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Mapping the Coercive Turn: Universal Credit, Social Crisis, and the Politics of Welfare in Austerity Britain, 2010–2019

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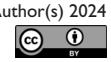

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Abstract

This article examines the politics of welfare in Britain from 2010 to 2019. Drawing on Gramscian literature, the first section outlines an original framework of the 'divide-and-rule' politics of welfare during the 1980s and 1990s in the United Kingdom. The second section examines the return of welfare restructuring in Britain following the 2008 global financial crisis, focusing on Universal Credit. It contends that a significant escalation of coercive social policies within the social security system undermined previous social antagonisms underpinning the political coalitions of neoliberal welfare reform. Alongside deepening economic stagnation and dislocation exacerbated by austerity after 2010, it argues that this coercive turn intensified an unfolding crisis of legitimacy. The third section examines the politics of welfare amid an unfolding social crisis in Britain. It argues that despite burgeoning socio-political discontent and the emergence of the counter-hegemonic project of Corbynism, 2016–2019 was characterised by an interregnum. With the defeat of Corbynism amid protracted Brexit negotiations, this included a period of political impasse in which popular support for welfare reform, austerity and neoliberalism were in decline, but without an attendant shift in the balance of political forces to advance an alternative hegemonic project. As a result, a deepening social crisis continued to unfold.

Keywords

austerity, welfare, hegemony, neoliberalism, corbynism, crisis, interregnum, political economy

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, many world regions saw a swift return to fiscal austerity. Rather than a neutral rebalancing of public finances, the effects of austerity were deeply asymmetrical, with the brunt of the burden of macroeconomic adjustment imposed on working-class

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populations through cuts to social spending, the restructuring of social security and income support programmes, and freezes to public sector wages. Within the United Kingdom, successive governments from 2010 onward leveraged welfare reform as a primary mechanism to impose austerity, redeploying the political coalitions, policy paradigms and ideological tenets of neoliberal welfare governance to legitimate the turn towards austerity and impose the costs of economic adjustment onto working-class populations. While post-2010 welfare reforms drew on long-standing policies and practices, there was also a qualitative shift in social policy during this period. Marking the beginning of a prolonged period of economic stagnation and austerity in the United Kingdom, the period following the 2008 crisis was characterised by the deepening of a variety of disciplinary social and economic policies (Dukelow and Kennett, 2018), including a historic reconfiguration of the welfare state. At the forefront of this shift was the rollout of Universal Credit, which consolidated six working-age benefits and tax credits into one amalgamated and digitised system.[1] These changes entailed far-reaching institutional and structural reforms with significant implications for the livelihood of recipients of social security and the British working class more broadly.

A burgeoning literature has since sought to make sense of the re-emergence of welfare restructuring in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis in the United Kingdom (Taylor-Gooby, 2012). Political economy literature has drawn attention to the economic logic behind welfare reform. Some have described the Universal Credit system in the United Kingdom as an attempt to recommodify the social security system and push recipients into the low-wage labour market to enhance structural competitiveness (Greer, 2016). Influential analyses have highlighted the increasingly coercive and violent nature of austerity and welfare restructuring in this period (Cooper and Whyte, 2017), which exposed large numbers of the British working class to premature death or 'social murder' (Grover, 2019).[2] Several commentators have highlighted far-reaching changes to the structure and governance of the British welfare state after 2010, including a significant escalation of benefits sanctions and punitive measures (Adler, 2016; Fletcher and Wright, 2018; Webster, 2014; Wright et al., 2020), which were overseen by an increasingly digitised and surveillance-based infrastructure (Alston, 2019). A growing literature has emphasised the deleterious effects of such reforms on the health and well-being of working-class and particularly disabled populations (Cheetham et al., 2019; Wickham et al., 2020), highlighting its gendered and racialised components (Fawcett et al., 2023; Reeves and Loopstra, 2017). However, with several exceptions (Fletcher and Redman, 2023; Lavery, 2019), few accounts have examined the implications of the reconfiguration of the UK social security system in relation to the changing *political* coalitions of the welfare state amid a broader crisis of legitimacy unfolding within British capitalism throughout the 2010s.

This article seeks to address these gaps by providing a conjunctural analysis of the politics of welfare in Britain from 2010 to 2019 in relation to a broader organic crisis in British capitalism.[3] Revisiting debates on the UK left on 'Thatcherism' during the 1980s, I first outline a Gramscian framework to conceptualise what I call the 'divide-and-rule' politics of welfare under neoliberalism in the United Kingdom from the election of Margaret Thatcher through the ascendence of the 'Third Way' under New Labour. I argue that despite important political and ideological differences between them, both political parties in the United Kingdom embraced an anti-welfarist approach that constructed electoral coalitions based on rigidly defined social antagonisms between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. I then examine transformations within this model of neoliberal welfare politics in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, focusing on the rollout of Universal Credit under the Coalition (2010–2015) and Conservative (2015–2019) governments in Britain. As part of a wider coercive turn associated with post-crisis austerity, I argue that social policies after 2010 built on established patterns of neoliberal welfare politics but also imposed increasingly coercive measures (e.g. conditionalities, work assessments) on growing ranks of working class populations, including those conventionally exempt from such reforms, that is, the 'deserving' poor. By

extending disciplinary policies to wider elements of the populace, I contend that this marked a break with prevailing patterns of neoliberal welfare governance. Amid a broader crisis of legitimacy in the British state and the onset of a period of historic economic stagnation, I discuss the emergence of contending political projects, most notably the counter-hegemonic strategy of Corbynism, which challenged key aspects of austerity and the neoliberal consensus. With the defeat of Corbynism amid the fallout of the Brexit negotiations, however, I argue that British politics from 2016 to 2019 was characterised by an *interregnum* in which popular support for welfare reform, austerity and neoliberalism were evidently in decline, but without an attendant shift in the balance of socio-political forces to advance an alternative hegemonic project. As a result, a deepening social crisis across Britain continued to unfold. I conclude by providing a brief reflection on the contributions of this article for current understandings of the politics of welfare, neoliberalism and social crisis in post-2008 Britain.

