

# ***The Rage of Well-fed Lions: The Economic Foundations of UK Welfare Claimant Demonisation in the Neoliberal Era***

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## ***A word of warning***

Ernest Mandel once said that Marxist writers too often echo Marx's polemic without matching his nuance. The following paper is guilty of this. I have focused on empirical data, which I think will be of most interest to the reader. For reasons of space, this information is discussed within a bare-bones theoretical framework that is at times too simplistic to capture the full complexity of welfare-to-work policy. Nevertheless, I contend that they are solid bones, and were the analysis extended into more nuanced considerations, a significant amount of further empirical evidence could be presented to justify the thrust of the central thesis. Regarding the polemic tone of the paper, 'workfare' is no mere historical curiosity; it is a current, ongoing and expanding social policy affecting millions. It is my hope that this paper will encourage the reader to engage, react and feel moved to contribute to the debate surrounding this important economic phenomenon.

## ***Introduction***

### ***Overview***

This paper explores the political and media use of labels applied to the welfare claiming unemployed in the UK between the mid-1970s and 2013. Utilising a Marxist socio-economic analysis, these labels are shown to have emerged primarily as responses to the UK's gradual reorientation towards a low-wage, partially 'workfare-dependent' service economy. Three distinct ideological periods—*necessity*, *social exclusion* and *Broken Britain*—are argued to have over-arched the gradual gestation of this economic formation, with propagandist continuums of deceit emerging in each phase in order to mask intensifying exploitation and control.

### ***Workfare***

Since the mid-1970s, the UK's welfare system has steadily shifted from largely unconditional unemployment benefits towards what is generally termed 'workfare'. While workfare is a plastic and contested term, in the UK it has taken on the broad meaning of 'reciprocity'—that is, making welfare claimants perform mandatory activities in return for their dole, thus '*restoring fairness to the welfare system*'.<sup>1</sup> Mandatory workfare activities vary, but generally include some combination of working for benefits, regular attendance at private workfare centres, re-training and attending case-worker interviews to provide proof of active 'jobseeking' activities. Workfare in the UK is currently administered by private companies on behalf of the government, usually under 'black box' agreements which permit individual workfare providers to design and implement their own regimes in order to fulfil payment-by-result contracts.

### ***The reserve army of labour and pauperism***

According to Marx,<sup>2</sup> the fundamental source of capitalist profit is the general practice of paying wage-labourers less than the value which their work produces. Keeping wages down to a minimum is one of the primary means via which the exploitation of this 'surplus labour' is maximised. Fewer workers on the labour market thus means higher average wage prices and less surplus value extraction; hence, conversely, more unemployed workers on the labour market is good for individual employers as this exerts a downward pressure on wages. However, this situation is bad for capitalism generally as a lower average income may reduce the overall demand for goods—and this, as Mandel puts it, is the 'Achilles' heel' of capitalism.<sup>3</sup> In a related process, capitalism also exerts a systemic tendency towards the creation of a 'reserve labour army' of under, or unemployed, people, often due to continuing technological innovation and increases in productivity. (Capitalist regimes may also take active measures to increase the numbers of unemployed in order to drive down inflation.) The general functions of the reserve army of labour

are: to undermine the value of labour-power and so enhance profit; to act as a disciplinary warning to those in work; and to function as a 'Lazarus stratum' who are raised from economic 'death' as and when businesses require them.<sup>4</sup> The reserve army of labour, often surviving in the most desperate of circumstances, constitutes a continual testament to the irrationality, cynicism and human tragedy that underpins capitalist productivity. Defamatory labels thus emerge to poison public support for this group and to justify its continued punitive control. This helps to prevent the wider emergence of class-conscious awareness of the structural flaws of capitalism, and also, following capitalism's periodic crises, to justify the driving back of paupers into super-exploited low-wage work in order to underpin a recovery.<sup>5</sup>

#### *The materialist theory of ideology*

According to Marxist theory, material factors, most significantly the specific historical configuration of economic organisation surrounding production, exert real pressures that drive economic elites to adopt ideologies which justify and mask the

<sup>1</sup> Iain Duncan SMITH, 'Restoring Fairness to the Welfare System', *Conservatives.com*, 2011, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Karl MARX, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1887 [first English edition of 1887, published online by *Marxists.org*, 2010].

<sup>3</sup> Ernest MANDEL, *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory*, London: Pathfinder, 2011, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Karl MARX, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest MANDEL, *Marxist Economic Theory*, London: Merlin Press, 1971.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 219

realities of class exploitation. Welfare claimant obloquy thus emerges because it is needed: defamatory labels are ideas, and their role is primarily reactive to changes in the economy, rather than being causes of changes. However, while labels may be obnoxious propaganda, for example 'scrounger' or 'scum', they may also be subtle misdirections, such as 'training scheme participant', or 'the socially excluded'.

*Purpose matters more than form.*

The matriculation of labels into the ideological superstructure is explained by Gerry Cohen's concept of 'functionally selectivity'.<sup>6</sup> Via functional selectivity—a process in some ways comparable to natural selection—ideas which most usefully service a contemporary phase of capitalist ideological requirements enjoy a much greater chance of being 'selected' up into the ideological architecture. This architecture may include the political, media and academic spheres, but 'selected' ideas may also in turn trickle down to become temporary phases of 'common sense' amongst sections of the general public. Labels are chosen, in other words, for their usefulness and subsequently disseminated by people who have a vested interest in masking the exploitative economic realities of capitalism.

#### *The workfare-dependent state, the world market and the lion's rage*

By the 1970s, emergent globalisation, the seemingly unresolvable crises of stagflation stemming from the implosion of Keynesianism, and a significant diminution of capitalist profit and power<sup>7</sup> prompted the formation of ideological apertures in the UK's political architecture. The colonisation of these apertures (i.e. explicatory and policy voids) by neoliberalism,<sup>8</sup> marked a significant proof of Cohen's functional selectivity hypothesis: a previously marginal ultra-right-wing economic theory was rapidly drawn-up, via idealist capillary action, into active power and ideological legitimacy due to its usefulness in restoring power and profit to the elite.<sup>9</sup> In other words, what precipitated the nascent neoliberal counterrevolution in the UK in the mid-1970s was not a change of ideological superstructure, but a shift in the material infrastructure.

The economic territory governed by what might be cautiously labelled the 'neoliberal order' is a vast world-market of interconnected regimes, businesses and workers. Within this global economy, as economist G. F. Ray puts it, '*from the point of view of international competitiveness, it is total labour cost that counts*'.<sup>10</sup> As

Jessop warns, however, the term 'competitiveness' places a positive spin on exploitation and should be treated with caution;<sup>11</sup> properly interpreted, what Ray

<sup>6</sup> Gerald COHEN, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

<sup>7</sup> Bob JESSOP, 'Towards a Schumpeterian Workfare State? Preliminary Remarks on Post-Fordist Political Economy', *Studies in Political Economy*, vol. 40, 1993; David HARVEY, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> David HARVEY, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*, London: Profile

Books, 2011; Kenneth HOOVER, *Economics as Ideology: Keynes, Laski, Hayek, and the Creation of Contemporary Politics*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> David HARVEY, 2007, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> G. F. RAY, 'Industrial Labour Costs, 1971-1983', *National Institute Economic Review*, vol. 110, n° 62, 1984, p. 64.

<sup>11</sup> Bob JESSOP, *op. cit.*

220 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

actually means is that lower wages are the basis of greater profits. By the 1970s the UK was already a low-wage economy compared to most other industrialised nations<sup>12</sup>—but this situation was changing, as '*apart from Italy, wage costs rose the fastest in the UK to 1981*'.<sup>13</sup>

Two important elements of Marxist economic theory need to be outlined in order to make clear what happened next. Firstly, there are two primary ways a business can increase its profits: by improving the productivity of industrial manufacture (for example by utilising better machines), or by more deeply exploiting workers (for example by lowering their wages and/or intensifying their working day). Secondly, that crises tend to be overcome by employing the lowest paid workers, from whom the highest ratios of renewed exploitation can be extracted.<sup>14</sup> This generally means the intensified exploitation of women, children, poor-law claimants, foreign workers and immigrants who, due to historically embedded chauvinism, can be paid the lowest wages. Which of these two courses the UK would take in the crisis of the late-1970s was conditioned by its pathdependency on one of the primary features of late capitalism: the significant deindustrialisation and concomitant increase of the tertiary, or 'services', sector in the major capitalist nations.<sup>15</sup> This occurs for many reasons, one of which is cheaper foreign labour markets. Like most industrialised countries, the UK experienced this reorientation from the 1970s onwards.<sup>16</sup> Short of genetic engineering, or a vast investment in education, people cannot be reinvented and so by definition drawing a greater ratio of profit from a service economy requires the deepening of exploitation through lower wages and more disciplined working conditions. One of the most important actions of the Thatcher government, elected in 1979, was to apply the ideological grease that lubricated this transition. As Thatcher put it: '*[We should not] prop up yesterday's industries, rather than encourage the creation of tomorrow's*'.<sup>17</sup> The transition would occur, however, not through 'encouragement', but through the weakening of hard-won quasi-socialist safeguards embedded in the political, legal and economic architecture, allowing them to buckle, and eventually yield, to the extreme economic pressure pushing for the replacement of full-time, primarily male industrial labour with 'flexible' low-paid, significantly female, service work.<sup>18</sup>

Seen via the Marxist lens, the obsessive neoliberal-era academic, media and political defamation of the poorest, most vulnerable units of society—i.e. poor, female-headed households, welfare claimants, immigrants, the disabled, and 'feral' youth—is thus revealed not as glib ignorance or simple nastiness, but as an ideological response to a material imperative: the wealth that supports the lifestyles

<sup>12</sup> G. F. RAY, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Ernest MANDEL, 1971, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Goran THERBORN, *Why Some Peoples are More Unemployed than Others*, London: Verso, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew CLARK & Richard LAYARD, *UK Unemployment*, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret THATCHER, 'Speech to Conservative Women's Conference', 1980, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Andre GORZ, *Critique of Economic Reason*, London: Verso, 1989.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 221

of the neoliberal elite is fed by a continuum of exploitation underpinned by these groups. The elite feed upon them, and hate them as justification for the feeding. As Adorno puts it: '*If the lion had a consciousness, his rage at the antelope he wants to eat would be ideology*'.<sup>19</sup> The progressive intensity of this 'rage' over the past forty years grew in direct proportion to increasingly desperate and ultimately pointless elite attempts to prevent capitalism's Achilles' heel from degenerating into a permanent neoliberal disability: a vicious economic stalemate in which the

intensified exploitation of the most vulnerable is no longer a quasi-temporary phase initiated to stimulate a recovery, but a permanent 'workfare state'.<sup>20</sup> This economic vacuum draws ever greater sections of the population, employed and unemployed, legal and illegal, domestic and foreign, paid and unpaid, into a nightmare of poverty and servile work, recoded glibly as necessary 'austerity' and noble 'hard-work'.

