron ore aside, is not the rosy picture presented by the Treasurer.

The Treasurer boasted how well Australia had done economically compared with other industrialised countries. This would not have occurred without pressure from the trade union movement to provide employees of businesses affected by the pandemic with JobKeeper and an increased JobSeeker. This reduced job losses and kept many businesses going.

The number on JobKeeper peaked last September at 3.6 million. Many of its recipients would otherwise have been deemed officially unemployed. These programs demonstrated the importance of consumer demand, of workers and the unemployed having money to spend.

**ASSUMPTIONS FLAWED**

The core budget assumptions about unemployment and economic growth are relatively rosy. Unemployment is forecast to be down to 4.75 per cent by 2023-24 and then settle down to about 2.5 per cent thereafter. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is expected to rebound to 4.25 per cent in 2021-22 and then settle down to 4.5 per cent the year after – both below pre-pandemic levels.

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The government is relying heavily on consumer spending to stimulate the economy. It is not doing this by increasing wages or pensions. It is relying on its “plan” for job creation which translates into the whims of market forces. This is centred on infrastructure spending, and subsidies and tax concessions to the private sector.

It ignores the link between higher wages and an increase in consumer demand, which in turn drives investment and job creation. It has not learnt the lessons of the pandemic and the positive economic impact of JobKeeper and JobSeeker.

It also fails to recognise the role job security plays in consumer confidence and spending.

The budget also assumes that borders will open by the middle of next year and that everyone would be vaccinated by the end of the year – by no means assured.

**WAGES AND JOB SECURITY**

The budget forecasts that workers cannot expect real wages growth prior to 2024-25. In real terms wages are forecast to decline over the next three years when compared with forecast rises in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
Australia-China relations continue to deteriorate. Last month, Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Paine, using the Foreign Arrangements Scheme, which came into force last year, vetoed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) agreement with Victoria. The Foreign Arrangements Scheme allows the government to block arrangements it believes are inconsistent with Australia’s foreign policy. However, despite the use of the scheme, Paine insists the move was not targeting China, stating that it was “ensuring that we have a consistent approach to foreign policy across all levels of government.” Translation: Anything that is a threat to Western hegemony needs to be removed.

Furthermore, one has to wonder how Paine reached her decision. Victoria had only signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with China which lacked detail but spoke to “trade, financial and policy cooperation” (ABC). Much of the discussions centred on infrastructure projects that would create jobs across the state. There were also talks regarding manufacturing, biotechnology, and agriculture and “agreements to develop trade and market access especially for agricultural products, food, nutraceuticals and cosmetics” (ABC). It is also important to note that BRI is not legally binding. Thus, given that virtually all activities under the scheme, Paine insists the move was not targeting China, stating that it was “ensuring that we have a consistent approach to foreign policy across all levels of government.”

In response to this senseless assault, China’s National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) suspended “indefinitely all activities under the China-Australia Strategic Economic Dialogue” (“Global Times”) which it jointly holds with the Australian government. It is the first time a diplomatic mechanism between the two countries has been frozen. NDRC stated that they felt such a measure from the Australian government to “disrupt the normal exchanges and cooperation between China and Australia” was “out of Cold War mindset and ideological discrimination.”

Paine, responding to the decision of NDRC in an absolutely stunning fashion, told reports that “[w]e have been very clear that we were willing and able to participate in an ongoing strategic and economic dialogue – that is ultimately a decision for China.” In what way has Australia been “very clear”? What signs of friendship and cooperation has the Morrison government extended to China? Absolutely none.

As other countries in the region start to cooperate and work with China, the Morrison government is increasingly becoming the little yappy dog, nipping at the heels of others, not causing harm but instead mild annoyance. Australia needs to stop acting as if it is America, pretending to be the police of the Asia Pacific, because it is operating as nothing more than a poor facsimile.

The Morrison government must stop playing this childish game with China and stop pretending that our economy doesn’t rely heavily on China. According to DFAT, “China is Australia’s largest two-way trading partner in goods and services, accounting for twenty-nine percent of our trade with the world.” Australia is not even one of China’s top trading partners. If we do not call on our government to mend this relationship, we run the risk of being isolated for decades.
Continued from page 1
Casualisation, labour hire, the gig economy, and job insecurity are not addressed. The government turns its back on low-income workers. Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s “Have a go to get a go” underlines the government’s attitude to workers and social security recipients. Fyndenberg continues to plead with the Reserve Bank of Australia’s pleas to increase wages as a means of stimulating the economy.

WOMEN

Last year’s budget was deserv-edly criticised as neglecting women. The government bungled the handling of a serious rape and sexual abuse and harassment alleg-ations within its own ranks. With an election on the horizon, women need to be high on the Coalition’s agenda.

The budget allocates $3.4 bil in funding for women over four years with the stated aim of improving women’s safety and economic security. This is 5 per cent of total new expenditure. Much of this spending is short-term, pre-election.

Fyndenberg makes unsupported claims about “ensuring Australian workplaces are free from sexual harassment.” The government can even do that in the parliamentary bubble.

There is an allocation of $164.8 mil in financial support for women escaping family and domestic violence, including a trial of $5,000 assistance for women fleeing to safety. This is a start in the right direction but not enough.