Divide and Rule: Towards a Gramscian Framework of Welfare State Politics in the Neoliberal Conjuncture

In the aftermath of the crises of the 1970s and the ascendence of neoliberalism, several strands of historical materialist thought sought further to refine theoretical frameworks for understanding the agency of state institutions and the primacy of politics in capitalist restructuring. Some of the most illuminating accounts redeployed the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to reconceptualise the politics of the welfare state as a site of contestation in the formation of 'hegemonic projects'. Jessop (1990) identified how accumulation strategies and hegemonic projects mutually shape the politics of capitalist states.[4] Hegemonic projects comprise efforts to mobilise political support 'behind a concrete, national popular program of action which asserts a general interest in the pursuit of objectives that explicitly or implicitly advance the long-term interests of the hegemonic class (fraction)' and to resolve the 'abstract problem of conflicts between particular interests and the general interest' (Jessop, 1990: 208–209). These can further be differentiated between 'One Nation' and 'Two Nation' projects, with the former referring to a more 'expansive hegemony in which the support of the entire population is mobilized through material concessions and symbolic rewards', such as postwar Keynesianism, while the latter described a 'more limited hegemony concerned to mobilize the support of strategically significant sectors of the population and to pass the costs of the project to other sectors', such as Thatcherism (Jessop, 1990: 211). While not necessarily meeting the conditions of conventional Gramscian understandings of hegemony,[5] Jessop's (1990) analysis contributed to a range of critical theorisations that illustrated how the politics of the welfare state is integral to the hegemonic projects of capitalist states that accompany, but are not functionally reducible to, their accumulation strategies (Lavery, 2019). This includes the work of historical materialist feminist social reproduction theory, which has emphasised the centrality of social reproduction as a key feature of how political authority and capitalist hegemony is contested and reproduced (Bakker and Gill, 2019).

Hegemonic Projects and the Politics of Anti-Welfarism From Thatcher to New Labour

In the aftermath of the electoral victory of Margaret Thatcher and the political ascendence of the New Right, debates over 'Thatcherism' on the UK left, particularly in the work of Stuart Hall, Bob Jessop and their co-authors, generated a number of clarifying theoretical analyses on welfare

state politics in the neoliberal conjuncture. Stuart Hall's (1988) analysis of authoritarian populism identified the politics of anti-welfarism as foundational to the political ascendence of Margaret Thatcher and the New Right amid a deep-seated crisis of postwar capitalism. Hall (1988: 8) noted how, ideologically, Thatcherism combined elements of 'organic Toryism', which tied together conservative themes of nation, family, duty, authority and traditionalism, with a 'revived neoliberalism' based on self-interest, competitive individualism and anti-statism. This was emblematic of Thatcher's unification of economic liberals and conservatives of the New Right embodied in the precepts of the 'free economy and the strong state' (Gamble, 1988).[6] Hall's (1988) analysis was particularly perceptive in noting how Thatcherism popularised the principles of monetarism by converting 'hard-faced economics' into the 'language of compulsive *moralism*' (p. 47).[7] This was achieved by tapping into forms of 'common sense' related to diverse social issues and weaving them together into a broad political coalition and historical bloc.[8] This included the propagation of tropes and idioms that resonated with the everyday life of a cross-class stratum of voters, such as the invocation of moral panics related to crime or economic dependency, which served to legitimate political interventions (Hall, 1988; Hay, 1996). Central to this political-ideological strategy was the politics of anti-welfarism. As Hall (1988) described, a core component of Thatcher's politics was the representation of 'the image of an over-taxed individual, enervated by welfare-state coddling' and the 'emotive image of the "scrounger"', and the 'welfare scavenger: a well-designed folk-devil' (p. 47).

This shift in British politics described by Hall identified how Thatcherism constructed lasting political coalitions and popularised forms of economic restructuring by mobilising sentiments of anti-welfarism that internally divided the working class between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' constituencies. While such divisions had a long-standing history in British capitalism (Novak, 1988), they were revived by the Thatcherite historical bloc during the 1980s, which sought to drive a wedge between the so-called 'deserving' (i.e. respectable, employed, working-and middle-class families) and 'undeserving' poor (i.e. unemployed, welfare-dependent, lone-parent, and often gendered and racialised; Shilliam, 2018). This included the use of moralising dichotomies strategically drawn between public- and private-sector workers, unionised and nonunionised labour, immigrants and non-immigrants, and social security recipients versus 'self-sufficient' workers. Valentine and Harris (2014), for example, identify the rise of these social antipathies in British culture through the trope of 'strivers', that is, hard-working, employed working- and middle-class populations, versus 'skivers', that is, dependent and supposedly idle citizens living off welfare benefits (see also Morrison, 2019).[9] Rather than a purely rhetorical representation, these strategic social antagonisms were rooted in the economic landscape of late 1970s and early 1980s Britain, when a growing multitude of unemployed workers displaced by the Thatcher administration's recessionary policies were targeted to internally divide the British working class. These forms of neoliberal common sense became foundational to how the New Right organised electoral coalitions during the 1980s and were deployed as a form of 'divide-and-rule' politics that strategically divided working-class constituencies and mobilised layers of the populace behind a broader assault on organised labour and project of neoliberal accumulation (Jessop, 1990). This modality of politics found resonance within and between different layers of the British class hierarchy and became central to the electoral politics of the United Kingdom from the 1980s onward.

The nature of Thatcherism and the political–ideological transformations it ushered in were the subject of lively debate on the UK left throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Providing a rejoinder to Hall's analysis in *New Left Review*, Jessop et al. (1984) identified several distinct elements of Thatcherism (Gallas, 2016).[10] They disputed Hall's assessment that Thatcherism constituted a successful and transformative hegemonic project able to secure mass popular consent (Jessop et al., 1984). Thatcherism, in their view, was a top–down political project that failed to achieve mass

popular political support, relying on a passive and demobilised social base, and seeking to contain and diminish what populist fervent it was able to generate (Jessop et al., 1984). Indeed, Jessop et al. (1984) classified Thatcherism as a 'Two Nations' hegemonic project, which was not necessarily able to sustain a national-popular base but rather constructed a 'more limited hegemony concerned to mobilize the support of strategically significant sectors of the population and to pass the costs of the project to other sectors' (Jessop, 1990: 211). Jessop et al. (1984) further maintained that there were numerous gaps between the ideological tenets espoused by Thatcherism and the institutional and economic transformations it was able to achieve. In particular, the Thatcher Government confronted several institutional barriers within the state that inhibited the full realisation of a coherent accumulation strategy.

Jessop et al.'s (1984, 1988) analyses provided an important corrective, illustrating how Thatcherism was a more contingent form of political rule with more limited popular support than is often implied by the invocation of hegemony (Nunn, 2014).[11] Despite these differences in analysis, the work of Hall and Jessop et al., both illustrated how a central element of the politics pioneered by Thatcherism and the New Right was its reliance on strategic antagonisms that were mobilised politically through the welfare state to divide classes and social groups and thereby diffuse political opposition to market disciplinary economic policies (Jessop, 1990).