### *Rage presaged*

To create the workfare-dependent state in the UK—and so harmonise its economy with more 'competitive' global conditions of production—a fundamental change in the socio-economic structure first had to be engineered viz a major rolling back of welfare state provision.<sup>21</sup> This was essential because the welfare state protected the most vulnerable, and therefore valuable, social units from having to sell their labour-power as a commodity. In 1974, key architect of Thatcherism Keith Joseph made an early, ham-fisted attempt to win support for this brutal recommodification by declaring that welfare funded, unmarried mothers from poor estates were '*producing problem children, the future unmarried mothers, delinquents, denizens of our borstals, sub-normal educational establishments, prisons, hostels for drifters*'.<sup>22</sup> Such language would, decades later, be so ideologically ingrained in national discourse that even calls for the poor to be put into concentration camps (now re-styled as 'boot-camps'),<sup>23</sup> or sterilised,<sup>24</sup> could be reported glibly in mainstream media. But in 1974 it was a career-damaging gaffe: the power of organised labour was still far too influential to permit such a naked attempt at economically motivated class-racism. It would require time, and an incrementally prosecuted ideological campaign, to manufacture widespread support for the terrifying ambitions of politicians who, in Gouldner's memorable insight, were disgusted by their own people.<sup>25</sup> As Thatcher outlined the project in 1981: '*Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul*'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Theodore ADORNO, *Negative Dialectics*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 349.

<sup>20</sup> Jamie PECK, *Workfare States*, New York: Guildford Press, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> David HARVEY, 2007, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Keith JOSEPH, 'Speech at Edgbaston', 1974, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 2013, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Martin BECKFORD, 'Tory Crime Tsar: Put "Shameless" Families through Two Years of Boot Camp Hell', *Daily Mail*, 16 November 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Natalie CLARKE, 'The Baby Machine', *Daily Mail*, 22 February 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Alvin GOULDNER, *The Dialectic of Technology and Ideology: The Origins, Grammar and Future of Ideology*, London: Macmillan, 1976.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret THATCHER, 'Interview for the *Sunday Times*', 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 2013, p. 8.

### **Necessity**

However, the first phase of the long, bitter journey towards national workfare dependency began not under Thatcher, but under Callaghan's Labour government. Labour came to power under Wilson in 1974 promising socialist policies—including increased welfare payments and major nationalisations.<sup>27</sup> Callaghan assumed the Prime Ministership in 1976 and, following a crisis bail-out from the IMF, promptly adopted monetarist policies and regressive changes to the welfare system.<sup>28</sup> Callaghan subsequently used his 1976 Labour Party conference address to warn that: '*we used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession, and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting Government spending. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists*'.<sup>29</sup> The initial phase of neoliberal reorientation would thus not be Joseph's naked class-racism, but the ideology of 'necessity'. Thatcher gave this phase its iconic rubric—'TINA' (there is no alternative)—shortly after the Conservative Party replaced Labour in power in 1979 when she stated that '*there's no easy popularity in what we are proposing but it is fundamentally sound. Yet I believe people accept there's no real alternative*'.<sup>30</sup> Behind the scenes, Arthur Seldon, director of the neoliberal think-tank the Institute of Economic Affairs, was less circumspect, writing to neoliberal luminary Friedrich Hayek of his desire to '*ram the truth [of neoliberal economics] down the throats of unwilling swallows*'.<sup>31</sup>

Wielding the TINA ideology, the Thatcher government deliberately engineered a recession; ostensibly to tame inflation,<sup>32</sup> but with the lucrative side-effect of producing a reserve labour army of 3.3 million people.<sup>33</sup> The government's response

was not, contra Seldon, the truth, but bald deceit, with 190,000 unemployed people disappearing from official statistics almost overnight in 1983 due to a spurious change in counting method.<sup>34</sup> According to the Bank of England, by 1990 this number had risen to 750,000 people.<sup>35</sup>

With the help of an enlarged reserve labour army, rising wage costs were reversed by 1983<sup>36</sup>—but this was merely the beginning of the neoliberalisation of the UK economy. A series of brutal industrial confrontations, combined with the passing of regressive legal instruments, weakened the labour movement

<sup>27</sup> Ann TALBOT, 'The Death of James Callaghan: A Good Labour Man and the End of Reformism', 2005, [http://www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/mar2008/james\\_callaghan.html](http://www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/mar2008/james_callaghan.html).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> James CALLAGHAN, 'Leader's Speech', 1979, British Political Speech Archive, 2013, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret THATCHER, 1980, *art. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur SELDON, Letter to Friedrich Hayek, 1980, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew CLARK & Richard LAYARD, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth HOOVER, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>34</sup> Martin GODFREY, *Global Unemployment: The New Challenge to Economic Theory*, Wheatsheaf Books, 1986, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew CLARK & Richard LAYARD, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> G. F. RAY, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 223

significantly.<sup>37</sup> Many older working class males, bred on strong unions and the expectation of decent wages, found little demand for their labour in the new economy of 'flexible', low-wage service work. Partly due to humiliating dole rituals<sup>38</sup> the percentage of male over 55s exiting the labour market rose to 37% by the early 1990s, from 14% in 1977—primarily by shifting to sickness benefits.<sup>39</sup> The number of full time males in the labour market overall, meanwhile, dropped by 20%.<sup>40</sup>

Already by 1986 the numbers of long-term (over one year) male unemployed in the UK had risen to around one million, from 100,000 in 1974.<sup>41</sup> While significant rises in long-term and youth unemployment constituted a major structural change throughout the industrialised nations,<sup>42</sup> the UK government was quick to adapt to the new reality, facilitating the intensified super-exploitation of the most vulnerable categories of cheap workers in order to supplant the expensive skilled male labourers now being held in cold-storage on a welfare pittance. British women, who were already '*almost the lowest paid among [the major] industrial countries*',<sup>43</sup> subsequently saw two million, primarily female, full-time roles displaced by lower paid, more precarious part-time positions.<sup>44</sup> A major pressurisation of welfare claimants accompanied the change, with the real value of benefits dropping by 15% for the poorest 20% of the population.<sup>45</sup> Alterations to claimant procedures, meanwhile, saw desperate individuals and families lose vital benefits for minor administrative transgressions. As welfare minister John Major reported to Parliament in 1986 regarding the new dole-scheme *Restart*: '*10,842 decisions to disallow benefit or credits [have] been made. Of these, 9,757 were as a result of a failure to attend an interview without good cause*'.<sup>46</sup>

To distract public attention from deliberately manufactured mass unemployment, a high-profile government campaign was launched in 1985 which, according to the *Times*, would '*crackdown on people claiming unemployment benefit while secretly working*' and '*cut the jobless total, believed by ministers to be artificially high in some areas*'.<sup>47</sup> As poverty rose, British neoliberal Digby Anderson—director of the right-wing *Social Affairs Unit*—encapsulated the Right's

<sup>37</sup> David HARVEY, 2007, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Paul SPICKER, *Stigma and Social Welfare*, London: St. Martin's Press, 1984.

<sup>39</sup> Heather TRICKEY & Robert WALKER, 'Steps to Compulsion within British Labour Market Policies', in Ivar LODEMEL & Heather TRICKEY (eds), *An Offer You Can't Refuse: Workfare in International Perspective*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2000, p. 183.

<sup>40</sup> Eithne MCLAUGHLIN, 'Flexibility and Polarisation', in Michael WHITE, *Unemployment, Public Policy and the Changing Labour Market*, London: Policy Studies Institute, 1994, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew CLARK & Richard LAYARD, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> G. F. RAY, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> Desmond KING, *The New Right: Politics, Markets and Citizenship*, Basingstoke: MacMillan Education, p. 193.

<sup>45</sup> Chris JONES & Tony NOVAK, *Poverty, Welfare and the Disciplinary State*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 58.

<sup>46</sup> John MAJOR, 'Mr Major's Written Parliamentary Answer on Benefit Claimants', 1986, *JohnMajor.co.uk*, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Philip WEBSTER, 'Move to Curb the Dole Cheats', *Times*, 5 August 1985, p. 1.