昨天’s budget barely acknowledges the 200,000 women who will have to wait four years before being eligible to apply for welfare payments. $200 mil will be slashed from employment services which are already failing. There is no attempt to restructure and return them to the public sector. Boost employment, cut back on contracting out the work of public servants. Outourcing is far too costly as layers of profit are built in and there is no transparency or accountability as contracts are “commercial in confidence.”

The economy was sliding into recession prior to the pandemic. Structurally, there was a heavy reliance on visa workers in construc-tion, tourism, aged care, health, and other areas. International students and tourism were other major contributors to the economy. Labour for these mostly low-paid jobs largely dried up with border closures. If the borders do not open, what then of the economic forecast?

The government has found $407 mil over the next two years in additional funding for onshore immigration detention and expansion of the Christmas Island detention centre.

HEALTH

There are a few tokens, inade-quate measures such as a small increase in the Medicare rebate for doctors in regional and remote areas. There will be $107 mil in cuts over the next four years in MRI and a number of other Medicare claims.

NDIS

Prior to the budget, Prime Min-ister Scott Morrison warned that costs of $126,000 could be reinstated. The disastrous and cruel system of independent assessments was introduced to ensnare the NDIS. The assess-ors were doing their job, cutting costs and reducing levels of care. There was such an uproar that the government was forced to suspend the independent assessments. But it has not given up on the idea.

The budget makes a relatively small increase in spending on the NDIS, but there is no doubt that following the elections, a Coalition government would return to “reining in” costs at the expense of people’s needs.

In the eyes of capitalists, people with disabilities are not highly productive for exploitation in the profit-making process – not worth spending a lot of money on.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Public universities were hit hard during the pandemic when international student numbers declined, and the government refused to pay them JobKeeper. They had become heavily reliant on international students as a means of addressing shortfalls in govern-ment funding. An estimated 17,000 staff lost their jobs. Courses were shut down. At the same time private universities received JobKeeper. Yet, the budget finds $33 mil for the private sector.

Since 2013, TAFE has suf-fered over $3 bil in funding cuts. The budget continues this trend with new funding directed to the private sector.

There is support for 70,000 additional apprenticeship and training places bringing the total to 170,000. However, these apprenticeships are not ready to meet skilled shortages immediately. The funding includes 5,000 additional gateway services to women and in-training support services for women com-mencing in a non-traditional trade occupation. That is $3,000 places out of 170,000 earmarked for women.

Just how much of that money flows to TAFE or to private VET colleges remains to be seen.

The government is funding for domestic students at public universities, further decreasing quality and making it harder to run the more expensive courses such as the sciences.

TAXATION

The government is extend-ing the low- and middle-income tax offset at an estimated $7.8 bil. It was set to end, which would have seen its estimated 10.2 mil workers facing a tax increase – hardly a wise political move just before the elections.

The tax offset is graduated according to income for workers on up to $25,000. Individuals receive up to $1,080 and couples up to $2,160. There is no guarantee that this will continue after the elections if the Coalition is still in office.

In 2018, the government announced three stages of income tax cuts. The third stage, totalling $130 billion in cuts, is slated to commence in 2024-25, although the government previously failed to get the third stage through the Senate.

[...]

The government’s aged care package fails to implement the Royal Commission’s recommenda-tions. There will still be no require-ment for all workers in the sector to be qualified. Staffing ratios are not specified. The additional $14.7 bil over five years – $3.54 bil per annum – falls disgracefully short of the estimated $8.10 bil per annum required.

No conditions are placed on the additional funding that residential centres receive. There is nothing to stop them pocketing the money as profits. This is not the “once in a generation” overhaul of the sector promised by the Health Minister Greg Hunt. (See page 4.)

Next Week: A People’s Budget – what the government should have done, what the Greens and Greens Party of Australia would do.
The Morrison Government’s attempt to show a commitment to women in this Budget ultimately does not reach the women it’s supposed to benefit, the United Workers Union said today.

“In its report care time minutes in July 2022, the Royal Commission found Federal Government funding of $17.7 billion a year over five years – or $3.5 billion a year – paled in comparison to the $50 billion in long-term care needs indicated by the Royal Commission and others over the same period.

“In its final report the Royal Commission found Federal Government funding in 2018-19 was $9.8 billion lower annually than it should be if aged care had been appropriately funded,” Smith said.

“The Budget tonight did nothing to support and value the essential early education workforce that this community relied on throughout the pandemic.

“The early education sector is in crisis, with calls for reform sounding from every corner of our society. Scott Morrison has well and truly missed the mark. The early education sector is in crisis, with calls for reform sounding from every corner of our society. Scott Morrison has well and truly missed the mark.

“Where is the commitment to secure, well-paid, safe jobs necessary for quality care of older Australians, with the Royal Commission forecasting there will be an extra 80,000 aged care workers needed by 2030?” Smith also said the centrepiece aged care funding measure of $17.7 billion a year over five years – or $3.5 billion a year – paled in comparison to the $50 billion in long-term care needs indicated by the Royal Commission and others over the same period.

