

Neo-Liberalisms in British Politics

by

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Abstract

This thesis reconsiders conceptualisations of neo-liberalism by challenging established economic and ideologic narratives of the unfolding of the neo-liberal project in Britain. Drawing on and attempting to integrate with one another Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist discourse theory and Foucault's theory of governmentality, the thesis charts the development of a neo-liberal governmental rationality in British politics from the emergence of Thatcher onto the British political scene in the late-1970s, through the New Labour project in the 1990s and 2000s, up to the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010. The second major strand of the argument presented in the thesis is that each of these decisive moments in the history of British neo-liberalism served the crucial purpose of reinvigorating the longer-term neo-liberal governmental project by providing it with a new hegemonic basis upon which to base its popular support. The thesis begins with an analysis of Thatcherism as a chaotic, fledgling form of neo-liberal governmentality underpinned by, in Hall's (1979) memorable words, an 'authoritarian populist' hegemonic project. It then considers New Labour as representing a more fully-developed, 'advanced neo-liberal' form of government, which simultaneously restored the electoral viability of the Labour party and provided the neo-liberal governmental project with a new, 'technocratic populist' hegemonic basis. The final section of the thesis focuses on the politics of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. The historical significance of 'Big Society' is theorised as both a neo-liberal technology of government and as an ideology with the dual purpose of 'detoxifying' the Conservative party brand and winning popular support for the further neo-liberalisation of British society.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Neo-Liberalism as an Object of Political Analysis

This thesis arose out of an interest in the complex interrelationship between New Labour, which when work on this thesis first began was still very much in the ascendancy of British politics, and what is commonly referred to in the literature as 'Thatcherism'. In some respects, there appears to be a great deal of continuity between Thatcherism and New Labour. To take one pertinent example, it is not difficult to identify several lines of continuity between Thatcherism and New Labour in the area of economic policy. The Thatcher governments' monetarist escapades in the early 1980s, their eschewing of the goal of full employment, and repeated attempts to rein in 'irresponsible' public spending after 1979 were all echoed in Gordon Brown's adoption of his lauded 'golden rules' in relation to fiscal policy and the 1997 decision to shift responsibility for the setting of interest rates over to the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. Likewise, looking at New Labour's social policies it is easy to draw parallels between the private finance initiatives of Labour governments after 1997 and the earlier public-private 'partnership' arrangements explored by Major in the early-1990s and, to a lesser extent, Thatcher in the mid-1980s.

However, it is also clear that, for as many lines of continuity there are between Thatcherism and New Labour, there are as many lines of discontinuity separating the two. Not only was the public persona and overall political style of Blair very different to that of Thatcher, but Blair's version of Thatcher's 'there is no alternative' – namely, his discourse on 'globalisation' and 'modernisation' – was a much more sophisticated defence of neo-classical economics. Added to that, Thatcher's famous assertion that 'there is no such thing as society' seems a long way from the Third Way ideas that were so critical early on in the New Labour project, which not only drew heavily on

communitarianism, but also envisioned a continuing 'enabling' role for the state in an era of globalisation.

The literature on New Labour, despite its voluminous nature, fails to account for these lines of continuity and discontinuity in a satisfactory way. This literature will be explored in greater detail in chapter three, but the part of it which is of interest for present purposes – namely, the part of it which addresses the interrelationship between Thatcherism and New Labour – can be roughly divided into two camps: in one camp we have the critical realist accounts of figures such as Colin Hay (1999) and Richard Heffernan (2000) and in the other we have the 'interpretivist' accounts of figures such as Mark Bevir (2005). The argument Hay sets out is that, in order to understand New Labour, we first have to arrive at an understanding of the contradictions which inhered in the regime of accumulation characteristic of the advanced industrialised nations in the immediate post-war period, as well as to account for the ideological offensive mounted by the New Right from the late-1970s onwards. Parts of Hay's account would fit within an orthodox Gramscian reading of New Labour and could be considered deterministic in nature, for reasons which are set out below, but he is also keen to elucidate the role of certain key elements of New Right ideology, such as Anthony Downs' theory of electoral competition, in the transformation of the Labour party of old into New Labour, as well as the influence of ideas such as the class dealignment and structural dependence theses, formulated by Left academics in response to the electoral and other successes of the New Right. Hay (1999: 94) argues that New Labour has come to act in a manner consistent with Downs' theory of electoral competition – that is, to reject a bi-modal view of the distribution of voter preferences in favour of a 'uni-modal and normally distributed' one – for 'ideational and contingent' reasons or, more

specifically, because of the reliance of key members of the New Labour project on professional market researchers and advertising executives who subscribe to Downs's theory, rather than because of a straightforward capitulation to the ideas developed by the academics, commentators, and politicians of the New Right.