224 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

hardening disdain and increasingly detached callousness, musing, aristocratically: 'Why are the poor, especially in large numbers, so boring? [...] I am not alone in finding the poor boring. Everyone does'.<sup>48</sup>

Another crackdown was announced in 1987 targeting people 'out of work without good cause',<sup>49</sup> which, according to Labour spokesman Michael Meacher, was 'the first time in the history of the welfare state that families with children will be expected to survive on an income 40 per cent below the official subsistence level for a full six months'.<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, under the guise of addressing the plight of the unemployed, the government re-jigged one of capitalism's oldest terms for exploitation—'apprenticeship'—to produce perhaps the most pernicious and misleading label for the super-exploited unemployed of the modern era: 'training scheme participant'. Numbers of benefits claimants on such programmes rose from 8000 in 1982 to 376,000 by 1988.<sup>51</sup> In 1986 alone, in any average month 70,000 super-exploited workers were servicing UK industry under the guise of training or work experience.<sup>52</sup> By 1985, 750,000 people had been churned in and out of the Youth Training Scheme as cheap labour for businesses, with plans announced in that year to exploit 500,000 more.<sup>53</sup> Predictably, the exploitation of the young was ideologically greased by their demonisation. Social commentator Mark Godyer exemplified the trend, writing in the *Times* that 'many problems abound, but dwarfing all the others, particularly in the summer holidays, is vandalism and petty crime, smashed telephone kiosks, defaced lavatories, smelly bus shelters, mutilated memorials'.<sup>54</sup> Seeming eminently socially conscientious, the idea that 'it is dishonest to preach the "right to a job" if we cannot realize that right for all citizens'<sup>55</sup> masked an emerging ideology that posited disciplinary labour—regardless of wage remuneration—and not the attenuation of poverty and hopelessness as the 'cure' for 'the new excluded underclass'.<sup>56</sup>

However, as rubrics for super-exploitation go, 'training scheme' is particularly time-limited by the implied promise of eventual matriculation into actual employment. By 1986 it was already clear that this was not happening, as the proportion of UK unemployed who were long-term had not shrunk, but risen to 40%, up from 20% in 1979,<sup>57</sup> while youth unemployment now topped 1 million.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Digby ANDERSON, 'Poverty's Grey Battalions', *Times*, 5 August 1986, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> 'New Benefit Cuts Loom for "Voluntary" Jobless', *Times*, 11 November 1987, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Andrew CLARK & Richard LAYARD, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> Robert MILLER, *The End of Unemployment*, Sussex: Atlas Economic Research Foundation, 1988, p. 79.

<sup>53</sup> 'Handsworth Warning: Inner-City Problems', *Times*, 15 October 1985, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Mark GODYER, 'Giving the Jobless some Dignity', *Times*, 7 September 1985, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Richard LAYARD, Stephen NICKELL & Richard JACKMAN, *The Unemployment Crisis*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 59.

<sup>58</sup> Louisa PEACOCK, 'Youth Unemployment Breaks 1m Barrier', *Daily Telegraph*, 16 November 2011, p. 1.

#### JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 225

The ideological grease was burning off 'training scheme', threatening to reveal the machinery of exploitation beneath. A new necessity-based ideological aperture appeared—and was promptly filled by 'welfare dependency'.

While the far-right of the Conservative Party had complained as early as 1973 that welfare rendered recipients 'wholly and permanently dependent on officials and politicians',<sup>59</sup> Conservative government minister John Moore introduced the idea of 'welfare dependence' to the wider UK public in 1987, following a fact-finding trip

to the United States. Attacking the post-war welfare consensus, Moore argued that 'a welfare state worthy of the name aims [...] to widen the understanding that dependency is debilitating and that the best kind of help is that which gives people the will and ability to help themselves'.<sup>60</sup> These words were not idly chosen; 'helping oneself' was code for the introduction of US-style workfare schemes that forced the unemployed to work for their benefits.<sup>61</sup>

The ideology of welfare dependency brought with it a bundle of concepts already functionally selected precisely for this purpose in the United States—where the shift towards workfare had begun in the 1960s.<sup>62</sup> Significantly, this included the notion that welfare corrupted entire neighbourhoods by destroying family values and undermining the work ethic. In 1943, arch-neoliberal theorist Wilhelm Röpke had claimed that welfare transformed claimants into docile state 'pets',<sup>63</sup> and it was a small logical step to argue that, freed from the discipline of work and self-reliance, the pets had inevitably gone feral. Charles Murray described this putatively inevitable degeneration as 'welfare's law of unintended consequences'.<sup>64</sup> In support, Digby Anderson, unable—or unprepared—to comprehend the coexistence of welfare and poverty in the UK as a palliative, not causal relationship, deployed chauvinism's primary ideological weapon—presenting prejudice as evidence of itself—by arguing that there was 'many a pub or bus stop conversation to endorse Charles Murray's American study'.<sup>65</sup> In 1989 Murray returned the favour, arguing in the British press that the underclass 'disease' had now spread to the UK.<sup>66</sup>

Murray's argument was by no means new, however: Joseph had spoken of a 'cycle of deprivation',<sup>67</sup> and before him, Moynihan of a 'tangle of pathology'<sup>68</sup>—and

<sup>59</sup> SELSDON GROUP, 'The Selsdon Manifesto', 1970, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 2013, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> David P. DOLOWITZ, *Learning from America: Policy Transfer and the Development of the British Workfare State*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Jamie PECK, 2001, *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Wilhelm RÖPKE, *The Social Crisis of Our Times*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948, p. 163.

<sup>64</sup> Charles MURRAY, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*, New York: Basic Books, 1984.

<sup>65</sup> Digby ANDERSON, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Joan BROWN, 'The Focus on Single Mothers' in Ruth LISTER, *Charles Murray and the Underclass: The Developing Debate*, London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1996, p. 69.

<sup>67</sup> Keith JOSEPH, *loc. cit.*

<sup>68</sup> Daniel P. MOYNIHAN, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labour, 1965.

226 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

there were many earlier iterations, stretching back to England's *Statute of Labourers* in 1351. The idea was so old, in fact, that James Mill had punctured its underlying tautology in 1808, noting that 'it is first making the vices of the poor account for the poor rate, and next the poor's rate account for the vices'.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, material realities re-selected the notion; now neatly dovetailed with neoclassical 'hysteresis' arguments that characterised welfare as precipitating the psychological degeneration of claimants, causing them to withdraw from the job market—artificially raising the price of labour and so causing employers to cut down on hiring.<sup>70</sup> Unemployment, in other words, was argued to be causing itself. As Conservative MP Ralph Howell put it in 1994: 'To offer people the chance to work and contribute a bit to the community must be better than trapping them in a depressing state of enforced idleness that leaves them less and less able to get back to work'.<sup>71</sup>

However, like many other libertarians, signally Nozick<sup>72</sup> and Gilder,<sup>73</sup> Murray recommended the near-total abrogation of welfare, musing: 'Why should I not let [a man who refuses to work] starve, considering it a form of suicide?'<sup>74</sup> Influential anarcho-capitalist Murray Rothbard went much further, arguing that even allowing babies to starve to death was justifiable according to the 'ethics of liberty', as babies had no legitimate property claims over others.<sup>75</sup> But dead workers do not produce surplus value, and dead babies offer little leverage over their mothers, and so this position was not functionally selected by the ruling elite.

In 1986, US sociologist Lawrence Mead took over Murray's territory and, functionally selecting what was useful in it, added the notion that over-generous,

unconditional welfare had corrupted the 'underclass' to such a degree that disciplinary socialisation in the form of workfare programmes was now necessary. These programmes were to be highly disciplinary, and modelled on the military where '*the clearest example of [...] standard setting occurs*'.<sup>76</sup> Low-paid work was to be mandated—but compensated for with a priceless wage of citizenship and enhanced self-esteem. As Mead put it: '*The rich man who puts in long hours in an office on Wall Street is seen as morally equivalent to the welfare recipient on workfare who is made to clean the streets*'.<sup>77</sup> Work, in other words, was to be transformed into its own wages. Soon Mead was on UK television promoting neo-Benthamite pauper control schemes,<sup>78</sup> while his Hannah Arendt-inspired argument that workfare underpinned 'active' citizenship began to be touted by left-leaning intellectuals as 'fair' and not necessarily contrary to socialism.<sup>79</sup> Eminent sociologist

<sup>69</sup> James MILL, *On the Overproduction and Underconsumption Fallacies*, Jefferson School of Philosophy, 1808, p. 15.

<sup>70</sup> Richard LAYARD et al., *op. cit.*

<sup>71</sup> Ralph HOWELL, *Why Not Work?*, Adam Smith Institute, 1994, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Robert NOZICK, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

<sup>73</sup> George GILDER, *Wealth and Poverty*, London: Buchan & Enright, 1982.

<sup>74</sup> Charles MURRAY, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>75</sup> Murray N. ROTHBARD, *The Ethics of Liberty*, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1982.

<sup>76</sup> Lawrence MEAD, *Beyond Entitlement*, London: Collier Macmillan, 1986, p. 52.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>78</sup> 'Television Listings', *Guardian*, 5 August 1988.

<sup>79</sup> See e.g. Raymond PLANT, 'The Fairness of Workfare', *Times*, 16 August 1988.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 227

Ralf Dahrendorf was less convinced, characterising Mead's theories as '*almost totalitarian*'.<sup>80</sup>

Regardless, Mead's ideas were needed. By the mid-1980s, despite suffering a serious '*credibility problem*',<sup>81</sup> training schemes had become a structural element of UK economic policy—not only supplying cheap labour to industry and helping to mask unemployment, but also acting as a retardant on real wage values—seen as one key to increased 'competitiveness'.<sup>82</sup> However, with the number of UK citizens living in poverty rising dramatically between 1983 and 1986, from 9 million to 10 million,<sup>83</sup> social security minister John Major was having difficulty defending current policies, able merely to insist glibly that continuing the Conservative Party's welfare reforms was the only real answer.<sup>84</sup> But any glutton would argue the same; the difficulty was in justifying the position. Hence, sweeping aside Thatcher's neoliberal instinct that the very idea of an 'underclass' was '*socialist claptrap*',<sup>85</sup> Mead's work was functionally selected into elite political discourse. In an enthusiastic article in support of workfare entitled 'Purge of the Parasites', journalist P. Potts thus reported that '*Mrs Thatcher recently became interested in workfare after watching a television programme about it. The next morning she dispatched a note to ministers asking for their thoughts*'.<sup>86</sup> Perversely, Mead's unsympathetic notion of an intransigent, criminal, pathologically idle underclass not only shifted the blame for training scheme failures onto their victims, it also transformed those failures into justifications for their intensification. Far from being the 'godfather' of workfare, as one media sycophant would later style him,<sup>87</sup> Mead was its pimp, hooking-up the early workfare-dependent economy with an easy, proleaphobic ideology: '*Low-wage work*', Mead argued, '*apparently must be mandated, just as a draft has sometimes been necessary to staff the military*'.<sup>88</sup> This, he claimed, was the only reliable means of '*dissolving*' the '*welfare class*'.<sup>89</sup>

Particularly useful to the UK regime was Mead's demonisation of single mothers. Mead attacked their '*refusal to take "dirty" jobs that they feel are beneath them*' as '*political behaviour*' designed to force society to '*adjust to them*' [Mead's emphasis].<sup>90</sup> With 578,000 single mothers surviving on supplementary benefit in 1986 (365,000 of these divorced or separated),<sup>91</sup> Mead's argument that they should not be allowed to 'blackmail' society, but instead be mandated to perform unskilled

<sup>80</sup> John KEANE, 'Decade of the Citizen', *Guardian*, 1 August 1990, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Peter BROCK, 'It Does Not Take a Genius', *Guardian*, 3 April 1985, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> John WALKER & Glen DAVIES, 'The UK Economy: Analysis and Prospects', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol. 1, n° 2, 1985.