“In its final report the Royal Commission found Federal Government funding in 2018-19 was $9.8 billion lower annually than it should be if aged care had been appropriately funded,” Smith said. The funding shortfall is leading to horrendous human costs in aged care, with older Australians left unsafe and vulnerable, and workers left physically and emotionally exhausted.

“Respected think tanks including the Grattan Institute and the Centre for Future Work have come to exactly the same figure of $10 billion extra a year needed for quality aged care for older Australians. When is the Federal Government finally going to recognise that a well-staffed, well-trained, adequately-paid workforce is the single biggest driver to providing the quality care time needed by older people in Australia?”

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The waterfront has been in a significant struggle over the last three years. Industrial action has occurred at four terminal operators and across a number of bulk and general sites. One of the terminal agreements at DP World has been settled, with the Hutchinson agreement reported to be close to finalisation. The two other terminal operators, VIC in Melbourne and Patrick nationally, are still in the process of struggle and negotiation. At both DP World and Hutchinson terminals nationally, huge amounts of industrial action were taken by wharffies. Both DP World and Hutchinson rank high among the union with extreme claims that were defeated.

**BOSSES DEFEATED IN STRUGGLE**

The companies were defeated by a solid commitment by workers and the MUA to take industrial action and fighting for claims.

The workers’ claims were mainly based on job security and protections from big industry threats such as automation. There were victories at both DP World and Hutchinson on the issue of automation, with an excellent result at Hutchinson forbidding the employer to make anyone redundant due to the implementation of automation and technology.

The first part of the wharffies struggle was characterised by constant legal challenges from employers around the right to take industrial action. Employers challenge your right to take action because collective industrial action works and moves employers to concede on issues they don’t want to give workers. The struggle and impact of your actions on their businesses make the boss move, which is the power that workers have in the workplace and society.

Further action is expected at VIC and Patrick, with the wharffies and the MUA to have the same fight four different times due to the flawed and anti-worker nature of Enterprise Employment. This situation really brings to the fore one of the big problems for workers under Enterprise Employment.

**EBAS CAUSE DIVISION AND REDUCE WORKERS POWER**

Why can’t every wharf move, which is the power that workers have in the workplace and society?

The bottom line is we are placed in Enterprise Agreement cages which are a tool of the employing class. This process is ably supported by all major parliamentary political parties who have made a conscious decision to side with the interests of employers and big capital. Successive Australian governments have chosen to keep workers divided and have accepted that workers should have reduced bargaining power. That should be kept in mind when workers refer to the ALP as being “us” and “ours.” There is nothing further from the truth in this. The ALP, like the Coalition, has been captured by neoliberalism resulting in generally cosmetic neoliberalism resulting in generally cosmetic differences between the two major parties.

This conscious decision by the ruling parties leads to the inevitable consequence of workers getting lower wages, increased flexibility, less family-friendly arrangements, and worse working conditions. The link between the interests of governments (of both persuasions) and employers is laid bare for all to see in this equation.

There can be no other conclusion reached than the Coalition, Labor, and all the employers are opposed to workers being in a position where they can improve their lives through struggle, which is the only way that workers have ever made any gains.

**WHY UNIONS AND WORKERS MUST FIGHT ENTERPRISE EMPLOYMENT**

The ACTU’s last campaign effort with Change the Rules correctly identified that Enterprise Employment is not working for the working class. Despite the correct analysis, the important campaign issue died with Labor’s electoral defeat. This is a flawed model of campaigning that arises when worker’s campaigns are limited to electoral outcomes. Once the election was lost, the movement drops off on what it had identified only weeks before as an issue of critical importance for Australian workers.

There needs to be a consistent approach to campaigning across the movement to continue the struggle against forms of employment that are negative for workers.

Political parties seeking the support of unions must be held to account that they will repeal anti-union laws that sit at the heart of the transfer of wealth to the rich away from Australian workers.

On that score, the campaign needs to be as broad-based as possible, and its ongoing nature and determination must not be contingent upon ALP electoral success. It must continue the struggle against forms of employment that are negative for workers.

The union movement has a continued reluctance to tackle the ALP in government which needs to be addressed. The ALP is not the union movement, and it is not a workers Party. Workers’ parties don’t adopt capitalist neoliberal policy solutions to every aspect of society, nor do they actually promote policies that transfer wealth to bosses away from the working class, nor do they send Australian workers to war for the imperialist ambitions of foreign powers. They don’t support undemocratic, authoritarian, union-busting institutions like the ABCC either.

Many ALP members feel equally betrayed by the implementation of neoliberal policies by their party, policies put in place without their agreement but in the interests of their class enemy. The bureaucratic leadership structures of the ALP need to be clearly differentiated from the good comrades in the ALP who support their unions and fight the employers on a daily basis. It is vital that they are part of this working class campaign aimed not at any particular party but carried out solely to develop the position of the working class and their unions.

**IN THE MEANTIME**

While the CPA advocates for the broadest working-class campaign, the anti-union laws will continue to exist, and workers will be forced to fight against the slide in wages and conditions prepared for them by their bosses.