In an analysis which in many ways resembles Hay's, Heffernan employs a critical realist epistemology and methodology to argue that New Labour is the product of a combination of structural economic change and the waging of a largely successful ideological war of position by the New Right, and – again like Hay – he also discusses Downs' economic theory of democracy. However, unlike Hay, who argues that the significance of Downs' theory lies not in its ability to explain (Hay argues that it is merely descriptive in nature), but rather in the ideological role it plays, Heffernan argues that Downs' theory does indeed have some explanatory capacity, so long as it is complemented with a theory of electoral competition which allows for the determining effect of ideology in select historical conjunctures. In his own words, 'Arising from their interactions with electors (and other parties), parties do alter their positions in a competitive space (as Downs' model suggests); some parties can successfully preference shape... while others can alternatively preference accommodate' (Heffernan, 2000: 107). He goes on to argue that New Labour is distinct from the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher because the latter was able to preference-shape, and hence was a 'directional' political party, while the former has been forced to preference-accommodate and is, therefore, a 'positional' political party.

Furthermore, while he provides no explanation of precisely how Thatcher's Conservatives were able to carve out a space for themselves as a directional political

party, he explains New Labour's willingness to perform the role of a positional party by arguing that 'parties do come to accept the primacy of a dominant micro-ideological alternative if it enhances their office-seeking role and can be linked to their historical ethos' (Heffernan, 2000: 151). In other words, for Heffernan, the transformation of the Labour party into New Labour can best be understood as the result of the latter's purely 'office-seeking' nature, and its ability to articulate its office-seeking as compatible with the core tenets of the social democratic tradition out of which it came. Meanwhile, those sections of Heffernan's analysis which focus on the role of structural factors in the formation of New Labour are based on the notion that, after an initial period of success in the 1950s and 1960s, the post-war settlement, incorporating a distinct accumulation regime and accompanying mode of regulation, ceased in the 1970s to be able to achieve its stated goals, thanks mainly to rises in the cost of oil. The result of this, according to Heffernan, was widespread dissatisfaction and a willingness on the part of the general public to embrace change and the installation of a new economic and political order (Heffernan, 2000: 6).

From the perspective of figures such as Bevir these critical realist accounts of the emergence of New Labour and its interrelationship with Thatcherism are problematic given that they 'objectify' social categories which cannot be said to have any objective essence. Bevir (1999: 3) argues that 'positivists [and, by extension, critical realists] treat institutions, social categories, or rationality as the givens that constitute actions, rather than as the contingent products or properties of actions' themselves and, in so doing, they fail to recognise their contingency and indeterminateness. In the work of Hay and Heffernan instances of objectification are not hard to find: one obvious example is Heffernan's conceptualisation of New Labour as a purely office-seeking entity. Another

is his reliance on the concepts of ideology and 'paradigm'. This is illustrated in his claim that 'The politics of the New Right, enacted into policy over a twenty-year cycle, now bound the policy horizon, reflecting the cognitive maps fashioned by a newly dominant neo-liberal paradigm' (Heffernan, 2000: 19), but perhaps the most telling form of objectification present in the work of both Hay and Heffernan relates to the signifying elements of 'the economy' and 'Fordism'. In Heffernan's work this is manifested in a rather simplistic narrative based around the crisis of Keynesianism and the inevitable rise of neo-liberalism.

In Hay's work it appears in a somewhat more sophisticated guise. Consider the following passage taken from Hay's discussion of the literature on post-Fordism:

If the political economy of the current stage of capitalist development is held to be synonymous with neo-liberalism, then the logic of the argument is that New Labour has no choice but to capitulate to the latter's inexorable embrace. If, on the other hand, post-Fordism (as in Jessop's formulation) can sustain a variety of different regimes (neo-liberal, corporatist and social democratic) then all that this implies is that Labour needs to revise its social democracy in tune with such post-Fordist tendencies (Hay, 1999: 30).