<sup>83</sup> 'Deafening Silence on Mass Poverty', *Times*, 14 November 1986, p. 1.



<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Margaret THATCHER, 'Don't Undo What I Have Done', *Guardian*, 22 April 1992, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> P. POTTS, 'Purge of the Parasites', *Daily Express*, 3 July 1986, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> John HUMPHRYS, 'Is Britain Witnessing a Shift in Public Mood over Benefit Dependency?', *Daily Mail*, 8 August 2013.

<sup>88</sup> Lawrence MEAD, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>91</sup> Joan BROWN, *art. cit.*, p. 62.

228 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

service work—which they were '*most easily qualified to do*'<sup>92</sup>—dovetailed neatly with both the economic imperatives of the servile economy and also the patriarchal culture which, as Beck argues, makes single parenthood the surest route to poverty for European women.<sup>93</sup>

In 1998, Margaret Thatcher revealed her contempt of single mothers, arguing that they '*devalue [...] our community*',<sup>94</sup> but the opposite was true—they, and their children, were an extremely valuable potential resource, and the venal obloquy inflicted upon them throughout the 1980s should be seen in this light. Signally, government minister Rhodes Boyson condemned single mothers as responsible for '*probably the most evil product of our time*'—'*uncontrolled male young*' who perpetrated '*violent crime, [...] football hooliganism, mugging and inner city revolt*'.<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile, the pernicious spread of neoliberal ideology to the Labour Party was signalled in 1989 when Labour MP Frank Field declared that '*for the first time groups of unemployed and young single mothers don't think the offer of rejoining mainstream Britain is worth taking. They opt consciously to stay on the outside*'.<sup>96</sup> Field's solution was not to make work worthwhile, or to value parenting in itself, but to shift women towards workfare. This pincer-movement, between Conservative class-racism and Labour's crocodile-tear paternalism, would prove characteristic of the pseudo-debate between right- and left-right that swept the road to national workfare dependency.

The term underclass, meanwhile, maintained not only its class-racist, but also its *actual* racist inflections.<sup>97</sup> Signally, the Independent Audit Commission produced a major report in 1987 in which director John Banham spoke of a '*horrific*' situation in which '*a 15-year-old black is having her third child by different fathers*', unemployment stands at 80 per cent, gangs roam the streets, drug-related crime is rife and '*you have to set up crèches in schools*'.<sup>98</sup> The solution, Banham suggested, was '*a productive partnership [with] the private sector*'. Workfare, in other words. However, Banham was not quite as independent as he seemed: he was shortly to assume leadership of the Confederation of British Industries,<sup>99</sup> a major capitalist organisation which, in 1985, had argued that government unemployment training schemes had '*yielded big dividends, with an enormous amount of companies [becoming] deeply and actively involved*' and that efforts should be '*devoted to expanding them*'.<sup>100</sup>

Media allies of the bourgeoisie, not for the first or last time, supported the agenda, blurring class-racist comedy with reality, with the *Daily Express* asking:

<sup>92</sup> Lawrence MEAD, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>93</sup> Ulrich BECK, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage Publications, 1992.

<sup>94</sup> 'Thatcher Stirs Up Single Parents', *BBC News*, 21 October 1998, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> David HENCKE, 'Boyson Condemns "Evil" Single Parents', *Guardian*, 10 October 1986, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Frank FIELD, 'Blame Thatcher and the Stick', *Times*, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> See e.g. 'Handsworth Warning: Inner-City Problems', *Times*, 15 October 1985.

<sup>98</sup> Nicholas WOOD, 'London Horrors Blamed on Eight Labour Councils', *Times*, 30 January 1987, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> 'CBI Urges New Jobs Drive', *Guardian*, 21 January 1985.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 229

'*Can we really tolerate a system in which dole frauds alone cost £500 million a year and have become a standing joke on a Saturday night comedy TV show?*'<sup>101</sup> The same paper, only a few days earlier, had described the expansion of training schemes to instil 'discipline' into young workers as a '*cause for cheer for job seekers*', stating that while '*a place on a training scheme is not as good as a job,*

[...] *it is the next best thing*'.<sup>102</sup> It is more accurate to say that, for the bourgeoisie, workfare schemes were *much better* than employing and properly remunerating people.

In 1988, the Conservative Party initiated a venal campaign of welfare claimant demonisation aimed at driving the poor into workfare and low-wage work.<sup>103</sup>

Terrifying hate-language resurfaced, with the *Daily Express* announcing an imminent '*welfare purge on single mothers*'.<sup>104</sup> Little was off-limits: in a speech vowing to end the UK's '*scrounger culture*', Minister John Moore claimed that a pregnant '*unmarried girl*', having miscarried and so lost her eligibility to somewhere to live, had complained to him that it was '*silly to make her move because she was going to get pregnant anytime. "I'm working on it now" she said*'.<sup>105</sup> Extracting ghastly political capital, Moore concluded that it was sad to see people '*caught in the dependency culture, sat passive in the face of new opportunities*'.<sup>106</sup>

One such 'new opportunity' was the Employment for Training workfare scheme, introduced in 1988 at a cost £1.4 billion and intended to provide 600,000 'training scheme' placements for the long-term unemployed.<sup>107</sup> The scheme was, according to its White Paper, necessary in order to address the complex problem-set faced by the long-term unemployed, including benefit dependence and low motivation.<sup>108</sup> In the same year, control and exploitation of children was intensified as all 16- and 17-year-old benefits claimants were mandated to attend the Youth Training Scheme. According to social policy expert Professor Alan Walker, this scheme was '*slave labour*' and had '*a fatal accident rate of 138.2 per 100,000*'.<sup>109</sup> However, with places on the scheme limited, many young people simply lost their eligibility to welfare altogether, forcing them into destitution and/or the black economy.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>101</sup> 'It's Time to Cut Mother State's Apron Strings', *Daily Express*, 27 October 1987, p. 1.

<sup>102</sup> 'More Cheer for Job Seekers', *Daily Express*, 16 October 1987, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> John WESTERGAARD, *Who Gets What? The Hardening of Class Inequality in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995; Heather TRICKEY & Robert WALKER, *art. cit.*

<sup>104</sup> Robert GIBSON, 'Welfare Purge on Single Mothers', *Daily Express*, 27 October 1988, p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> Nicholas ASSINDER, 'More Vows to End "Scroungers" Culture', *Daily Express*, 6 September 1988, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> HANSARD, *Training (White Paper)*, HC Deb vol. 127 cc825-38, 16 February 1988, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> Desmond KING & Hugh WARD, 'Working for Benefits: Rational Choice and the Rise of Work-Welfare Programmes', *Political Studies*, vol. 40, n° 3, 1992.

<sup>109</sup> Alan WALKER, 'Blaming the Victims', in Ruth LISTER (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>110</sup> Heather TRICKEY & Robert WALKER, *art. cit.*

230 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

With middle income earners now being squeezed to fund cheap labour schemes for the benefit of businesses,<sup>111</sup> Chancellor Norman Fowler diverted taxpayers' ire towards benefit fraud, announcing at the 1988 Conservative Party conference that '*we are not prepared to see taxpayers' money being used to finance the fraudulent. It is a totally unnecessary imposition on those in work paying taxes and, above all, it is an insult to the genuinely unemployed in this country*'.<sup>112</sup> In reality, UK businesses had developed a significant, tax-funded, cheap-labour habit, with the supply now extending well beyond dole claimants: numbers receiving the Family Tax Credit—a supplementary benefit for low-wage workers—for example, had risen from 71,000 in its introductory year of 1971, to 199,000 in 1985, and to 317,000 by 1990.<sup>113</sup> However, Fowler was considerably less squeamish about insulting the public when it came to wage increases, complaining that they '*discourage employers from taking on more staff, and reduce opportunities for expanding*'.<sup>114</sup>

By 1989, average wage values for low-skilled workers plummeted between 10% and 25%,<sup>115</sup> while the numbers of service sector roles rose 23.8% on 1979 figures.<sup>116</sup> John Moore dismissed complaints of rising poverty, declaring '*the end of the line*' for anything but voluntary indigence.<sup>117</sup> In fact, relative poverty increased significantly through the 1980s and '*the growth of child poverty on the relative measure was particularly alarming, with a rate of 12% in 1979 rising to 27% by*

1992'.<sup>118</sup>

As predicted by Marxist economics,<sup>119</sup> this intensified exploitation of the poor contributed toward a temporary upturn in the business cycle: the so-called Lawson boom. The boom bust in 1989, with inflation rocketing to 7.5% by 1991, and unemployment rising by 500,000.<sup>120</sup> A campaign of welfare 'reform' and claimant demonisation followed, so vicious that Westergaard described it as '*the attrition of citizenship*'.<sup>121</sup> Signally, in 1992, with a whiff of Pinochet Social Security minister Peter Lilley announced: '*I've got a little list, of benefit offenders who I'll soon be rooting out, and who never would be missed*'.<sup>122</sup> Unsurprisingly, this list included

<sup>111</sup> Ralph MILIBAND, *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism*, Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>112</sup> Martin FLETCHER, 'Battle against Benefit Cheats: Conservative Party Conference', *Times*, 13 October 1988, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> Andrew DILNOT & Julian MCRAE, *The Family Credit System and the Working Families' Tax Credit System in the United Kingdom*, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 1999, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> Barrie DEVNEY, 'Jobless Up, but Hopes Are Rising', *Daily Express*, 19 February 1988, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup> Frances Fox PIVEN, 'Welfare Reform and the Economic and Cultural Reconstruction of Low Wage Labour Markets', *City and Society*, vol. 10, n° 1, 1998, p. 27.