The only answer is to continue to fight. Even in our EBA cages, we must continue to fight, as wharffies can attest. We must link these various struggles together with the most important word in the vocabulary of the working class: solidarity.

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**Wharfies Gain Big Wins in Waterfront Struggle – More to Come, More to Win!!**

Article by the Maritime Branch of the CPA

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The only answer is to continue to fight. Even in our EBA cages, we must continue to fight, as wharffies can attest. We must link these various struggles together with the most important word in the vocabulary of the working class: solidarity.
WILL BE FREE!
Who are the protesters? The protests were initially against the tax reform the government was trying to introduce, was supposed to be the pathway to addressing the country’s economic crisis. The proposal sought to increase taxes on businesses, increase the number of goods covered by value added tax (VAT), and lower the salary threshold that would be taxed. Colombia is currently in the midst of its worst crisis in fifty years: the economy shrank by 6.8 per cent and continues to decline as the pandemic continues, and unemployment skyrocketed to 16.8 per cent in March 2021. According to Colombia’s official figures, half of the country lives in poverty and the number of people living in extreme poverty grew by 2.8 million people last year. By lowering the individual salary threshold that the government was trying to address, as they continue to demon- strate against police brutality, human rights abuses, and income inequality. As one protester, Mayra Lemus, summarised, “This is not just about the tax reform […]. This is about corruption, inequality and poverty.”

Trade unions have played a massive role in organising the rallies, due to the disproportionate impact the tax reforms would have on the poorest parts of the population who are already besieged by the economic impact of Covid-19. The truck and bus drivers’ unions have been blocking roads across the country. The increase of goods subject to the VAT would mean the cost of everyday items would have increased, this, combined with the lowering of the salary threshold, would place people in a double bind of having less money to spend on more expensive goods.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, more than 75,000 Colombians have died, with its highest death tolls occurring over the past couple of weeks. Protestors have been blaming this on poor management from the government, particularly its lack of proper investment in the healthcare system and inadequate COVID response. These events have once again demonstrated that protest- ing a singular issue can draw attention to the other systemic issues within capitalist society, strengthening the breadth and organisational power of a protest.

Police brutality

At the time of writing 37 people have been killed, 89 have been reported missing, and more than 800 wounded since the nationwide protests began. The police have employed an arsenal of flash-bangs, teargas, water cannons, and firearms on the protestors, drawing heavy condemnation from various international bodies. Amnesty International has confirmed, via the analysis of available video footage, that police have used lethal force against protestors around the country, most egregiously in the form of rifles and semi-automatic guns.

The Defence Minister Diego Molano has refused to back down claiming that the police are simply responding to the situa- tion, and that violence of the protestors is “systematic, premeditated and financed by criminal organisations,” in addition to telling the police to be “ruthless towards those who use vandalism.” Protestors have not taken kindly to this blatant misrepresentation of their grievances and explicit call to use excessive force against them.

In the capital, Bogotá, protestors have been attacked by what are known as “immedi- ate response police commando posts” across the city. Officials have reported that at least 25 have been targeted. These “commando posts” are basically small police stations, consisting of a room or two, and are scattered around neighbourhoods across the city. A similar situation is occurring over in Cali, the country’s third largest city.

International perspective

This situation is by no means unique to Colombia. Many times in the past, a protest that has begun in one Latin American coun- try has spread to its neighbouring countries as often many of them share similar socio-economic difficulties. These protests are a continuation of a movement that swept Latin America in late 2019, just prior to COVID, as people took to the streets in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Nicaragua among others. Throughout these countries there was an opposition to a common prob- lem: limited opportunities and widespread corruption amongst government officials.

The COVID pandemic has made it excep- tionally difficult for workers to protest in the streets across the world out of concerns of transmitting the virus to the most vulner- able parts of the population. The working class has found itself incredibly atomised, the Greek resisted the excessive use of police brutality, the list goes on. Mass demonstrations always carry a risk of fur- ther increasing the number of COVID cases, but this risk must be balanced against the long-term damage to peoples’ standards of living and livelihoods that these government policies have. Forcing people to live below the relative poverty line because of stagnant wages or subpar welfare benefits constitutes a health threat that the working class has every right to protest against.

The CPA has released a full statement on the situation in Colombia which can be accessed via the website. The statement begins with:

“The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) condemns in the strongest possible terms the actions by the Colombian government of President Ivan Duque against the people of Colombia.”

The CPA demands that:

- Ivan Duque & his government must resign
- The end of police brutality against the Colombian people
- That the perpetrators of this violence be held accountable
- People are given proper access to adequate healthcare

See page 2 for CPA statement.

Governments across the world have seized upon the COVID crisis to attack labour and welfare laws.
Russian President Vladimir Putin gave an address at the Victory Day parade in Red Square, Moscow, on 9th May. The event marked the 76th anniversary of the defeat of Nazism in Europe, during which the Soviet Union captured Berlin and liberated Germany from Nazi rule.

Our dear veterans, we bow before your courage and strong spirit and thank you for this immortal example of unity and love for our Motherland.

“You proved that only together it is possible to achieve what seems impossible. You defeated a merciless enemy, defended your home, your children, and your country. You came out an absolute victor in the battle against Nazism and eternally the memory of the 9th of May, 1945.”

