

Cash-banning PM fails common good test



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Lead Editorial

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In a little over three weeks, the Senate Economics Committee will hand down its report on the cash ban bill, after which the Morrison government can be expected to move it to a vote in the Senate. The government intended to ram this bill through Parliament last September, but that agenda was derailed by the massive public backlash informed by the Citizens Party and others. Now it may have been derailed again by the bushfire crisis, which has exposed Prime Minister Scott Morrison for what he is—a pit bull when it comes to protecting the banks, but absent and uncaring when it comes to the needs of real people.

Politicians like Scott Morrison love to hide behind formalities such as the demarcation between federal and state responsibilities. That attitude comes up all the time when their constituents try to lobby them on important issues, such as the cash ban, and in response the MPs deflect like mad, passing off responsibility to Treasury, or other politicians or parties. Morrison tried to do that with the bushfires, by leaving the job to the states and assuming state leaders would take the heat, but it didn't cut it. In a major crisis, Australians expect their government to take charge, and marshal all of the resources necessary to tackle the crisis head-on. Instead, Morrison went on holidays, and left it to volunteer firefighters to shoulder the responsibility of protecting the nation. When he was shamed into returning, he was slow to deploy the army, overly bureaucratic in providing financial assistance to the volunteer firefighters (just as his government had been with farmers suffering from the drought), and more interested in photo ops (which spectacularly blew up in his face).

All Australians saw the real Scott Morrison. This side of him has always been visible, except people didn't pay attention until it affected them. Morrison's callousness and inability to empathise was on full display when he ran the "border protection" program that scapegoated innocent and vulnerable refugees. He had no care for the myriad victims of Australia's criminal banks, which he protected from scrutiny and accountability every way he could. And he has continued putting the banks above the people in policies such as "bail-in" and the cash ban.

On most of these issues, the nature of Morrison and his government was disguised by the fact that he had accomplices—the Australian Labor Party. When Labor caves in to the government's agenda, there's no accountability. But now we have an interesting situation with the cash ban. The hearing of the Senate committee in December exposed that the government has no evidence of the need for this totalitarian law that traps people in banks. This was drawn out by questioning from Labor Senator Alex Gallacher, who made it clear his motivation came from the flood of protests he had received from his constituents (thanks to the work of the Citizens Party and our collaborators). Now the bushfires have demonstrated that in a natural disaster, electronic means of payments easily fail, and without cash people are left stranded. Combined with the lack of evidence for the law, if politicians had any integrity at all this experience should be enough to kill off the bill.

It is up to us to make sure it does. For the next three weeks, we have one target—the Labor Party. Morrison will push ahead with his agenda if Labor lets him. Given that Anthony Albanese's policy director Andrew Dempster is from KPMG, the corrupt global auditing firm behind the cash ban, we have a big job, but now's the time to strike. For the next three weeks everyone should call Labor MPs and Senators, to ram home the point that they will be held responsible if they again let Morrison get away with putting banks ahead of the Australian people.

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