<sup>116</sup> Eithne MCLAUGHLIN, *art. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>117</sup> CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, *The State of the Nation Report: Economic Dependency*, 2006, p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Ernest MANDEL, 1971, *op. cit.*

<sup>120</sup> Andrew CLARK & Richard LAYARD, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>121</sup> John WESTERGAARD, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>122</sup> 'Your Favourite Conference Clips', *BBC News*, 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/January/programmes/the\\_daily\\_politics/6967366.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/January/programmes/the_daily_politics/6967366.stm).

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 231

'*young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing queue*'.<sup>123</sup> Dismissing the engulfing misery, Chancellor Norman Lamont took the line that '*rising unemployment and the recession have been the price that we have had to pay to get inflation down. That price is well worth paying*'.<sup>124</sup>

While inflation was again wrested down to 2% by 1994, the new threat to the now intensely globalising system was the collapse of global growth rates: down from 3.5% in the 1960s to 1.1% in the 1990s,<sup>125</sup> with the UK rate going negative in 1991.<sup>126</sup> By no coincidence, from the late 1980s the term 'feckless', with its core sense of inability to produce anything of value, began to migrate from descriptions of absent fathers to the general unemployed. As Kilroy-Silk signally phrased it, '*hard-working members of the community [should not] have to tend to the needs of the lazy and feckless*'.<sup>127</sup>

Despite 61 million people living below the poverty line across Europe,<sup>128</sup> lifecrippling low-pay was cynically justified as positive and unavoidable by bourgeois academics: '*if employers pay a living wage, they simply will not want to employ all the available labour*'.<sup>129</sup> Politicians were little better, with now Prime Minister John Major arguing that '*the minimum wage [makes it] more difficult for people to find work*'.<sup>130</sup> The Conservative answer was more workfare, with Employment Minister Michael Portillo announcing in 1995 yet another new scheme—*Network*—in which 16-18 year old workers would be paid primarily in training and work experience.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, the potential cash value of transforming benefits claimants into superexploited workers was underlined when Conservative MP Ralph Howell published, via the neoliberal think-tank the Adam Smith Institute, a thinly veiled call for workfare, arguing in the *Observer* that '*we spend £10 billion per year supporting the unemployed. We could offer work to everyone who wants it for roughly the same money*'.<sup>132</sup>

However, in the ever more interconnected world-market, the Conservative Party was now only one minor power in a vast neoliberal network. With an unprecedented global glut of potential low-wage workers, all European capitalists now faced an intensive struggle to maintain growth and global market share.<sup>133</sup> Notably, in 1995 the European Union's Competitiveness Advisory Group warned of a significant '*decline in the ability of the Union to exploit its productive potential to*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> HANSARD, HC 6Ser vol. 191 col 413, 16 May 1991.

<sup>125</sup> David HARVEY, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>126</sup> 'Economy Tracker: GDP', *BBC News*, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10613201>.

<sup>127</sup> Robert KILROY-SILK, 'Workers Who Won't', *Times*, 18 March 1988, p. 1.

<sup>128</sup> John DITCH & Ellen ROBERTS, *Integrated Approaches to Active Welfare and Employment Policies*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>129</sup> Andrew CLARK & Richard LAYARD, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>130</sup> John MAJOR, 'Leader's Speech', British Political Speech Archive, 1996, p. 5.

<sup>131</sup> J. HOLLAND, 'Working at the Training Connection', *Daily Express*, 16 February 1995.

<sup>132</sup> Dean NELSON, 'The Freedom to Earn Your Benefits', *Observer*, 18 September 1994, p. 1.

<sup>133</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Global Europe: EU Performance in the Global Economy*, 2008.

232 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

*the full* due primarily to 'eight million permanently unemployed', and too low rates of females and long-term unemployed engaged in the labour market.<sup>134</sup> The solution was the expansion of exploitation beyond its contemporary, limited remit, to force individuals previously protected under sickness, single-parent or other 'passive' long-term unemployment status into 'active' labour market regimes.<sup>135</sup>

In 1997 the European Union's Jobs Summit directed member states to activate further workfare schemes to drive, initially, 20% of this 'passive' group back into the labour market.<sup>136</sup> However, work-for-benefits, not actual jobs, was to be, as Bruttel and Sol put it, 'the underlying paradigm of the European employment strategy'.<sup>137</sup> Member states drew-up 'National Action Plans' to steer this project locally<sup>138</sup> but administering them required reinvigorated steering committees armed with new ideological weapons. As Tony Blair put it, following neoliberal Labour's sweep to power in 1997, 'the job of refashioning welfare and the job of refashioning government are inseparable'.<sup>139</sup> This new governmentality would be, as Jessop had previously predicted,<sup>140</sup> a 'workfare state'.

The Conservative party might have managed this restructuring in the UK—and later did—but they lost the 1997 election. Besides which, the old ideology of welfare dependency, although still very much part of the neoliberal rhetorical suite, was, by itself, too shallow to justify the vast economic reorientation now required of member states: despite Tony Blair claiming in 1995 that there were 'two Britains, one on welfare, the other paying for it',<sup>141</sup> in reality, by 1997 unemployment benefits accounted for only 9% of total social security spending in the UK,<sup>142</sup> and only 8% across the European Community as a whole.<sup>143</sup> The corrosive effects of neoliberalism in the UK in the early 1990s were far too extensive to hang onto this little peg; particularly the 'exceptional' growth of inequality which saw the richest 10% increase their income by close to 70%, and the poorest decile suffer an effective 8% decrease.<sup>144</sup> An ideological canopy of a whole new order was required. This could have taken numerous forms, but it needed, as its foundation rationale, to protect neoliberal wealth-theft: returning pilfered capital was off the table and any suggestion of such had to be denounced as pointless. This ideological void drew up, via capillary need, a natural extension of the dependency thesis: that it was not

<sup>134</sup> COMPETITIVE ADVISORY GROUP, *Enhancing European Competitiveness*, European Union, 1995, pp. 1-2.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Ivar LODEMEL & Heather TRICKEY, 'A New Contract for Social Assistance', in Ivar LODEMEL & Heather TRICKEY (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>137</sup> Oliver BRUTTEL & Els SOL, 'Work First as a European Model: Evidence from Germany and the Netherlands', *Policy and Politics*, vol. 34, n° 1, 2006, p. 70.

<sup>138</sup> Colin GILL, Michael GOLD & Peter CRESSEY, 'Social Europe: National Initiatives and Responses', *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 30, n° 4, 1999.

<sup>139</sup> Tony BLAIR, 'Bringing Britain Together', British Political Speech Archive, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>140</sup> Bob JESSOP, *op. cit.*

<sup>141</sup> Tony BLAIR, 'Leader's Speech', British Political Speech Archive, 1995, p. 4.

<sup>142</sup> Ivar LODEMEL & Heather TRICKEY, *art. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>143</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Social Protection in Europe 1997*, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>144</sup> JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION, *Income and Wealth: The Latest Evidence*, 1998, p. 1.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 233

welfare, but welfare *claimants* that were the problem. In fact, more than a problem, a

national threat; a group—almost an ethnicity—whose pathological culture emitted a destructive moral radiation that destabilised surrounding communities, corrupted children and threatened to undermine both social order and the economy. As the *Sunday Times* had put it in an early ideological rehearsal in 1993, *'the growth of a hard core of long-term unemployed and the spreading culture of welfare dependency have brutalised British society well beyond its developing underclass and undermined much of what we thought made this country civilised'*.<sup>145</sup> The outgoing Major government attempted to adapt its ideology to this intensified classracism with a disastrous 'back to basics' moral crusade: a jeremiad which managed to juxtapose child pornography, crime, the Yugoslavian conflict and Irish terrorism with *'accepting a responsibility for yourself and your family and not shuffling off on other people and the state'*.<sup>146</sup> But this was merely a desperate, local ideological mutation which rapidly self-aborted in toxic pools of hypocrisy. Behind Major's back, at the global neoliberal level, the tumbler of ideological functional selectivity was piecing together a profoundly more effective discourse: *social exclusion*.

### **Social exclusion**

'Social exclusion' has been identified by scholars such as Lodemel and Trickey,<sup>147</sup> Skeggs,<sup>148</sup> Cameron and Palan,<sup>149</sup> Byrne<sup>150</sup> and Crompton<sup>151</sup> as a key strut in the ideological architecture of neoliberalism. However, there was never one version of this idea that achieved neoliberal hegemony: continually functionally reselected for the plasticity of its ideological infrastructure, 'social exclusion' should be seen, rather, as a continuum of implications which steadily adapted to material imperatives—eventually, in the UK, evolving into the ideology of 'Broken Britain'. The idea of social exclusion initially emerged in radical French critiques of socially corrosive economic policy.<sup>152</sup> In 1995, the United Nations' *Social Development Summit* partially adopted this critique, stating that *'full and adequately and appropriately remunerated employment is an effective method of combating poverty and promoting social integration'*.<sup>153</sup> However, this, by definition, contradicted the European Union's workfare paradigm; and with the colossal expansion of the EU's reserve labour army to 15.7 million by 1999,<sup>154</sup> Europe's workfare trajectory was intransigently set at the economic base. Rather, bombarded by the intense pressure of economic reality, the meaning of social exclusion itself

<sup>145</sup> 'Darling Buds of Major', *Sunday Times*, 2 July 1993, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> John MAJOR, 'Speech to Conservative Party Conference', 1993, p. 2.