While Hay is careful to avoid the most common form of objectification found in the literature on post-Fordism – namely, that which conceives of 'economic change' such that it allows for a single superstructural response – he nevertheless still objectifies 'the economy' and ascribes to it the function of limiting the range of state responses that are possible in the era of post-Fordism. The ultimate result of this kind of objectification is to engender a degree of fatalism with regards the scope of the possible within politics in

the post-Thatcher era. Hay rightly criticises the more simplistic accounts of post-Fordism for diffusing a logic which renders neo-liberalism necessary and inevitable, yet he himself is similarly fatalistic with regards the inevitability of either a neo-liberal, neo-corporatist or neo-statist response to post-Fordism. Not only that, but Hay also strongly advocates what he sees as the only appropriate response to post-Fordism – namely, a British variant of neo-statism – and one which is ultimately not very far removed from the Thatcherite project he is so vehemently opposed to. Ultimately, it seems, Hay's major criticism of Thatcherism is that it failed to construct an internationally competitive Schumpeterian workfare regime due to its overriding ideological preference for markets solutions to all social problems (Hay, 1999: 68; for a similar diagnosis of the British condition after Thatcher see Hutton, 1996).

Bevir (2005: 4) speculates that the reason why political analysts seek to objectify parts of the social world in the manner of Hay and Heffernan is because they seek objective knowledge of social processes which allows them to develop a kind of predictive science of the social. In his own words:

Whenever positivists [and, by extension, critical realists] objectify institutions, social categories, or rationality, they divorce the objects they study from the contingent beliefs and desires embedded within them: they portray the Labour Party, the working class, or bureaucrats as objects whose properties and actions they can explain, correlate, or model without having to take cognizance of the possibly diverse and conflicting beliefs, desires, and actions of Party members, workers, or civil servants. In doing so, positivists establish the possibility of their claiming a certain expertise. They can claim to reveal how and why political events and processes occur through the application of their abstract explanations, correlations, or models. Sometimes they even claim that their

explanations, correlations, or models can predict what will happen under certain circumstances. Hence they can offer expert advice to elite actors about what these latter might achieve and how they might do so.

Bevir aims to deploy a type of analysis which is not motivated by the desire to attach to itself an aura of scientificity in the manner described above. Given his interpretive starting point, this means that he does not take for granted the existence of an empirical world which can in part or in whole be observed by the impartial political analyst using categories such as 'regime of accumulation', 'mode of regulation' and 'paradigm'. On the contrary, he argues that all human experience has precise discursive conditions of emergence and that it is the job of the political analyst to reveal the contingent nature of taken-for-granted social phenomena. This is what differentiates his work, on the most basic level, from that of critical realists such as Hay and Heffernan. In his own words:

Critique, as I am using the term, consists less of an evaluation of its object, than in the act of unmasking its object as contingent, partial, or both... We move from fault-finding to critique... when we shift our attention from the evaluation of a movement or practice in terms of a given set of criteria to the use of philosophical and historical analyses to bring into view the very theories or concepts that inform its nature and its own evaluations (Bevir, 2005: 126).

As such, Bevir formulates an analysis of New Labour based not on identifying the structural economic preconditions for the emergence of a new mode of regulation, nor on determining the precise nature of the paradigm-shift brought about by the diffusion of neo-liberal ideology, but on unearthing the diverse ideological influences upon the

New Labour project and on showing how, as an ideology, the latter is distinct from, and yet imbricated with, Thatcherism in all of its intricate details.

More specifically, he presents the argument that New Labour represents a response to questions posed by the New Right – for example, in relation to the supposedly enervating effects of inflation and the bureaucratic and inflexible nature of the Keynesian welfare state – but one which answers those questions in a manner consistent with both New Labour’s social democratic heritage and its more recent opening-up to communitarianism and the new institutionalism. The following is typical of the type of argument put forward by Bevir (2005: 45):

Although New Labour accepts that markets can be an appropriate means of delivering public services, it insists that markets often are not the most efficient way to deliver services because they can go against the public interest, reinforce inequalities, and entrench privilege, all of which can damage economic performance. For New Labour, the problem with public services is one of adapting them to new times, rather than of rolling back the state to promote market competition... New Labour’s supply-side vision [therefore] reflects the new institutionalism – and the heritage of Wilsonian socialism – more than it does neoliberalism.