This speech occurs in the context of the ongoing efforts by reactionary forces in Europe to rewrite the history of WW2, to equate fascism and communism, to deny the existence of the 9th of May. The event marked the 76th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union and today’s Russia promoted by the reactionary forces in Europe, the outright demonisation of Russia’s history, and the demonisation of those against Nazism and the EU in a subordinate position.

While much of the ideological shift comes from forces within Europe, the United States and many other countries around the world.

This serves two distinct purposes: the demonisation of socialism and communism, and the demonisation of today’s Russia. While much of the ideological shift comes from forces within Europe, the United States has also played a major role in promoting and fostering these attitudes. The US has particularly sought to oppose and hamper economic relations between the EU and Russia, to weaken Russia’s growing power and keep the EU in a subordinate position to US hegemony.

Putin is no communist, and his public comments on the Soviet legacy over the years have been inconsistent and often contradictory. But the increasing conflation of the Soviet Union and today’s Russia promoted by the reactionary forces in Europe, the outright demonisation of Russia’s history, and the demonisation of those against Nazism and the EU in a subordinate position.

The public rehabilitation of historical fascists and Nazi collaborators by governments including those of Ukraine, Poland, and Hungary is an obvious sign of this, but the surge in far-right movements and ideology spans the whole of Europe, and many other countries around the world.

Seamus Carey

ON VICTORY DAY

Reserve Bank of Australia shirks affordable housing responsibility

AFFORDABLE HOUSING RESPONSIBILITY

E Lennon and N Stallon

A recent ABC article reports that the RBA doesn’t see its monetary policy as a solution to increasing house prices.

The institution’s deputy governor Dr Guy Debelle addressed the University of Western Australia’s business school at the end of April:

“(Rising house prices are) an issue that needs to be considered,” Dr Debelle said. “There are a number of tools that can be used to address the issue, but monetary policy is not one of them.”

Dr Debelle stated that rising house prices would have “distributional consequences”. His words minimise the unstable state of Australian housing and related issues many people face as a direct result. Dr Debelle’s comments highlight the RBA’s role as ensuring the stability of capitalism, rather than solving issues which affect people such as the housing crisis and stagnant wages. Instead, Dr Debelle claimed that alleviating house prices is the responsibility of either the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA), or the state and federal governments.

APRA claimed six weeks ago that alleviating house prices is not its responsibility, but the governments. However, the various governments have routinely shirked responsibility for house prices, instead blaming those who can’t afford houses for spending irresponsibly, not having a good enough job, or living in a city. What “reforms” are passed, are generally no more than the government giving small amounts of money, acting as guarantor for unaffordable deposits, or allowing people to withdraw from their retirement savings.

This cynical cycle in which the financial institutions pass the buck onto the government, which then passes the buck onto the markets (controlled by themselves and the financial institutions), demonstrates that both the financial institutions and the government serve the interests of capital, rather than the basic needs of citizens.

Instead, Dr Debelle said that rather than tackling affordable housing, the RBA would be maintaining house monetary policy for years to reach “full employment” by 2024. However, in accordance with Josh Frydenberg and the Treasury, the RBA defines “full employment” as “with a four in front of it” at best.

Jim Standard of the Australia Institute claims that Australia can handle an unemployment rate much lower than four per cent. “Because you’ve got so many people, because you’d still have a large part of the labour force dealing with precarity of one form or another, you’ve still got incredibly oppressive rates around collective bargaining, you’ve still got an award system that’s only a safety net rather than a leading force of wage growth.”

Full employment means the constitutional right to work and the absence of involuntary unemployment. Not only is this possible, but achievable, even with a reduction to a 32-hour week, and before 2024.

Ultimately, this is the government’s responsibility. Secure employment and housing are human rights, which can and must be guaranteed. Rather than deferring to financial institutions concerned solely with facilitating the maintenance of capitalism, the government must accept responsibility.

It must push for true full employment and liveable wages. So too, must it build and provide public housing for all Australians. In fact, the two have a symbiotic relationship. A nation-building public housing project would serve as a useful catalyst for the provision of secure employment for all who want it.
Bree Booth

In a judgment handed down on the 10th May, the Federal Court of Australia (FCA) upheld the federal government’s India travel ban. The ban came into force on the 3rd May, making it a crime, punishable by five years in prison and/or $86,000 in fines for a person to enter Australia within fourteen days of travelling to India. It took effect as an emergency declaration made by the Health Minister under section 477 of the Commonwealth Biosecurity Act. It will be lifted on the 15th of May.

The ban is controversial due to its blanket nature – it applied to both citizens and non-citizens - and claims it is not racially motivated - no similar ban was implemented for the US or any country in Western Europe during their coronavirus surges. This left the federal government in the unique position of being called both too discriminatory and not discriminatory enough.

Gary Newman, a 73-year-old Australian who is an urgent claim in the FCA on the 6th May, challenging the ban on the grounds that the Minister had exceeded his power under the Biosecurity Act, or alternatively, that the sections of the Act which empowered him to make such a declaration were inconsistent with the Constitution. The Court reached a conclusion about the first question as to the ban but left the broader constitutional issue to be decided at a later date.