<sup>147</sup> Ivar LODEMEL & Heather TRICKEY, *art. cit.*

<sup>148</sup> Beverley SKEGGS, *Class, Self, Culture*, London: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>149</sup> Angus CAMERON & Ronen PALAN, *The Imagined Economies of Globalization*, London: Sage Publications, 2004.

<sup>150</sup> David BYRNE, *Social Exclusion*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2005.

<sup>151</sup> Rosemary CROMPTON, *Class and Stratification*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.

<sup>152</sup> Hilary SILVER, 'Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity: Three Paradigms', *International Labour Review*, vol. 133, n° 5, 1994.

<sup>153</sup> UNITED NATIONS, 'Article 42', *World Summit for Social Development Plan of Action*, 1995.

<sup>154</sup> John DITCH & Ellen ROBERTS, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

234 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

buckled, eventually fully inverting to become a justification for socially corrosive policies. As the European Commission put it, *'the aim of [social inclusion] policy is to strengthen incentives to work and to improve the adaptability and employability of the work force'*.<sup>155</sup> By emphasising *'the complex and multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion'*,<sup>156</sup> European Union apparatchiks began to re-image poverty, not as lack of income, but as a broadly 'psycho-social' issue—a behavioural, cultural and attitudinal matter—and the solution, therefore, not as full and adequate remuneration for work, but as *'reintegration into society through linking welfare and work'*.<sup>157</sup> Via the ideology of social exclusion, work-for-welfare was thus transformed into an apparent mechanism of 'cultural matriculation' which could re-qualify the poor as members of society happily clutching wage packets filled with self-esteem and social membership. All that remained was for national administrations to sell the idea to their populations.

Tony Blair—typically 'on message'—downloaded the new ideology into UK political discourse: *'Social exclusion is about income but it is about more. It's [...]*

*damaging to self-esteem, more corrosive to society as a whole, more likely to be passed from generation to generation than material poverty*'.<sup>158</sup> What was only 9% of the UK benefits budget thus became, via words, something apparently massive: an *'underclass of people cut off from society's mainstream, without any sense of shared purpose'*.<sup>159</sup> With facts overcome by whimsical appeal to *'what we all know exists'*,<sup>160</sup> capital exclusion was thus rhetorically inverted to justify a significant intensification of social discipline and pauper exploitation; a major neoliberal reorganisation of the UK economy dwarfing anything that the Conservatives had managed to achieve. Such a project required an ideological justification of similar proportions: an extensive continuum of deceit, adapted cynically to varying levels of gullibility.

At the apex of this continuum the government argued that *'for people of working age, a job is the best route out of poverty'*,<sup>161</sup> and that work was the key weapon in the *'fight against poverty and social exclusion'*.<sup>162</sup> In reality, the country was being transformed into a low-wage, workfare-dependent state: a series of 'New Deal' workfare programmes were set up between 1998 and 2010, aimed at driving 'inactive' benefits claimants into the active reserve labour army. As minister Peter Hain put it, *'we must push forwards with further reform [...] focusing on the 4.5 million people of working age on out-of-work benefits'*.<sup>163</sup> In fact, only 5.6% of New

<sup>155</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *op. cit.*, 1998, p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> John DITCH & Ellen ROBERTS, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. v.

<sup>158</sup> Tony BLAIR, 1997, *art. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>159</sup> Tony BLAIR quoted in John WELSHMAN, *Underclass: A History of the Excluded 1880-2000*, London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006, p. ix.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS, *UK National Action Plan on Social Exclusion 2003-2005*, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>163</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS, *In Work, Better Off: Next Steps to Full Employment*, 2007, p. 7.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 235

Deal participants ever matriculated into employment.<sup>164</sup> However, this seeming total failure was actually a significant success for the capitalist class. As Marxist economist Bob Milward explains, *'the reserve labour army allows the total domination of capital over labour. It is the key economic force which keeps the real wage down to subsistence level'* [Milward's emphasis].<sup>165</sup> Meanwhile, poor working people—encouraged to see the unemployed as *'scroungers who won't get a job'*<sup>166</sup> and as *'parasites'* who *'breed for greed'* and *'grow fat on your taxes'*<sup>167</sup>—were themselves being transformed into low-wage, benefit-dependent workers, with tax credit spending rising *'from £3.3 billion in 1997-98 to more than £20 billion by 2010-11'*<sup>168</sup>—paid for not from the corpulent coffers of firms, but from the squeezed pay-packets of middle-income earners.<sup>169</sup>

In 2008, neoliberal Labour introduced the Flexible New Deal—a major mergence and expansion of previous New Deal schemes. This scheme mandated the long-term unemployed into disciplinary institutions for one year of 're-training'. Somewhere close to half of its 405,000 'clients' were sent to service businesses with free labour for periods of *'four or more weeks'* at a time,<sup>170</sup> while the rest were held in disciplinary cold-storage.<sup>171</sup> Labour's much mooted minimum-wage legislation did not apply to these people—nor to any 'clients' who found temporary paid work.<sup>172</sup>

New Prime Minister Gordon Brown lionised the intensified regime by arguing that Labour was creating *'opportunity for all [...] matched with a new responsibility from all. Our aim is a something for something, nothing for nothing Britain. A Britain of fair chances'*.<sup>173</sup> It was a grotesque lie, intended to demonise the unemployed for failing to take advantage of unprecedented levels of opportunity. Quite contrarily, as the government's own National Equality Panel delicately put it, it was *'hard [...] to sustain an argument that what we show [grossly increased, socially entrenched inequality] is the result of personal choices against a background of opportunity, however defined'*.<sup>174</sup> In fact, as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported, *'by 2008/2009 13m people were in poverty. Of these, 5.8m*

<sup>164</sup> CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION, *Work Programme*

*Performance Statistics: Inclusion Analysis*, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>165</sup> Bob MILWARD, *Marxian Political Economy: Theory, History and Contemporary Relevance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000, p. 94.

<sup>166</sup> Gabriel MILLAND, 'Tories Plan to Get Tough with Scroungers Who Won't Work', *Daily Express*, 8 July 2007, p. 1.

<sup>167</sup> Simon HEFFER, 'Parasites Grow Fat on Your Taxes', *Daily Mail*, 27 April 2004, p. 1.

<sup>168</sup> CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, *Signed On, Written Off: An Inquiry into Welfare Dependency in Britain*, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>169</sup> David BYRNE, 2005, *op. cit.*

<sup>170</sup> F. MCGUINNESS, *Work Experience Schemes*, House of Commons Library, 2013, p. 10.

<sup>171</sup> John David JORDAN, 'The Anathatractive s/State: A Marxist-Semiotic Analysis of the Discourse, Ideology and Practice of Neoliberal Workfare', *Public Journal of Semiotics*, vol. 5, n° 2, 2013.

<sup>172</sup> H. M. GOVERNMENT, *National Minimum Wage Act*, 1998.

<sup>173</sup> Gordon BROWN, 'Labour Party Conference Leader's Speech', *Labour.org.uk*, 2008, p. 10.

<sup>174</sup> NATIONAL EQUALITY PANEL, *An Anatomy of Economic Equality in the UK*, H. M. Government, 2010, p. 2.

236 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

*(44% of the total) were in "deep poverty" (household income at least one-third below the poverty line), the highest proportion on record*.<sup>175</sup> Meanwhile, seven million UK citizens were suffering in-work poverty,<sup>176</sup> with half of all UK children who were surviving in poverty living in working families.<sup>177</sup> But with work now the marker of cultural matriculation into 'social inclusion', minister Peter Hain was able to fudge the reality by emphasising that *'the rewards of work [...] go far beyond financial independence [...] because work is inherently good'*,<sup>178</sup> while neoliberal apologist Simon Heffer argued that poor-work at less-than-benefit levels was *'the price they [low-wage workers] pay for dignity, decency, self-respect'*.<sup>179</sup> However, the reality of the New Deals was difficult to reconcile with the true scope of capital exclusion—and a lie inevitably emerged of a 'hard-core' who were resistant to Labour's paternalist interventions. As minister Peter Mandelson complained, *'we are spending vast sums of money, often over and over again, on the same people through different programmes, without improving their ability to participate in the economy and society'*.<sup>180</sup> Bizarrely, some of the socially excluded were characterised as so hard-core that it would be necessary, according to Tony Blair, to target them while they were still foetuses.<sup>181</sup> Oppression of the unemployed was intensified, meanwhile, as *'the number of sanctioned jobseekers with a reduced entitlement to JSA doubled in 2010 to around 800,000'*.<sup>182</sup>

A dangerous notion was forming: that some people simply could not be included. And this propaganda game was soon out of the control of Labour's spindoctors; in fact, it had already emerged amongst the attack-dogs of the neoliberal media who pushed the idea almost as far as it could possibly go in socially excluding the poor as an utterly alien, immoral culture who were a threat, as Phillips disturbingly put it, to the nation's *'social and moral health'*:<sup>183</sup> *'Britain's feckless, thuggish, self-pitying, sponging criminal underclass'*;<sup>184</sup> *'that terrifying growing*

<sup>175</sup> JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION, *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*, 2010, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup> Rodolfo G. PALACIOS, Ana M. G. RODRIGUEZ & Ramon PENA-CASAS, 'Earnings Inequality and In-work Poverty', Working Papers on the Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe, Edinburgh: Dissemination and Dialogue Centre, 2009, p. 20.

<sup>177</sup> Judi ATKINS, 'Moral Argument and the Justification of Policy: New Labour's Case for Welfare Reform', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vol. 12, n° 3, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>178</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS, *Ready for Work: Full Employment in Our Generation*, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>179</sup> Simon HEFFER, *art. cit.*

<sup>180</sup> Peter MANDELSON, *Labour's Next Steps: Tackling Social Exclusion*, London: Fabian Society, 2008, p. 8.