Despite important political and ideological differences with the New Right, divide-and-rule politics was subsequently embraced by Tony Blair's Third Way New Labour Government (Wamsley, 2023). New Labour's embrace of disciplinary 'workfare' policies, which imposed compulsory work and behavioural requirements on recipients in return for receipt of residual social security benefits, ceded ground to the revanchist welfare politics of the New Right (King and Wickham-Jones, 1999; Peck, 2001). Under the pretence of combating social exclusion, New Labour embarked on far-reaching efforts to compel unemployed populations back to work and reintegrate them into low-wage labour markets (Nunn, 2007). Building on the changes of the Major administration with the introduction of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in 1996 (Peck, 2001: 282), New Labour implemented a range of reforms to the UK social security system, including the extension of compulsory work training through the newly formed JSA. These reforms tethered eligibility and receipt of social assistance to work and behavioural requirements based on US models of workfare (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby, 2004; King and Wickham-Jones, 1999). New Labour's reforms also imposed caps on receipt of benefits, elevating the penalties and sanctions for those unable to take up work placements or meet increasing work requirements and behavioural criteria (Fletcher and Wright, 2018: 328; Peck, 2001: 280–281).

New Labour's social policy reforms were influenced by a new philosophy of governance emerging throughout the 1990s called new paternalism (Soss et al., 2011). Based on the work of figures such as Lawrence Mead, new paternalists maintained that a culture of dependency had developed within liberal capitalist democracies, in which populations had come to depend on state social support rather than taking risks in labour markets, creating a new underclass of citizens. Tapping into the racialised and gendered politics of the 'undeserving poor' (Shilliam, 2018), new paternalists advocated for an active state that could reintroduce norms of responsibility and civic obligation in the working class (MacGregor, 1999: 92), and mould their behaviour into market-conforming activity (Dukelow and Kennett, 2018; Soss et al., 2011).

While these coercive reforms in social policy comprised key components of Third Way welfare restructuring, they were also flanked by more ostensibly socially inclusive policies (Jessop, 2007), including distributive transfers and investments in 'human capital'. As part of campaign promises to promote social justice and equality of opportunity, New Labour increasingly relied on the administration of tax credits for social policy. After a period of substantial fiscal consolidation from 1997 to 2001, the Blair administration significantly increased means-tested tax credits,

including the Working Families Tax Credit (2001), and the Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit (2003), with total expenditures on tax credits rising to more than £20 billion in 2010 (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2013). These reforms, alongside other moderately increased social spending on health and education, comprised the 'carrot' of New Labour's social policy reforms (Sloman, 2019: 19). This shift towards tax credits was nonetheless part of a new means-tested, employment-based consensus in social policy that valorised labour market income while sanctioning unemployed workers and lower echelons of the class hierarchy unable to attain these socio-economic outcomes, thereby cultivating popular antagonism against the 'undeserving poor'. Alongside the secular decline of organised labour, deindustrialisation and the broader defeat of the Left across Britain, popular hostility towards welfare recipients served as a foundational mechanism of securing political legitimation. New Labour's approach to social policy sought to circumvent the 'old' politics of the welfare state, that is, its previous association with the political coalitions of organised labour and the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and to promote a broader hegemonic project of market-led economic policies within an ostensibly socially inclusive agenda (cf. Lavery, 2019; Nunn, 2007). In short, while New Labour's approach to the politics of the welfare state differed in important respects from the New Right, the divide-and-rule politics of anti-welfarism remained an integral feature of all major UK political parties throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Post-2008 Austerity and the Return of Welfare Restructuring

Amid the return to the politics of austerity in 2010 that closely followed the 2008 global financial crisis, welfare restructuring returned to the fore of British politics. From 2010 onward, successive governments in the United Kingdom leveraged welfare reform, redeploying political coalitions, policy paradigms and ideologies of neoliberal welfare governance to legitimate the turn towards austerity and impose the costs of economic adjustment associated with the post-2008 bailout and stimulus measures onto working-class populations. However, while post-2010 reforms drew on long-standing policies and reforms characteristic of neoliberalism, there was also a shift in social policy in the aftermath of 2008. This was defined by what Dukelow and Kennett (2018) have described as coercive commodification, which is characterised by the 'closing down any vestiges of choice and stripping back subsequent policy buffers, and locking people into a circuit of low-paid work, debt and housing precarity' (pp. 485, 486). Central to this process in the United Kingdom was the reconfiguration and recommodification of the social security system. Alongside the pivot towards austerity in 2010 and the onset of a period of historic stagnation in British capitalism (Resolution Foundation and Centre for Economic Performance, 2022), social policy reforms by successive Coalition and Conservative governments became increasingly coercive, extending benefit sanctions, conditionalities, and workfare reforms to broad layers of the British working class that extended beyond the parameters of the 1990s. Layered on top of more long-standing dislocations and inequalities associated with neoliberalism, this shift in social policy contributed to a burgeoning legitimacy crisis within the British state and an ongoing reconfiguration of the political coalitions behind welfare reform.

Universal Credit and the Shifting Landscape of British Welfare Politics, 2010–2016

In the lead up to the 2010 UK election, all of the major contending parties promised public spending cuts, a cap to public sector pay, and to deliver savings through reforms to the social security system.[12] However, it was the Conservative Party that most stridently championed austerity and

welfare reform. Promising to fix 'Britain's broken society' and the 'tidal wave of worklessness', the 2010 Conservative manifesto called for an immediate freeze to public sector pay, raising the public sector pension age, halting tax credits, slashing discretionary spending and substantially reforming the welfare and social security system to 'give unemployed people a hand up, not a hand out' (Conservative Party, 2010: viii, 15, 16). After the Conservative–Liberal Democratic Coalition Government took power in May 2010, welfare reform became one of its central aims to eliminate the 'structural' budget deficit. As Chancellor of Exchequer, George Osborne, highlighted in his June budget speech, 'It is simply not possible to deal with a budget deficit of this size without lasting reform of welfare' (HM Treasury, 2013).