There is a presumption that when Parliament passes legislation, it does not intend to take away from rights that citizens and residents of Australia enjoy under the common law. The legislature is entitled to change the common law by passing Acts that are inconsistent with the rules of the unwritten common law. Still, if Parliament intends to take away common law rights, it must do so by clear language in the statute. This is known as the principle of legality. It is important because, as a country without a bill of rights, most rights that Australians enjoy are derived not from the written text of the Constitution but from the unwritten common law.

Either party did not dispute the right of citizens of Australia to enter Australia. The High Court has in previous cases acknowledged that such a right likely exists under common law. Counsel for Newman alleged that the Biosecurity Act did not contain a clear enough statement of Parliament’s intention to take away this right of entry into the country. Therefore that Act did not empower the Minister to impose a ban that excluded citizens of Australia from the country.

Justice Thawley found that this intention was clear from the provisions of the Act – essentially, that it would make no sense for Parliament to pass such an Act if that did not intend for it to be able to temporarily impinge on common law rights in the interests of national security. The Act required that the ban be “no more restrictive or intrusive than is required in the circumstances.” Justice Thawley found that the ban was appropriate given the nature of the COVID crisis in India and its potential impact on Australia.

A date is yet to be set for the hearing of the second question, on whether the ban was unconstitutional. Newman alleges that the ban was beyond the scope of Section 51 of the Constitution, which enumerates the areas which Parliament may pass laws with respect to. He alleges that section 477 does not fall within any of the areas listed in section 51 and therefore that it is invalid as law of the Parliament. Moreover, he argues that the ban infringed on the implied freedom of Australians to enter Australia under the Constitution. These are important questions that directly impact Australians’ rights to travel in a COVID-stricken world, and we should watch the proceedings of this case with great interest.

ASSAM’S STATELESSNESS CRISIS CONTINUES

Bree Booth

In August 2019, a National Register of Citizens was published in Assam. It has created a crisis of statelessness in the region which is ongoing today. Assam is a state in northeastern India which is home to around 33ml people. It is located just to the south of the Eastern Himalayas and is bordered by Bhutan to the north and Bangladesh to the south. A substantial portion of the state’s population are Bengali-speaking Muslims who migrated from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) after the 1971 war with Pakistan. From 1979, massive protests against the influx of immigrants occur under the state leading to the 1985 Assam Accord between the government and protestors, which declared arrivals in Assam after the 24th March 1971 (the end of the war with Pakistan) a foreigner.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZENS

In 2019 the government introduced a list of citizens in Assam, in an attempt to stop illegal immigration into the state. The list, known as the National Register of Citizens (NRC), was a list of Assam’s residents, the majority of them Bengali-speaking Muslims. The compilation of the NRC has the backing of the national government and was overseen by the Indian Supreme Court.

Those excluded from the list have to prove their citizenship before the Foreign Tribunals (FT) in order to be allowed to remain in India. There are not just national bodies, but are staffed by members of the community. Reasons for decisions and records of proceedings are not being kept, or kept informally by concerned lawyers and activists. The FT has been criticised by lawyers, activists, and human rights groups for extreme bias and ex parte (without trial) judgments.

The burden of proving their citizenship is placed on the applicant, but many residents of the impoverished state lack access to the kinds of records that can prove this due to poor government record-keeping, illiteracy or lack of money. Inconsistencies in official records are also being used to declare people foreigners if there are differences in spelling or ages on the voter rolls.

Journalist Rohini Mohan analysed these judgments in 2019 and found that 82 per cent of them resulted in deportation, with Bengali-speaking Muslims more likely than other groups to be deported, although other Bengali-speaking people are also being targeted. 78 per cent of hearings were held on the papers without the applicant being heard at all. The government says this is necessary for efficiency as many “foreigners” had absconded and could not be found. Many people against whom ex parte judgment was passed were in fact living in local villages, were easily locatable and in some cases, were unaware of any proceedings against them.

Ostensibly, the punishment for being declared a foreigner is deportation, but Bangladesh has refused to accept such deportees. In reality, those declared foreigners are subject to arrest and detention, potentially indefinitely, awaiting deportation. These detention centres are described as overcrowded and poorly maintained. One activist described the situation as one of “grave and extreme human distress and suffering.”

STATELESSNESS CRISIS

Two after the publication of the NRC, the consequences for the 2 million excluded people in Assam are still being felt. Those excluded from the list are effectively stateless.

They are not entitled to the various rights which attach to Indian citizenship, and are increasingly unable to own property, access welfare or vote.

Statelessness is an area of increasing concern in international law. In 2014, the UNHCR launched the #IBelong campaign in a bid to end statelessness worldwide. There are an estimated 10ml stateless people in the world, but it is hard to be sure of exact numbers. There is a lack of agreement over what statelessness is and stateless people are difficult to count, given their inherent marginalisation, and lack of representation in official records. There is no doubt however that millions of people in Assam are now excluded from citizenship.