<sup>181</sup> Lucy WARD, 'Unborn Babies Targeted in Crackdown on Criminality', *Guardian*, 16 May 2007.

<sup>182</sup> JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION, *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>183</sup> Melanie PHILLIPS, 'We Have a Choice: Face Up to this Crisis or Commit Social Suicide', *Daily Mail*, 9 July 2007, p. 3.

<sup>184</sup> Tom UTLEY, 'Fear the Criminal Underclass and it Will Cost You—or Worse, Me', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 January 2004, p. 1.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 237

*phenomenon: a feckless, amoral, workshy, benefit-dependent underclass*<sup>185</sup>; *'scroungers who try to take a free ride on the backs of others'*<sup>186</sup>; *'an ever-growing subculture of neglect, violence, drugs, pornography, crime and unemployment'*<sup>187</sup>; *'scum. Sorry, but there's no other word for it'*.<sup>188</sup> With glib hypocrisy, journalists who simpered over the fate of 'underclass' children simultaneously used their images and identities in exploitative photo-shoots.<sup>189</sup> Class-racist hate was celebrated: *'Hurrah for the chav-hating holiday boss—champion of the middleclass!'*

<sup>190</sup> Those workers, meanwhile, whose wage values had collapsed to close to unemployment benefit levels were encouraged not to hate the system, but to despise those already surviving on an unemployment pittance: *'Ignore leftist hysteria—at last Britain has woken up to the grotesque irony that so many on welfare are better off than hard working families'*.<sup>191</sup> Fiction overtook reality as class-racist comedy shows and characters such as Wayne and Waynetta Slob,<sup>192</sup> Vicky Pollard,<sup>193</sup> and *Shameless*<sup>194</sup> became emblematic of *'a daily tragedy whose victims, like Shannon Matthews, are all too real'*.<sup>195</sup> Conservative Shadow Home Secretary Chris Grayling took this blurring of fantasy and reality to quixotic heights, bruited the US fictional television drama *The Wire* as an accurate representation of the *'urban war'*, *'culture of violence'*, and *'collapse of civilised life'* plaguing Britain.<sup>196</sup> At the bottom of the continuum of deceit, class-racists used the internet to spew vile *'solutions'*, with even a mainstream journalist eventually feeling safe to muse: *'Of course, forcibly sterilising a woman is something that cannot be countenanced in a civilised society—or can it?'*<sup>197</sup>

Following the 2008 economic crisis, neoliberal Labour's ideology began to buckle under the weight of economic reality. Blair's crocodile-tear appeals for social inclusion were largely abandoned, with Gordon Brown dropping the phrase altogether from his 2008 leadership speech. A new ideology was emerging: that only those who worked, and worked hard, really mattered: *'my starting point is onenation, rooted in a commitment to common democratic citizenship. It is*

<sup>185</sup> Amanda PLATELL, 'Shannon's Mother and Seven Babies by Six Men', *Daily Mail*, 6 December 2008, p. 1.

<sup>186</sup> 'Hit Skivers, Not Strivers', *Daily Express*, 13 September 2010, p. 1.

<sup>187</sup> 'Plea for the Victims of Welfare Britain', *Daily Mail*, 6 December 2008, p. 1.

<sup>188</sup> Richard LITTLEJOHN, 'Welcome to Britain, Land of the Rising Scum', *Daily Mail*, 14 November 2008, p. 1.

<sup>189</sup> E.g. Chris BROOKE, 'Families of 12 with a Difference', *Daily Mail*, 17 October 2008;

John CHAPMAN, 'Give Us a New House Say Family on £30,000 Handouts', *Daily Express*, 4 December 2010.

<sup>190</sup> Harry PHIBBS, *Daily Mail*, 27 January 2009, p. 1.

<sup>191</sup> Max HASTINGS, *Daily Mail*, 30 October 2010, p. 1.

<sup>192</sup> 'Rising Toll of Waynettas', *Daily Mail*, 14 January 2010.

<sup>193</sup> 'Vicky Pollard Teen Given Super-Asbo', *Sky News*, 4 May 2005.

<sup>194</sup> Allison PEARSON, 'Shameless Britain Isn't a Comedy: It's a Tragedy', *Daily Mail*, 9 April 2008.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>196</sup> Chris GRAYLING, 'Labour Have Failed to Deal with Britain's Social Challenges', *Conservatives.com*, 2009, pp. 1-2.

<sup>197</sup> Natalie CLARKE, *art. cit.*, p. 1.

238 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1  
*unashamedly majoritarian, focusing on the concerns of the hard working majority*.<sup>198</sup>

## **Broken Britain**

The Conservative Party, meanwhile, had been following its class instincts and mooting poor women as the primary grist of economic recovery: around 2006, Tory spin-doctors and their media allies began aggressively pushing the sound-bite 'Breakdown' or 'Broken-down' Britain,<sup>199</sup> with the primary connotation of broken homes—and the truth-reversing conclusion that *'one of the most important factors implicated in poverty and a low sense of well-being is family breakdown'*.<sup>200</sup> However, 'Breakdown Britain' was a clumsy phrase that implied either total hopelessness, or else a satisfactory fix in the near future—neither of which usefully



justified the oncoming scale of economic transformation which would see the impoverishment and intensified disciplinary control of much of the population. The tumbler of functional selectivity spun-on until it fell, eventually, into the ideological configuration of 'Broken Britain'.

Early in 2007, the *Times* reported David Cameron as pledging to mend "*Broken Britain*",<sup>201</sup> with the word 'broken' in quotation marks. In July, the *Edinburgh Evening News* quoted Cameron as stating that "*repairing broken Britain*" would combine cutting the cost to business and the taxpayer with increasing social justice'.<sup>202</sup> By mid-2007, the term was a Cameron catchphrase, with the *Evening Standard* reporting: 'I want to fix broken Britain, Cameron tells critics'.<sup>203</sup> By the end of the year the term had become a media buzz-phrase in its own right, with *Daily Express* editor Martin Townsend complaining that in 'broken Britain' a 'Leftie-liberal agenda' had 'kicked away the building blocks' that created World War Two heroes.<sup>204</sup>

Early in 2008 the neoliberal elite fully captured the phrase as the *Sun* newspaper, in partnership with David Cameron, launched a major 'Broken Britain' campaign. Capitalising 'Broken', it was reported that 'yesterday David Cameron unveiled his plans to mend Broken Britain'.<sup>205</sup> The new ideological paradigm was that Britain was 'a society at breaking point', and the answer, 'work for welfare' to 'make poverty history'.<sup>206</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Gordon BROWN, 'What I Believe', *Prospect Magazine*, 23 July 2009, p. 4.

<sup>199</sup> 'Cameron and a Haynes' guide to Fixing Broken Down Britain', *Daily Mail*, 21 July 2007; CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, *Breakdown Britain*, 2006.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>201</sup> Anthony BROWNE & Angus MCLEOD, 'Tories Pledge to Help Families in "Broken" Britain', *Times*, 17 February 2007, p. 1.

<sup>202</sup> 'Cameron Ready to Square Up to Brown over Social Breakdown', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 July 2007, p. 1.

<sup>203</sup> 'I Want to Fix Broken Britain, Cameron Tells Critics', *Evening Standard*, 31 July 2007, p. 1.

<sup>204</sup> Martin TOWNSEND, 'A Word from the Editor', *Daily Express*, 14 October 2007, p. 1.

<sup>205</sup> 'Cam: I'll Mend Broken Britain', *Sun*, 30 January 2008, p. 1.

<sup>206</sup> David CAMERON, *Work for Welfare*, London: Conservative Party, 2008, p. 4.

#### JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 239

The Broken Britain narrative retained an intensive focus on driving female heads of household into poor work—not necessarily to lift them from poverty, but because, argued Cameron, 'the transition from worklessness to work has beneficial effects on both parents and children alike'.<sup>207</sup> But the new ideology was to go much further 'to build a welfare-to-work programme that goes so far, in scale, beyond [Labour's] limited plans'.<sup>208</sup>

With work-for-welfare already contributing to an increase in inequality—both of opportunity and income—so great that the National Equality Panel warned that the 'sheer scale' of it 'for many readers [...] will be shocking'<sup>209</sup>—selling an intensified crackdown on the reserve labour army required a whole new level of cynical propaganda. The primary weapon in this project was the recoding of the real 'break' in Britain—that between rich and poor—into the fairy-tale of an urban conflict between the imagined moral dead-zones of welfare-dependent 'sprawling council estates'<sup>210</sup> and an ideological realm populated by middle-class 'hardworking families'.<sup>211</sup> High profile crimes were cynically exploited to widen the gap. Signally, making political capital from a famous child abduction case, David Cameron damned the poor for something they had not even done, stating that 'there are 5 million people on benefits in Britain. How do we stop them turning into Karen Matthews?'. Cameron then linked this crime with 'an estate where decency fights a losing battle against degradation and despair. A community whose pillars are crime, unemployment and addiction. [...] Before her [Mathews] there was Baby P, a tiny boy beaten by lower-than-life thugs. Before him, there was Shaun Dykes, a suicidal teenager taunted by a gang of yobs to end his own life. Before him, there was Rhys Jones, shot dead as he cycled home from football practice. It goes on'.<sup>212</sup> Media allies pushed the agenda: 'In these households and in these areas, where people fuelled by a constant flow of drugs, alcohol and pornography exist outside the norms of civilised behaviour, society most definitely is broken. [...] It can't be restored unless welfare dependency is stopped dead in its tracks'.<sup>213</sup> The public were

nudged towards the required conclusion: *'EVERY candidate standing in the general election should read [...] the comments of Beryl Teasdale about the state of British society. After seeing young thug Jessica Parry jailed for attempting to rob her, 73-year-old Beryl said: "When I was her age I was working around the clock"'*.<sup>214</sup>

In 2010 a new Conservative-led coalition government came to power. They inherited a neoliberal economic reorientation in full swing. In 2011, 81% of the UK

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> NATIONAL EQUALITY PANEL, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>210</sup> E.g. Peter HOSKIN, 'Today's Welfare State Is Making Poverty Permanent', *Spectator*, 11 March 2010.