The flagship welfare reform programme of the Coalition Government was Universal Credit, which was introduced in the 2012 Welfare Reform Act and rolled out progressively over the next several years. Universal Credit proposed shifting recipients of virtually all working-age benefits and tax credits onto an amalgamated tax and benefit system. Among other things, this transferred recipients onto a monthly automated payment schedule credited to recipients' bank accounts; consolidated in-work and out-of-work benefits through an integrated tax and earnings reporting system; shifted applications and management of claims online (from in-person Jobcentre Plus offices to Universal Jobmatch) through a surveillance-based 'digital-by-default' design; deepened existing conditionalities and work requirements for claimants and introduced new conditionalities and work requirements for previously exempt populations; strengthened the scope and severity of sanctions for non-compliance; introduced an earnings-based taper system to incentivise work; increased penalties for 'benefit fraud' and ramped up efforts to recover 'fraud debt' through higher benefit sanctions; and replaced hardship payments, that is, support for destitute claimants who had been sanctioned, with conditional loans (Welfare Reform Act 2012, 2012). Also included in the 2012 welfare reform legislation was the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment, which replaced Disability Living Allowance, introducing more stringent 'work capability assessments'.[13] These reforms were explicitly framed as a cost-saving measure to reduce disability benefit caseloads by 20% (Hobson, 2020: 13).[14]

The Coalition Government also passed an across-the-board benefit cap implemented in 2013, which established a ceiling on total payments that populations could receive in social security benefits or tax credits at £26,000 per year or £500 per week (Kennedy et al., 2016). These caps followed a series of public sector pay freezes in 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 (Lupton et al., 2015). Caps and pay freezes were leveraged as part of the Conservative Government's political project of cultivating 'moralised antagonisms' between working and non-working households, as well as public and private-sector workers, and particularly lowering the living standards of welfare recipients relative to working households (Lavery, 2019). As the Government's 2010 Spending Review articulated, the reforms were intended to ensure that 'no workless family can receive more in welfare than median after-tax earnings for working households' (HM Treasury, 2010: 28).

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Universal Credit and the broader agenda of welfare state restructuring ushered in by the Coalition Government was the highly centralised regime of conditionalities and sanctions that it introduced. While conditionalities, that is, work-based behavioural requirements mandated for receipt of social benefits, had long been a feature of liberal governance in Britain, post-2010 legislation significantly expanded its reach and severity. As leading critical social policy scholars observed, Universal Credit constituted 'the most all-encompassing manifestation of conditionality in any developed welfare system' (Wright and Dwyer, 2022: 22). Work-related conditionalities were introduced for virtually all social benefits claimants. The progressive escalation of conditionalities meant that those in receipt of social support not only had to be 'available for work' but also 'actively seeking work' (Adler, 2016). This entailed mandating a minimum of 35 weekly job search hours, the attendance of work-focused interviews with a work coach,

training sessions, among other surveillance-based and stigmatising behavioural requirements (including mandating recipients to alter their appearance to appear more 'employable') for receipt of benefits (Fletcher and Wright, 2018).

The largest constituency subjected to conditionalities was JSA claimants, that is, unemployed populations. New conditionalities were also scandalously introduced for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants, populations with a limited capacity to work due to long-term sickness or disability. The Universal Credit regime further reformed ESA by rigidly differentiating claimant populations based on their perceived labour market value. Those deemed 'fit to work' were subjected to a range of requirements, including maintenance of work availability, upwards of 35 mandated hours of job search and preparation, and the attendance of work-focused interviews (DWP, 2015). Those with 'limited capability for work' were placed in Work-Related Activity Groups and were likewise mandated a range of job search requirements (DWP, 2015).[15]

At the forefront of this shift was an unprecedented expansion of a sanctioning regime for benefit recipients. Initiated in 2010 and deepening following the 2012 Welfare Reform Act, the new sanctioning regime, which critical observers have likened to a 'secret penal system' (Webster, 2014), established a multi-tiered system of sanctions for welfare recipients. These included 'lower level sanctions', that is, the least severe of the sanctions imposed for various 'infractions', including failure to attend, or to merely appear a few minutes late to, a meeting with a work coach, failure to participate in a work training regimen, or failure to 'do something to look for work that you agreed with your work coach' (DWP, 2021). For income-based JSA claimants, the largest benefit recipiency pool, these sanctions resulted in claimants losing *all* benefits for a minimum of 4 weeks for the first 'offence', up to 13 weeks for the second, plus additional time to correct the infraction; 'intermediate-level sanctions' resulted in 4-week and 13-week sanctions for first and second strikes; and 'higher-level' sanctions led to a loss of *all* benefits for 13 weeks for a first offence, 26 weeks for a second, and 156 weeks (3 years) for a third (DWP, 2013). Open-ended sanctions were also a new feature introduced, in which benefits were suspended *indefinitely* until compliance with certain conditionalities (Wright et al., 2020).

This significant escalation in the severity and applicability of sanctions increased the maximum benefit sanction from a previous high of 28 weeks to a 100% reduction of benefits for up to 3 years. Similar sanctions were applied to ESA and disabled populations deemed 'fit to work' (DWP, 2013). Unlike other administrative or criminal fines and fees, the imposition of benefit sanctions took immediate effect following infractions (and before appeals), and recipients lost their primary or only source of income, even during the appeals process if they were wrongfully sanctioned (Adler, 2016).[16] The increase in the number of sanctions was striking. Between 2007 and 2013, the number of sanctions imposed on JSA claimants escalated from an annual total of 351,341 sanctions imposed to a high of 1,037,000 sanctions in 2013 (not including ESA sanctions). Between 2010 and 2015, under the Coalition Government's term, roughly one quarter of *all* JSA claimants were sanctioned (before challenges or appeals; Webster, 2017: 6). The post-2010 conditionality and sanctioning regime was also overseen by the introduction of a highly centralised and digitised surveillance system. While the accelerated automation of the UK social security system was introduced gradually, this 'digital-by-default' design system meant that all interactions by new benefit claimants with the social security system were to be automated through a self-administered online portal and call centres (Alston, 2019). While many would continue to use Jobcentre offices for in-person appointments, the legislation gradually introduced a 'mandatory digital self-help' infrastructure in which claimant registration, income calculation, benefit dispersal, sanctions, and an array of surveillance mechanisms were all transferred online (Fletcher and Wright, 2018).