All of this is happening against a backdrop of Hindu nationalism. The BJP, the Hindu nationalist party to which Prime Minister Narendra Modi belongs, have recently won the state election in Assam to retain their seat in the region. They ran on an anti-muslim, anti-immigration platform which targeted the minority Bengali-speaking Muslim population and framed them as a “threat” to the Hindu majority in Assam. Human Rights activists fear that this climate will feed ethnic and religious tensions in the region and lead to violence as has happened in 1983 when hundreds of people were killed by anti-muslim mobs.

The crisis in Assam has been compared to the genocidal crackdown on Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, which forced millions of people across the border into Bangladesh, resulting in a refugee crisis in the region. Citizenship is a nationalist fiction, designed to formalise the line between “us” and “them.” Nevertheless, this fiction has important consequences for those excluded from its ambit. The ongoing situation in Assam deserves our attention and our support. Governments must not be allowed to weaponise citizenship.
Last week, Israeli military forces began killing Palestinians— including women and children. Most were killed by bombs dropped on Gaza by Israeli jets. The airstrikes came in retaliation for rocket attacks by militants belonging to the Islamist group Hamas. The rockets, in turn, were a response to Israeli attacks on the houses of Palestinians protesting a Zionist march at Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa Mosque.

Sparking the latest round of violence are Israel’s aggressive land grabs and stepped-up effort to expel Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. The moves are widely seen as a prelude to Israeli ambitions to swallow up all of Jerusalem, blocking the formation of a Palestinian state with its capital in the city.

The expulsions have now been temporarily postponed by a decision of the Supreme Court of Israel to delay ruling on government plans to permanently move Israeli settlers onto the Palestinian lands in Sheikh Jarrah.

Much of the mainstream press in Israel and in countries allied with the extremist right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have referred to the stealing of Palestinian land and homes by illegal settlers as “evictions,” but Palestinians and international human rights groups say the process is part of a long-running ethnic cleansing program aimed at driving Arabs out of Jerusalem.

Some of the families living in Sheikh Jarrah have been there since 1936. They moved to the area after being expelled from their previous homes during the land thefts that made way for the founding of the State of Israel in 1948—the events known as the “Nakba,” or the Catastrophe, by Palestinians. Approximately 750,000 Palestinians out of a population of 1.9 million were kicked off their ancestral lands to make way for new Jewish immigrants from 1947 to 1949.

Israel’s deadly airstrikes on last Monday were preceded by hours of fighting outside the al-Aqsa Mosque, a site sacred to both Muslims and Jews. Palestinians had gathered to pray as Gaza under attack. An estimated 300 or more Palestinians were hurt. Later that evening, Hamas fired rockets toward Israel in retaliation. Netanyahu then sent bombers into the skies above Gaza.

The Israeli military claimed it would only target Islamist militants, but the Gaza Health Ministry reported heavy civilian casualties, particularly in targeted apartment buildings.

Ashraf al-Kidra, a spokesperson for the ministry, told the Associated Press that Israel’s “reckless assault” was overwhelming the health care system, which is already reeling from the fight against COVID-19. Medical supplies are constantly in short supply due to an economic blockade by Israel, and a form of vaccine apartheid continues to restrict Palestinian access to coronavirus shots. Israel has vaccinated over 60 per cent of its population, but by the end of April, Palestine had only been able to secure enough vaccines for .4 per cent of its people. Most Palestinians must wait for supplies from the World Health Organization’s Covax program for poor countries, even as their wealthy neighbor speeds back to pre-COVID normality.

These events are unfolding in the wake of the release of a comprehensively stunning report from the internationally respected group Human Rights Watch, which unequivocally calls Israel an “apartheid” state.

Israel’s “relentless assault” was overwhelmingly supported by the people of Sheikh Jarrah “in the face of the fascist attacks” of Israeli “occupation forces and settler gangs.” The left-wing socialist party urged Palestinian authorities to secure international aid to “stop the massacre of ethnic cleansing” in East Jerusalem.

Calls for resistance against Israeli aggression also came from within Israel itself. Muhammad Barakeh, chair of the Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel, encouraged protests in all cities against the “terror of the occupation in Jerusalem.” Some twenty-one per cent of the population of Israel proper is Palestinian. Barakeh is a member of the Communist Party of Israel and previously served as a member of the Knesset, Israel’s parliament.

Netanyahu’s militaristic actions are in line with his long-running stance of squeezing out Palestinians and expanding Israeli territory, but they are also wrapped up in Israel’s chaotic domestic political situation. Since inconclusive elections in March, Netanyahu has failed to hammer out a coalition arrangement with his hardline and ultra-Orthodox allies. He currently sits as a caretaker prime minister.

Heading up the defence ministry and overseeing the bombing of Gaza is one of Netanyahu’s rivals, Benny Gantz. The two share a desire for crushing Hamas, but the latest fighting may upset Gantz’s attempts to win the support of Arab parties in Israel in order to oust Netanyahu.