<sup>211</sup> Richard SEYMOUR, 'Why "Hardworking People" Are at the Heart of Conservative Policy Making', *Guardian*, 3 October 2013.

<sup>212</sup> David CAMERON, 'There Are Five Million People on Benefits in Britain', *Daily Mail*, 8 December 2008, p. 1.

<sup>213</sup> Melanie PHILLIPS, 'Cameron's Right about Broken Britain', *Daily Mail*, 25 January 2010, p. 1.

<sup>214</sup> 'Repairing Broken Britain', *Daily Express*, 8 April 2010, p. 1.

240 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

workforce, and 92% of working women, were employed in the services sector.<sup>215</sup>

The workfare-dependent sector of the economy, meanwhile, was big and hungry—and seemingly more needed than ever, with growth at 1.1%, going negative to minus 0.2% in 2012.<sup>216</sup> In 2011, the new regime launched its Work Programme—a major expansion of workfare predicted to force around 3.3 million people into disciplinary workfare centres by 2016<sup>217</sup>—the same number initially made unemployed by the early Thatcher government. With around 900 sub-contractors nationally,<sup>218</sup> the Work Programme marked a major intensification of workfare.

In his pre-launch press-release for the scheme, Conservative welfare minister Iain Duncan Smith claimed that the Work Programme constituted a *'radical welfare reform designed to tackle entrenched poverty and end the curse of intergenerational worklessness'*.<sup>219</sup> Blaming jobless parents for influencing their children into choosing welfare as a preferred lifestyle, Smith argued that *'family is the most important influence on a child's life, so it is no surprise that with this many children growing up with parents on benefits we are facing intergenerational worklessness. [...] Our broken welfare system has reinforced this destructive cycle for generations, root and branch reform is long overdue'*.<sup>220</sup> In reality, the UK

government kept no records showing that intergenerational unemployment even existed.<sup>221</sup> Rather, thirty years of deliberate and cynical labour market destabilisation, and consequent economic impoverishment, was being parasitised as evidence for the necessity of more of the same.

To boost support for workfare as an essential, even philanthropic project, the government initiated a propaganda campaign claiming that there were 120,000 seriously dysfunctional underclass families in the UK who alone cost the country £9 billion per year. They were, argued Cameron, *'sealed in their circumstances with a weekly welfare cheque'*, and required *'help to turn their lives around and heal the scars of the broken society'*.<sup>222</sup> In 2012, government advisor Louise Casey's codsociological report *Listening to Troubled Families* appeared just in time to aid the

fiction: choosing to describe rape and sexual abuse (in one case perpetrated by an apparently unrelated neighbour) as *'incest'*, Casey speciously juxtaposed her findings with discussion of these 120,000 families, tentatively insinuating that they were, as a group, the bearers of repulsively dysfunctional social mores, vitiated by welfare dependency.<sup>223</sup> Even the right-leaning *Daily Mail* however, which had

<sup>215</sup> OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS, *170 Years of Industrial Change across England and Wales*, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>216</sup> 'Economy Tracker: GDP', *art. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>217</sup> NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE, *The Introduction of the Work Programme*, Department for Work and Pensions, 2012, p. 4.

<sup>218</sup> CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION, *Government Work Experience Schemes: What Are the Differences?*, 2013, p. 4.

<sup>219</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS, *Reforms Will Tackle Poverty and Get Britain Working Again*, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>220</sup> 'Thousands Grow Up on Dole', *Daily Express*, 14 February 2011, p. 1.

<sup>221</sup> CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, 2013, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>222</sup> David CAMERON, 'Troubled Families Speech', H. M. Government, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>223</sup> Louise CASEY, *Listening to Troubled Families*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012.

JORDAN — WELFARE CLAIMANT DEMONISATION 241

initially welcomed the findings, printed a partial retraction once it was realised that Casey's report was based on only 16 loosely investigated case studies.<sup>224</sup> In fact, the government's definition of 'troubled families' was based entirely on poverty, poor opportunity, deprivation and ill health, and not criminal or 'dysfunctional' behaviour.<sup>225</sup> Nevertheless, yet again deploying indigence as evidence to support more of what caused it, the government mooted placing these 'troubled families' onto a quasi-food-stamp scheme,<sup>226</sup> potentially reducing them to the most basic level of survival permitted by law—and possibly extending this scheme to another 400,000 households.<sup>227</sup>

Speaking in 2012, meanwhile, Cameron argued that '*first, we must treat the causes of poverty at their source. [...] Second, we've got to recognise that in the end, the only thing that really beats poverty, long-term, is work*'.<sup>228</sup> In reality, by 2012 13 million UK citizens lived in poverty, half in working families, with another two million artificially missing from the data because average incomes fell 8% on 2008 figures, superficially 'lifting' them out of the reckoning.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, there were record numbers of childless, working-age people in poverty, while 4.8 million people were churned in and out of unemployment benefits—and 5 million people were working for below the minimum wage.<sup>230</sup> By Cameron's own admission, the average UK household was now £3,000 a year worse off compared to 2007.<sup>231</sup> In its first year the Work Programme experienced a failure rate of 97%.<sup>232</sup> By 2014, this figure was unchanged.<sup>233</sup> The neoliberal regime's response was, as it had been for the previous thirty years, more of the same: a '*crackdown on migrants' benefits*';<sup>234</sup> for British youth, '*if they are still unemployed after six months, they will have to start a traineeship, take work experience or do a community work placement—and if they don't turn up, they will lose their benefits*';<sup>235</sup> for older workers: '*The long term unemployed are no longer going to get something for nothing. They'll have to put back into their community, including compulsory work*'.<sup>236</sup>

### **Concluding comments**

From the 1970s, the West's bourgeoisie, witnessing falling profits and diminishing class power, engineered an atavistic reversion to the essential mechanism of national capitalist class control: the expansion of the domestic reserve

<sup>224</sup> 'Criminal Culture at the Heart of Feckless Families', *Daily Mail*, 16 November 2012.

<sup>225</sup> Michael KELLY, 'A Look at the "Troubled Families Figure"', *Family Action*, 2013.

<sup>226</sup> 'No-booze Smart Cards for Benefits Claimants', *Daily Mail*, 13 November 2012.

<sup>227</sup> 'Another 400,000 "High Risk" Households to Get Help', *BBC News*, 24 June 2013.

<sup>228</sup> David CAMERON, 'Speech at Bluewater', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 June 2012, p. 4.

<sup>229</sup> JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION, 2013, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> David CAMERON, 'Prime Minister's Questions', House of Commons, 16 January 2014.

<sup>232</sup> CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>233</sup> 'Work Programme Creates Just 48,000 Jobs in Three Months', *Guardian*, 21 March 2014.

<sup>234</sup> 'Crackdown on Migrant's Benefits', *Times*, 19 February 2014.

<sup>235</sup> George OSBORNE, 'Autumn Statement', H. M. Government, 2013, p. 5.

<sup>236</sup> George OSBORNE, 'Speech at Sertec', 2014, p. 8.

242 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE — VOL. 19 N° 1

labour army. Exploitation of this group has led to the creation of a servile, low-paid, service economy, significantly underpinned by workfare. Three broad ideological canopies have been deployed in justification of this project: *necessity*, *social exclusion* and *Broken Britain*. Beneath these umbrella deceits, a series of sub-lies emerged: that unemployment was essential, first to re-model the economy, and/or to control inflation; that workfare was required—first to provide training and control feral 'youth' and blacks, and then to attack the evil of 'welfare dependence' and the 'underclass'. In the 1990s, as the European Union shifted significantly towards a workfare paradigm, work became its own wages as 'social inclusion' replaced actual earnings for a new class of workfare helots. In the UK, neoliberal attack-dogs savaged the poor, and by the late 2000s the idea of 'Broken Britain' had emerged, deployed against the victims of poverty with ghastly and naked class-racism. The

anger, the bile, the disgust of the neoliberal regime and its apologists is, however, too easily dismissed as ignorance, or mere chauvinism. It is, rather, the rage of the lion at the antelope: the despising of the people upon whose misery the elite feed to support their own wealth and privilege. Claims of supporting the long-term unemployed, the family, industriousness, wayward youth, British culture, law and order and the work ethic are primarily ideological reflections of a material, systemic impulse towards the super-exploitation of women, single parents, young people, paupers and immigrants amidst a miasma of poverty and disciplinary control engulfing the UK. Workfare has been a major engine driving the growth of this miasma—as similar schemes have also been in all earlier iterations of British capitalism. With the shifting of significant tax revenues from one group of working people to support the low wages of another, this overall project can be described as transforming Britain in to a workfare-dependent economy.

In 2014, numbers of in-work housing benefits claimants rose 59% to 936,964, from 586,181 in 2010.<sup>237</sup> The government's ambition to harmonise in-work benefits with workfare has already been signalled, with welfare minister Lord Freud stating in 2012 that '*obviously, we are interested in [...] extending conditionality to claimants who are in relatively substantive levels of work but who are nevertheless capable of working more. A conditionality regime can play an important role in encouraging such claimants to progress towards more self-sufficiency*'.<sup>238</sup> The paradox of an unremitting expansion of the seemingly failing workfare regime is only solved when these events are viewed via the Marxist socio-economic lens: a disciplined and super-exploited workforce, and a growing reserve labour army, are the raw dinner-meat of the well-fed lions of the neoliberal jungle. Continued poverty and exploitation is, for the bourgeoisie, a tremendous success.

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<sup>237</sup> 'So-called "In-work" Poverty Soars by 59%', *Guardian*, 10 May 2014, p. 1.

<sup>238</sup> HANSARD, 'Welfare Reform Bill, Third Reading', House of Lords, 31 January 2012, p. 3.

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