These institutional changes marked an increasingly disciplinary turn, which both deepened patterns of coercive conditionality characteristic of neoliberal British social policy but also extended

them into relatively novel terrain by breaking with conventional distinctions of the 'deserving/undeserving' poor. Under Universal Credit, it was not only unemployed populations who were subjected to stringent conditionalities. As part of its structural consolidation of out- and in-work benefits, in-work conditionalities were also introduced for low-wage and part-time workers receiving benefit or tax credit support (The Universal Credit Regulations 2013, 2013). These reforms, intended to promote 'in-work progression', applied to working households below a certain income threshold, mandating work requirements to increase working hours or take on additional employment (Work and Pensions Committee, 2019). Previously, conditionalities ceased after claimants had taken up 16 hours of paid work; under Universal Credit, however, this threshold was abolished, with full conditionalities applied to working populations working more than 16 hours (Wright and Dwyer, 2022: 22–23). Working households were now subjected to a range of conditionalities and job search requirements if their income fell below a given threshold (Welfare Reform Act 2012, 2012). These requirements were based on a higher earnings threshold, equivalent to a 35-hour work week at the national minimum wage, below which working claimants (an estimated 1.2 million adults) would be subject to work-related requirements (Pennycook and Whittaker, 2012: 7–8). 'In-work conditionalities' were without historical or comparative precedent (Clegg, 2015), subjecting low-wage workers to the 'double conditionality' of workfare requirements on top of employment (Wright and Dwyer, 2022). As a later report revealed, these additional requirements often led low-wage workers to relinquish benefits for which they were eligible, and thereby reduce their standard of living, due to the over-bearing behavioural and work requirements mandated on top of part- or full-time employment (Welfare Conditionality Project, 2018).

Despite burgeoning discontent with welfare reform measures and austerity, the 2015 election, in part due to the distortions of the first-past-the-post electoral system but also the strategic and political limitations of Ed Miliband's Labour Party, saw the Conservatives return to power with a majority government. Once elected, the Conservatives escalated austerity measures and further deepened welfare reforms. The July budget promised an additional £37 billion in spending cuts in one Parliamentary sitting, £12 billion promised in cuts to welfare, a significant escalation of fiscal consolidation measures (HM Treasury, 2015). The spending cuts were to be primarily an across-the-board freeze on working-age benefits, estimated to reduce spending by £4 billion by 2020, a substantial reduction of tax credit and work entitlement eligibility, estimated to save £6 billion, as well as an additional reduction of the total benefit cap (HM Treasury, 2015). The Conservative Government's further changes to the welfare and social security system were implemented in the 2016 *Welfare Reform and Work Act*. Foremost reforms included a lowering of the across-the-board household benefit cap from £26,000 for a family and £18,200 for a single person, to £23,000 in London (£15,410 for a single person), and £20,000 (£13,400 for a single person) everywhere else in the United Kingdom; a 4-year benefits freeze; curtailing Child Tax Credits and child support through Universal Credit; the abolition of ESA Work-Related Activity Component; as well as reductions in social housing rent levels and changes to conditionality for responsible carers and mortgage interest support (Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, 2016). This tranche of reforms marked the second major round of austerity-based welfare restructuring since 2010, affecting the livelihood of hundreds of thousands.

Post-2010 welfare reforms in Britain marked a notable shift in the political coalitions of neoliberal social policy. Whereas welfare state politics during the ascendence of neoliberalism throughout the 1980s and 1990s had previously relied on clearly defined antagonisms between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, under Universal Credit's unprecedented escalation of benefit sanctions, many so-called 'deserving' (e.g. the working poor) populations were now subjected to wide-ranging conditionalities. Such coercive policies undermined past electoral coalitions and Two Nations strategies, which strategically divided social groups based on clearly defined dichotomies to generate

political support for economic restructuring, rupturing the conventional political coalitions of neoliberal welfare reform (cf. Lavery, 2019).

Unlike the ostensible macroeconomic stability associated with previous iterations of welfare reform throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the post-2008 period in the United Kingdom was also characterised by a more pronounced period of economic stagnation, declining real wages, precarious employment and rising inequality (Green and Lavery, 2015; Hay, 2013). These structural pathologies in British capitalism, exacerbated by the embrace of austerity from 2010 onward, meant that the UK labour market was unable to offer meaningful paths to economic security for welfare recipients pushed off benefits. As the Coalition Government enacted a range of disciplinary social policy reforms, the social, economic and political effects of this welfare offensive sharpened a series of interlacing crises in Britain leading up to 2016.

Organic Crisis: The Rise and Fall of Corbynism and the Politics of Welfare in the Interregnum, 2016–2019

The revival of the politics of austerity and old orthodoxies such as welfare reform in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis confounded critical commentators, who discerned the 'strange non-death' of neoliberalism (Crouch, 2011). To some, the stabilisation of global capitalism and its prevailing political and ideological parameters in the aftermath of 2008 under the extraordinary discretionary crisis management policies of states was a testament to neoliberalism's 'remarkable shape-shifting capacities' (Peck, 2010: 106). Yet, despite this apparent stabilisation, a burgeoning crisis of legitimacy emerged throughout the 2010s. From the student movement and anti-austerity protests on the left, to hard-right nationalist movements such as United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), rising social and political discontent against key elements of the neoliberal consensus emerged alongside wide-ranging elite attempts to restore the political-economic and ideological status quo.

Redeploying Gramsci's analysis of the crises of the interwar era, critical observers described the post-2008 era as an 'organic crisis' (Gill, 2012; Stahl, 2019). An organic crisis refers to a multifaceted crisis of representation in which classes and social forces become detached from their traditional parties, metastasising into a generalised crisis of hegemony among the ruling class (Gramsci, 1971: 178, 453). As support for dominant hegemonic projects and ideological consensus declines, this often leads to an interregnum, or a period of relative political impasse or deadlock between contending socio-political forces. Stahl (2018) outlines four elements of an interregnum, including 'a lack of consensus, political dysfunction, competing hegemonic projects, and a reconfiguration of social forces' (p. 352). In the post-2008 period, this included declining popular ideological appeal of core tenets of neoliberalism, such as austerity and welfare reform, as well as the emergence of a variety of contending hegemonic projects and socio-political forces.

On the left, the most significant counter-hegemonic force emerged alongside the unexpected election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in 2015. Representing the culmination of escalating socio-political discontent emerging in response to post-2010 austerity measures, from the student protests to the mass anti-austerity movement from 2012 to 2015, Corbynism signified the sharpest leftward turn within the leadership of the Labour Party in decades (Nunns, 2018). Bolstered by a savvy digital media outreach strategy, energising electoral campaigns, which mobilised working class and precarious educated urban youth populations, and a creative and transformational policy agenda, Corbynism broke with key aspects of the neoliberal consensus (Forrester, 2021). Corbyn's early ascendence in 2015 was based in part on his outspoken opposition to austerity and punitive welfare reform measures. His staunch opposition to the newly elected Conservative Government's proposed Welfare Reform bill in 2015, for example, clearly differentiated him from

the rest of the Labour leadership, which had either acceded to or remained silent on the punitive reforms. Corbyn's principled opposition to austerity was a core component of the 'politics of kindness' that shaped his early appeal (Seymour, 2016). In the leadup to the 2017 election, despite attempts to unseat him as Labour leader and an extraordinarily hostile leadership within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), Corbyn's insurgent campaign defied expectations, resulting in the highest popular vote for Labour since 1997 and securing it 262 seats in Parliament and 40% of the vote. Led by the radical policy agenda of Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, John McDonnell, Labour's 2017 campaign outlined a popular and ambitious anti-austerity agenda, including proposals such as the nationalisation of rail, mail, water and energy firms, the abolition of university tuition fees, substantially increased funding for the National Health Service and social care, and the promotion of alternative models of co-operative and worker ownership at firms (Labour Party, 2017).