However, the kind of interpretivist account of New Labour and its relationship with Thatcherism put forward by Bevir is not entirely unproblematic given that it is based on what is, from the post-Marxist perspective of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001), a logical short circuit.

This is because, despite cautioning other authors against objectifying social categories, Bevir himself objectifies a range of social categories which have no greater claim to an objective essence than those used by the positivists and critical realists he sets himself in opposition to. Bevir (2005: 60), in setting out the case against accounts of New Labour which treat ideology in an 'aggregated' manner, and which ascribe to it a determining function in relation to political change, argues that we ought to 'define ideologies not by reference to a given content – whether perennial or contingent – but, rather, pragmatically in relation to that which they explain.' However, in attempting to bring to light the contingent, non-necessary nature of New Labour ideology, and the diverse range of influences which fashioned the Third Way, he falls back on the notion of 'tradition', which is ultimately little different to that of ideology, in accounting for the lines of continuity between old-style social democracy and the modern Labour party. This is illustrated in the following passage:

In the case of New Labour's Third Way, we will find, first, that agents operating against the background of a tradition of social democracy generally constructed issues such as state overload in ways subtly different from the New Right. We will find, second, that their different responses to these issues reflect their tradition and their particular construction of the problems. And we will discover, finally, that New Labour conceives of the problems, and responds to them, in ways that are entwined with the new institutionalism (Bevir: 2005: 60).

However, to say that Bevir is guilty of his own form of objectification should not be taken as an assertion of the need to avoid objectification at all costs in order to arrive at a correct understanding of New Labour. This is because some kind of objectification is a

necessary part of any kind of political analysis. The reason why is set out in an interesting exchange between Judith Butler (2000) and Laclau (2000).

Butler takes issue with Laclau's theory of subject-formation and, in particular, his depiction of a subject whose sense of self is necessarily permeated by a kind of auto-negativity stemming from the failure of discursive systems of representation to achieve a final 'suturing' of the social world. She argues that positing such a subject amounts to the imposition of a 'structural limitation' which cannot be said to be theoretically valid given the entirely social, cultural and context-dependent determinants of subject-formation in any given historical conjuncture (Butler, 2000: 13). Laclau's response is to argue that the very notion of a 'radical historicism' of the kind Butler advocates is an impossibility given the unacknowledged structural limitation the concept implies. Laclau (2000: 184) cites Butler's assertion that 'no assertion of universality takes place apart from a cultural norm, and, given the array of contesting norms that constitute the international field, no assertion can be made without at once requiring a cultural translation,' and poses the question, 'is the assertion that 'no assertion of universality takes place apart from a cultural norm' a structural limit or a context-dependent assertion'? As such, Butler is faced with the dilemma of either accepting that the assertion that 'no assertion of universality takes place apart from a cultural norm' is transhistorically valid, in which case her entire argument collapses in on itself, *or* that this assertion is also entirely context-dependent, in which case we have to accept the possibility of there existing some contexts in which the prevailing social and cultural conditions *do grant* certain 'assertions of universality' validity apart from any social or cultural norms.

As such, for Laclau, the imposition of some kind of structural limitation – or ‘objectification’, to use Bevir’s terminology – is not so much an analytical *faux pas* as a necessary precondition, not just for conducting political analysis, but for communicating any meaning whatsoever. What this implies, for example, in relation to Laclau’s use of the category of discourse is that, in order to make his form of political analysis possible, it is necessary to posit this category as pure objectivity and to act *as if* it is transhistorically valid, albeit while bearing in mind its precarious grounding and, in consequence, the precarious grounding of any knowledge which its application produces. In which case, the stance taken by Bevir, of seeking to avoid objectification at all costs, is faulty and the criticisms of post-modernism of the kind put forward by Hay (2002) and Terry Eagleton (1996) are misplaced. Hay (2002: 249) argues that post-modernism necessitates an ‘epistemological scepticism’ and a deconstructivist methodology concerned with endlessly deconstructing, in ‘parasitic’ fashion, the givens of modernist thought. On this basis he poses the question, ‘To be a consistent postmodernist... should we not dispense with narratives and metanarratives alike?’ and concludes that, ‘If so, to be a postmodernist is indeed to take a self-imposed vow of absolute silence.’ Clearly, Laclau’s discourse theory does not see an epistemological scepticism as necessarily leading to a purely deconstructivist methodology and from this perspective no such ‘vow of absolute silence’ is necessary.

