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The Prime Minister has made clear that the moral priority he believes the 45th parliament needs to address is 'budget repair'. He justifies this priority on the basis that if the task is not undertaken it unfairly places the cost of current profligacy on the shoulders of those who are to follow.

If it is as simple as that, who could argue? But it is not as simple as that, as the rhetoric of Scott Morrison illustrates in his Joe Hockey mimicking binary division of Australians between 'tax payers and non-tax payers'. In other words the budget blowout is the fault of those who are not pulling their weight and those not pulling their weight are to be defined as those receiving tax payer largesse. Following this argument, budget repair therefore necessarily means removing benefits from the poorest in our society.

Those not paying tax include students and the young unemployed, the elderly who have paid tax for 50+ years and the army of volunteers who devote much of their time to providing essential services without which our society could not properly be called a 'civil society'. Those who receive tax-payer largesse fraudulently or who have no desire to contribute to the wellbeing of society are a miniscule minority. The vast majority who receive centrelink benefits would rather it was otherwise.

What the rhetoric of the Prime Minister and Treasurer fails to address is the very serious and growing inequity that besets western democracies worldwide. The very wealthy no longer contribute to society through work in the conventional sense. There is a huge divide between those whose wealth is derived from 'assets' and those whose well being is derived from a wage or a salary paid out of their business. The latter pay their tax. The former often do not, or have the means to ensure that their contribution is minimised as much as possible.

In addition, the assets of the very wealthy are often accumulated without contributing value. Hedge Fund operations do not necessarily contribute any value, or assist production; they can simply strip 'value' from one place of production and put it in the hands of their shareholders. It is simply not true that wealth necessarily flows into the creation of Australian jobs

Sir Michael Marmot nailed it last night on the ABC's Q&A program (29 August) when he revealed a polling of the general public showed they thought a senior executive should receive no more than 6 times the basic salary of their employees. When asked what they thought they were receiving the average response was "12 times". Such was their incredulity to find the figure to be 350 times.

*The video clip is available through [the Sydney Morning Herald site](#).*

If budget repair is to be achieved the government must take transparent steps to do two things.

First, the Australian community must be shown that the generous concessions made to the wealthy through superannuation, negative gearing and capital gains are reined in. These concessions, possible during the mining boom, are clearly not possible now and continuing with them is contributing significantly to our budget problem.

Second, wealthy individuals and companies must be made to pay their fair share of tax. Not to do this and at the same time to withdraw benefits to the poor will give cause for some to consider civil disobedience morally justified. If there is a moral issue as the Prime Minister insists, and I agree, the moral issue relates not to a budget but to the fairness and equity of the society to which we all belong.

If in 3 years time we have repaired the budget but widened the gap of inequity we will have bequeathed to the next generation a society which can no longer be called 'civil' or fair, a society in which those who have will need South African style electric wires to protect their gated communities from those who have not and an Australian society that has totally lost the desire for a moral compass, let alone recognises a pathway to find one.

All of this without even mentioning Climate change, clearly the issue which bequeaths all following generations with a debt beyond their capacity to put right.

By **George Browning**