One important element of Corbyn's 2017 campaign that has received less media and scholarly attention was its proposal to 'end the punitive sanctions regime' of the Universal Credit system and to 'change the culture of the social security system', particularly by ending the Work Capability Assessments imposed on disabled and sick populations (Labour Party, 2017). In sharp contrast to the legacy of New Labour, which had played an active role in implementing punitive welfare reforms and reinforcing reactionary attitudes towards 'undeserving' welfare recipients (O'Grady, 2017), Corbynism represented a rebuke of this consensus on social policy. While its 2017 campaign offered few detailed proposals on social policy, its rejection of the sanctions regime and punitive features of Universal Credit signalled a substantial shift in the politics of welfare within the Labour Party.

The ascendence of Corbynism coincided with a significant shift in public attitudes towards austerity and welfare. Evidence of these shifting undercurrents was registered in an abrupt transformation in population surveys beginning in 2010. The 2017 *British Social Attitudes Survey*, which had polled the same questions since the 1990s, revealed that for the first time since the 2008 crisis, more people wanted increased taxation for increased social spending (48%) than those who wanted it to stay the same (44%), while more people agreed that the government should redistribute income from the well-off to the least well-off (42%) than those who did not (28%; Clery et al., 2017). Similarly, in a reversal of popular sentiment since the 1990s, the proportion of those surveyed who believed that 'dole claimants' were 'fiddling' dropped from 35% in 2014 to 22% in 2016, while those who believed social security claimants did not deserve help polled at record lows (Clery et al., 2017).

This marked shift in public attitudes towards welfare and austerity was influenced in part by the rise of Corbynism. The Corbyn campaign actively sought to re-fashion popular attitudes towards welfare and austerity in a positive direction and, as one scholar has put it, to spark a 'quiet revolution' on Labour's approach to welfare (Sage, 2019). While undoubtedly playing a role in shifting popular attitudes, this shift was also part of a broader crisis of legitimacy in neoliberalism driven by widespread social discontent with deepening austerity after 2010 and the sharp escalation of punitive benefit sanctions associated with Universal Credit. As recent evidence suggests, popular opinion of both Labour and Conservative Party supporters towards welfare and austerity shifted in parallel after 2010, with negative attitudes towards government social spending and social security recipients declining significantly, indicating a broader ferment of political discontent with the neoliberal consensus in Britain preceding the rise of Corbyn (Geiger et al., 2023). As the authors of the 2023 *British Social Attitudes* survey conclude, the causal forces behind this shift were likely 'entwined': worsening material conditions of poverty and more punitive benefit policies undermined the credibility of attacks of welfare recipients as undeserving and created a more propitious socio-political environment for pro-welfare views, most notably from the insurgent Corbynite left (Geiger et al., 2023: 37).

Despite this escalating crisis of legitimacy and evident shifts in popular opinion that coincided with the most radical Labour Party leadership in decades, it was the political forces of the right that were able to exploit Britain's unfolding social crisis most successfully. Stemming from long-standing tensions in the United Kingdom's position in Europe that had animated the political right for decades (Baker et al., 2002), the most consequential downstream effects of the growing legitimacy crisis of the British state was registered in the UK decision to leave the European Union on 23 June 2016. While the short- and long-run factors behind the 2016 Brexit vote have been examined in depth (Gamble, 2018; Hay, 2020), the results of the referendum signalled, at least in part, a repudiation of key tenets of the prevailing neoliberal order, ranging from the politics of expertise and technocracy to post-2010 austerity measures, which were refracted through the politics of nationalism and sovereignty. As Fetzer (2019) has shown, for instance, post-2010 austerity measures, and particularly welfare and social security reforms after 2010, played an important role in shifting a notable portion of especially older populations in deindustrialised northern regions in the United Kingdom on welfare benefits towards support for the Leave campaign and right-wing political parties such as UKIP.[17]

While the Corbyn campaign's counter-hegemonic strategy achieved significant gains electorally and politically from 2015 to 2017, its defeat in the 2019 election and eclipse by the right-wing forces of Brexit and the Conservative Party meant that few reforms were pursued from 2016 to 2019 that diverged with patterns of austerity and welfare reform. While it is outside the scope of this article to analyse the causes behind the decline of Corbynism, scholars have identified a range of contributing factors, spanning external and structural forces to strategic flaws within the Corbyn campaign. External impediments facing the Corbyn campaign ranged from a deeply hostile media environment, an antagonistic PLP dominated by the forces of New Labour, and a deeply threatened British ruling class (Panitch and Leys, 2020). Structural challenges included the historic weakness of the British left and a schism in the Corbyn coalition between its progressive urban youth and blue-collar, working-class supporters in deindustrialised regions, which was exacerbated by the protracted and demobilising Brexit negotiations leading up to 2019 (Borriello and Jäger, 2023). More recently, some analyses have pointed to strategic flaws of the Corbyn campaign after 2017, including its top-heavy leadership style and hyper-digitised outreach strategy, which, partly out of necessity, operated in 'leaps' rather than patiently building long-term political coalitions (Forrester, 2021). As one commentator recently observed, this conception of politics was more Leninist than Gramscian, prioritising the seizure of executive power through short-term strikes such as electoral campaigns rather than constructing a more long-term counter-hegemonic social bloc to reconstitute civil and political society (Gilbert, 2020).

Amid the decline of the Corbynite left, British politics from 2017 to 2019 remained wedged in an interregnum. Despite notable shifts in popular opinion and growing socio-political discontent, the decline of the counter-hegemonic left amid the fallout of the Brexit negotiations foreclosed political channels needed to shift the balance of political forces away from the core parameters and practices of neoliberalism. While there was a marked shift in the rhetoric of politicians in the Conservative Party in response to both the challenge of Corbynism and a broader unfolding crisis of legitimacy, promising an end to austerity and cuts to social spending, this yielded few concrete institutional and policy changes. As a result, the deepening social crisis across Britain continued to unfold.