Though the highest organs of the Israeli state appear beset by division and confusion, in Sheikh Jarrah and across Palestine, the fighting appears to be uniting people. Muna al-Kurd, a 23-year-old woman living in Sheikh Jarrah, told the Al Jazeera network, “The size of the global solidarity has angered the [Israeli] government of the occupation, and the crackdown has increased. “But,” she defiantly said, “I believe in popular resistance.”
China’s space authority announced on Sunday that remnants from China’s Long March-5B Y2 carrier rocket reentered the Earth’s atmosphere at 12:44 am Beijing time on Sunday with most parts burning up during the process, China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) said. The location of the re-entry is 7.2 degrees east longitude and 2.65 degrees north latitude, indicating somewhere on the Arabian Sea west of Sri Lanka.

Despite clarification by China’s space industry insiders and Foreign Ministry that the probability of the rocket remnants causing harm was extremely low, a number of Western media outlets, including CNN and The New York Times, as well as the US Pentagon and NASA, claimed the debris was heading back to Earth in an “uncontrolled manner” and criticised China of being “irresponsible” for the ocean landing.

But analysts of foreign affairs pointed out that it reflects the double standards of the West in an attempt to sabotage China’s space station construction plan, exposing their military intentions to track China’s space hardware.

**“COMPLETELY NORMAL”**

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“The accusations were false, groundless,” said Song Zhongyi, an aerospace expert and TV commentator. “The so-called ‘uncontrolled’ trajectory refers to the loss of propulsion, but in no way means that China has lost track of its flight path and real-time location.”

The movement of the rocket fragments was watched closely by China’s space-tracking network. Accurate predictions of its landing site were made during the design phase so that the flight course would avoid densely inhabited areas.

Wang Ya’nan, chief editor of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, said “it is completely normal” for rocket debris to return to Earth, and it is a common practice carried out by all global participants in the aerospace field, including the US.

“The wreckage’s fall is within the normal range under widely accepted standards, with most parts burnt up during re-entry and a few were insufficiently burnt due to differences in the atmospheric environment,” Wang said. “Except for the SpaceX reusable rockets, all remnants from the first and second stages of traditional launch vehicles return to Earth in an uncontrolled manner. And all countries conducting such practice track the falling pieces and calculate their trajectories as China does,” Wang noted.

Following the successful launch of the Long March-5B Y2, which sent the first section of China’s space station – Tianhe core module cabin – into orbit, China kicked off an intense construction phase of the country’s first space station project, where a busy schedule of another 10 launches has been set for the next two years. The space station is expected to be operational by 2022.

Estimated to be the only operational space station in orbit that will be open to foreign partners after the retirement of the International Space Station scheduled in 2024, some Western countries, especially the US, are jealous of how rapidly China is growing in aerospace technology. “Therefore, any progress in the aerospace sector will touch a nerve in the US strategic community,” Li Haidong, a professor at the Institute of International Relations at China Foreign Affairs University, told the Global Times on Sunday.

The US has continued suppressing China in the science and technology field after US President Joe Biden took office. It tried to use the issue of the rocket debris to smear China’s image in the globe, accusing the country of damaging world peace, and on the other hand, it attempted to play up the “China threat” theory as not every country can develop Long March rockets, Li said.

Space debris is an issue faced by all countries in the process of space development. Space needs protection from all countries just like Earth. However, it is a scientific and technological issue and should not be politicised, Li stressed.

Several Chinese space industry insiders reached by the Global Times on Sunday revealed that China did its homework during the initial rocket design phase on the lift-off position, trajectory planning and related technical preparations, which all took into consideration the falling of rocket debris.

**MILITARY INTENTIONS**

Before the debris reentered the Earth’s atmosphere, the US military and certain EU agencies closely tracked the debris and predicted the landing time and location. Experts noted that Western predictive analysis of the re-entry of the final stage of the Long March-5B Y2 carrier rocket is a kind of anti-missile training for them.

“Although the upper stage of this rocket is not a real missile, the prediction of its flight trajectory and reentry performance parameters can be used as an exercise to predict the reentry parameters of a real missile warhead. It is a reference for their future precise anti-missile operations,” said Huang Zhicheng, an expert in the space industry.

Huang noted that the treatment of the debris of the upper stage of the rocket may cause a small amount of debris, but the probability of causing harm is very small.

However, this problem has not been finally solved by any country.

**“COMET-LIKE” OR “SERIOUS THREAT”**

In stark contrast to media reports on China’s rocket debris, burning rocket remnants of the second stage of the US SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, which crashed on a farm in Washington state in March, were described by media like Associated Press as “leaving comet-like trails” as the vessel streaked across the Pacific Northwest sky.

The different descriptions of the two rockets reflects the double standards adopted by some Western forces in the way China is treated, said Song, as “they are not really worried about causing harm to people, but since it’s a Chinese rocket, they have politi-cised the matter, put a label on it and then hyped it.”

Xing Jianwei, vice chief designer of the Long March 5 rocket, told media that China is developing the capability to control the rocket’s fanning (when the nose cone that protects the payload is jettisoned in space) after separation so that the attitude of its re-entry to Earth can be controlled.

During the nearly 60 years of space activity, no case of rocket debris causing human casualties has been reported. The risks for all rocket debris are fairly close, hence, it is seriously anti-intellectual to claim that Chinese rockets have a particularly high risk, analysts said.

“I now really doubt the common sense of science in Western society, since they believe in such logic,” Wang Yanan noted. PeopLe’s Daily