Escalating Socio-Political Crises

As Universal Credit was gradually implemented, burgeoning evidence suggested that a deep-seated social crisis was underway in Britain. As early as 2016, a National Audit Office report concluded that the use of benefit sanctions from 2010 through 2016 had contributed to 'hardship,

hunger, and depression' (quoted in Reeves, 2017: 130). As an annual report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation confirmed, in 2017, in the aftermath of successive bouts of austerity and welfare reform, over 1.5 million people, 365,000 of which were children, were 'destitute' in the United Kingdom during 2017, which was defined as lacking income to purchase 'two or more of a basket of six essentials over the past month' (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018: 14).

By 2017 and 2018, the government's stated objectives of post-2010 welfare reform to combat poverty by reducing welfare 'dependency' and reintegrating people back into paid employment was failing on its own terms. Rather than facilitating nonworking populations into long-term employment, the most common effects of post-2010 welfare reforms was to channel benefit recipients between cycles of intermittent low-paid employment, benefit ineligibility and sanctions, and immiseration (Welfare Conditionality Project, 2018). Several studies noted the ineffectiveness of benefit sanctions and conditionalities associated with welfare reform and the rollout of Universal Credit. As one study on 346 jurisdictions in Britain from 2009 through 2014 revealed, 'rising sanction rates [. . .] increased the off-flow rate (the number of people leaving JSA) *without increasing employment rates*' (emphasis added Reeves, 2017: 130–131). The brunt of the new conditionality and sanctions was often imposed disproportionately on the most precarious, low-income and marginalised segments of the British working class often incapable of sustaining and maintaining long-term employment.

Rather than seamlessly facilitating welfare recipients back into the labour market, in the absence of well-paying jobs in conditions of relative stagnation in the post-2008 British economy, conditionalities and sanctions were extended to populations traditionally deemed unable to sustain long-term employment. Populations subjected to sanctions often subsisted in the informal economy or relied in high-cost loans or family members to meet their basic social reproductive needs (Dagdeviren et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020). Welfare recommodification was thus uneven and marked by displacement, dislocation, and contradiction, contributing to an escalating social and health crisis in Britain. As one influential Marxist analysis describes, this process could be understood as a process of 'violent proletarianisation', in which the subjection of vulnerable working-class populations to deprivation through welfare restructuring not only coercively compelled re-entry into the lower rungs of the labour market, but also exposed a significant portion of the British working class to premature death or social murder (Grover, 2019).

Amid this unfolding crisis and the 2017 campaign of Jeremy Corbyn, politicians in all major political parties increasingly sought to distance themselves from the conventions of austerity and embrace a new discourse of protectionism and a relaxation of social spending cuts. While the Conservative Theresa May Government (2017–2019) was primarily occupied with negotiating the terms of the Brexit agreement, it faced pressures throughout 2018 to address the unfolding social crisis and halt the scandalised rollout of Universal Credit. Despite a rhetoric of industrial policy, economic rejuvenation and purported softening of austerity, however, spending cuts accelerated throughout 2017 and 2018 as Universal Credit was rolled out (Berry, 2019). Chancellor Phillip Hammond's ambiguous 2018 budget speech captured this tension between rhetorical promises of reform unmatched by policy changes when he proclaimed that 'austerity is coming to an end – but discipline will remain' (HM Treasury, 2018). In the 2019 election, the Labour Party embraced its most radical manifesto since the early 1980s. However, the electoral cycle was dominated by the stultifying parliamentary politics of Brexit negotiations, which diminished the Corbyn campaign of its insurgent appeal from 2017 (Panitch and Leys, 2020). The Conservative Party under hard-right leader, Boris Johnson, campaigned primarily on the emotive appeal to 'get Brexit done'. Despite promises of 'levelling up' and increased public investment in depressed regions across the United Kingdom after taking office, the Johnson Government's rhetoric did not correspond with any substantial re-orientation of British economic and social policy.

From 2010 to 2019, almost a decade of austerity and welfare reform had produced dramatic changes in the social fabric of the bottom rungs of Britain's class hierarchy. By 2019, a damning Institute for Public Policy Research report indicated that UK social security payments compared to average earnings had reached their lowest levels since 1948, the founding of the modern British welfare state (McNiel et al., 2019). The ongoing rollout of Universal Credit and the manifold changes to the structure, provision and dynamics of social provisioning that it engendered continued to uproot and displace working-class populations across Britain. Overshadowed by the fallout of the Brexit, a deepening social crisis across the United Kingdom continued to unfold unabated.

Conclusion

This article has examined the changing politics of welfare in the decade following the 2008 global financial crisis in Britain. Returning to debates on Thatcherism from Gramscian literature in the 1980s and 1990s, I outlined a conceptual framework for understanding the politics of welfare throughout the neoliberal conjuncture. I argued that a common approach, predicated on the strategic division of social groups and classes between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, was embraced by both of Britain's mainstream political parties, albeit in distinctive ways. Turning to the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, I examined the highly centralised reconfiguration of the UK social security system, focusing on the restructuring of its tax and benefits system under Universal Credit and the punitive regime of benefit sanctions it ushered in. I argued that this coercive turn in social policy after 2008 ruptured conventional neoliberal political coalitions, imposing increasingly disciplinary social policies on broad swaths of the working class. Amid a broader environment of post-crisis austerity and economic stagnation, this exacerbated a burgeoning crisis of legitimacy related to the core parameters of neoliberalism. Despite the counter-hegemonic challenge to this consensus mounted by Corbynism, its defeat by the right-wing forces of Brexit and the Conservative Party meant that British politics remained mired in an interregnum, with popular support for dominant policies and practices of austerity and welfare reform in decline but without accompanying politico-institutional or policy shifts.

These arguments offer several contributions to current literature on the politics of welfare state under neoliberalism, and the post-2008 conjuncture more specifically. First, this article offers a unique lens to understand the politics of welfare under neoliberalism. There is a significant literature analysing the changing politics of the welfare state ushered in by the Thatcher (Gamble, 1988; Hall, 1988; Nunn, 2014; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2012) and New Labour governments in the United Kingdom (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Hay, 1999; King and Wickham-Jones, 1999; Peck, 2001). Persistent debates in the literature have sought to understand the relationship between these distinct political formations, and their respective approaches to social policy. Critical commentators have often identified how elements of Third Way social policy capitulated to the political terrain of the New Right (Panitch and Leys, 1997; Peck, 2001). Others have suggested that New Labour embraced a 'One Nation', more socially inclusive, approach to neoliberalism, albeit one that marginalised organised labour as a political constituency (Jessop, 2007). Others still contend that the Third Way represented a novel hybrid form of neoliberalism (Lavery, 2019). As this article has shown, while there are important ideological and policy differences between each of these political formations, a 'divide-and-rule' approach to the welfare state, which rigidly differentiated the working class and stigmatised the 'undeserving' poor, was a broad approach encompassing both parties that became foundational terrain on which neoliberal electoral politics was organised. This argument illustrates how it can simultaneously be true that the New Right and Third Way

advanced alternative social policies and political projects, but that they nonetheless both operated on the new hegemonic terrain of neoliberal social policy.

Second, this article contributes to critical literature on the post-2008 period, specifically in relation to British social policy. A significant literature has sought to examine the dramatic reconfiguration of the UK social security system in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis (Fletcher and Wright, 2018; Taylor-Gooby, 2012; Wright et al., 2020). By situating reforms to the UK social security system after 2010 within more long-standing patterns of social policy since the 1980s, this article offers an original analysis of the changing political coalitions underpinning welfare state politics. I argued that while the return to welfare reform after 2008 relied on similar mechanisms deployed throughout the 1980s and 1990s (i.e. sanctions, conditionalities), the roll-out of Universal Credit was novel insofar as it deepened the severity and applicability of such measures, extending the benefit sanction regime to new heights. This punitive shift in social policy undermined previously clearly defined social antagonisms between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, in turn contributing to a substantial shift in the political coalitions underpinning neoliberal welfare reform. While there are competing perspectives in the literature on the extent to which the ideologies and practices of welfare reform remain hegemonic among elements of the British populace (cf. Fletcher and Redman, 2023; Nunn, 2014), this article suggests that the prolonged period of austerity and welfare reform after 2010 deepened an unfolding crisis of legitimacy in the political core of British neoliberalism. As the coercive measures associated with welfare restructuring and austerity after 2010 generated growing political contestation, the conventional coalitions and hegemonic projects associated with welfare reform appeared to lose much of their political and ideological appeal.

Yet rather than marking a clearly established break with neoliberalism, I argued that British politics from 2016 to 2019 was characterised by an interregnum in which intensifying popular discontent, channelled by the rise and eventual defeat of Corbynism, was accompanied by a stalemate in the balance of social and political forces in Britain. Despite contributing to rhetorical shifts in social and economic policy among Conservative policymakers and political elites, there was not a corresponding shift away from the dominant trajectory of austerity and welfare reform. This analysis offers a more circumspect assessment of the changing dynamics of neoliberalism in Britain throughout the 2010s than strands of 'post-neoliberalism' literature, which narrative an epochal break in 2016 or shortly thereafter (Gerstle, 2022; Sitaraman, 2019). While this article's analysis is confined to 2019, its contention that contemporary British politics has been characterised by a fusion of deepening political contestation and social crisis without an attendant shift in the balance of political forces needed to alter its dominant policy regime may also provide a framework for examining the post-2020 period in future research.

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Notes

1. These include the Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and the Working Tax Credit.
2. Social murder is a term coined by Friedrich Engels in his 1845 text, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, which was used to describe how British capitalism systematically exposed the working class to premature death by subjecting them to social conditions of deteriorating health and livelihood.
3. Informed by the work of Antonio Gramsci as well as other Marxist and Gramscian scholars, conjunctural analysis is a mode of inquiry associated with the study of crises that reveals the relations of force in a given society and its social, political and ideological contradictions (Hall and Massey, 2010).
4. Accumulation strategies refer to the economic projects and patterns of capitalist accumulation pursued by policymakers, state officials and social blocs within capitalist states, which is distinct from, albeit at times overlapping with, legitimation strategies (Jessop, 1990).
5. Gramsci's use of the term hegemony described a configuration of political power in which a dominant ruling class strata exercises political authority around a putatively universal set of interests. Though rarely fully solidified, hegemony was based not simply on the use of coercion and violence but also forms of 'intellectual and moral leadership' (Gramsci, 1971: 182 quoted in: Gill, 1993: 93).
6. This was predicated, as Gamble (1988) describes, on a 'traditional liberal defence of the free economy with a traditional conservative defence of state authority', which advocated for the state to be 'simultaneously rolled back and rolled forward' and could at once appear 'libertarian and authoritarian, populist and elitist' (p. 28).
7. As Hall (1988) described,Neither Keynesianism nor Monetarism win votes in the electoral marketplace. But in the doctrines and discourses of 'social market values' [. . .] 'Thatcherism' has found a powerful means of popularizing the principles of a Monetarist philosophy: and in the image of the welfare 'scavenger' a well-designed folk-devil. (p. 47)
8. By 'common sense', I am referring to Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's use of the term, which describes the multi-faceted and seemingly self-evident truths that people arrive at in their everyday lives.
9. As Fraser and Gordon (1994) note, dependency is an ideologically charged term that 'serves to enshrine certain interpretations of social life as authoritative and to delegitimise or obscure others, generally to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinate ones' (p. 311).
10. For an overview of the debate between Hall and Jessop et al., as well as the conceptual and methodological implications of these differences, see Gallas (2016).
11. As Nunn (2014) describes, Thatcherism had both more contingent short- and long-term effects and is best understood as 'partial and largely negative, in that it cleared the way for a longer-term and more constructive attempt to embed neoliberal political economy' (p. 303).
12. The 2010 Labour manifesto, for example, promised a 1% cap on public sector pay increases, £5 billion in cuts to spending, and £1.5 billion in savings by implementing 'touch choices' on welfare to 'increase fairness and work incentives' (Labour Party, 2010). The Liberal Democrats promised a £400 pay rise cap for public sector workers, the restriction of tax credits, reforming public sector pensions to 'ensure that they are sustainable', as well as over £15 billion savings from cuts to government spending (Liberal Democrat Party, 2010).
13. Work capability assessments reintroduced a stricter definition of who was deemed fit for 'work-related activity', and was predicated on 'the principle that a health condition or disability should not automatically be regarded as a barrier to work' (Kennedy, 2012).
14. Other social policy reforms between 2010 and 2015 included the restructuring of Housing Benefits, the removal of the spare room subsidy, which infamously became known as the 'bedroom tax', and the abolition of the Social Fund.
15. 'Lone parents', predominantly working-class single women, were also subjected to numerous reforms under the Lone Parents Obligations reforms.
16. The United Kingdom is comparatively severe in its immediate revocation of benefit support. In other countries, an independent review process is often required before benefit sanction (Adler, 2016).
17. Relying on data of the effects of austerity by district and electoral support for the Leave or Remain vote, Fetzer (2019) argues that 'individuals exposed to various welfare reforms experienced distinct, sizable,

and precisely estimated increases in their tendency to express support for UKIP and, in turn, to support Leave in 2016' (p. 3850).

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