However, all of this does beg the question, if some form of structural limitation is a necessary part of any kind of political analysis, how do we determine which form in particular we ought to take as our starting point? Phrased differently, if all knowledge represents an ultimately unjustified imposition of ‘decidability’ in a context of radical ‘undecidability’ there is no immediately apparent, rational way of choosing between, for

example, the categories Heffernan chooses to objectify and those preferred by Bevir. This is because there is no such way, whether immediately apparent or not and, ultimately, the only sensible way of deciding which set of categories we ought to objectify is to base our choice on the admittedly partial criteria of how well they seem to explain political phenomena, not in the sense that they can help us to make sense of an objectively-existing social reality, but in the sense that they can allow us to overcome some of the problems and dead ends encountered by other social theorists seeking to understand the same phenomena. With this being the case, the argument put forward in this thesis is that the major fault of Heffernan and Hay, as well as Bevir, is that they objectify the wrong sets of categories and that, given the inescapability of objectification in political analysis, the ultimate criterion of the validity of the ontological, epistemological and methodological starting points which underpin this thesis, as well as its general approach to political analysis is whether or not it provides a convincing account of New Labour and the broader neo-liberal project of which it is a part.

Bevir's historical account of the ideological lineage of the New Labour project in the long tradition of social democracy and the traditions, more recent in origin, of communitarianism and the new institutionalism is sound, but what is left unaccounted for from Bevir's perspective is the precise role played by this internally diverse configuration of ideological elements in winning popular support for the Third Way. An interpretivist approach is a potentially very fruitful approach to take, for reasons to do with the limitations of simplistic economic or ideology-focused approaches, set out above by Bevir, but it has to be a form of interpretivism which can explain how particular ideological elements became hegemonic, and Bevir does not pay due attention to the fact that the ideological component pieces that went to make up the

Third Way, besides partially informing the policy orientation of New Labour in government, also had a hegemonic role in the sense that they were the basis for the popular appeal of the New Labour project. It is the intention of this thesis to argue that an appreciation of this aspect of the New Labour project, and the ways in which New Labour as a *hegemonic project* was distinct from Thatcherism, is only possible by means of an application of the post-structuralist discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

A second way in which the literature on New Labour is limited relates to the Foucauldian concept of governmentality and its applicability to the study of New Labour and neo-liberalism more broadly. One of the consequences of Bevir's preoccupation with objectification and the contingent, non-necessary character of Third Way ideology is that he loses sight of that which is relatively permanent in the relationship between Thatcherism and New Labour. Hay and Heffernan are right to point to a stable, underlying current linking the neo-liberalism of Thatcher with the neo-liberalism of Blair, but the history of neo-liberalism is not the history of the emergence of a particular form of state appropriate to a post-Fordist regime of accumulation. The history of neo-liberalism, as will be argued in subsequent chapters, is the emergence of a specifically neo-liberal governmental rationality – or governmentality – and it is only by viewing neo-liberalism in this way that we will be able to make sense of the way in which a succession of what, on the surface at least, appear to be quite distinct political projects – Thatcherism, New Labour and the Big Society – have exhibited such a large degree of continuity in policy and other terms over the past third of a century. Likewise, it is only by 'objectifying' the set of categories Michel Foucault puts forward as part of his analysis of governmentality – such as 'governmental rationality, 'bio-politics',

'technologies of government', and 'counter-conducts' – that we can hope to make sense of the highly *interventionist* nature of neo-liberalism as a style of government, which many existing accounts of neo-liberalism overlook. Furthermore, while it is true that there are some accounts of New Labour which frame the interrelationship between New Labour and the type of neo-liberalism which came before it in terms of the spread of a distinctly neo-liberal governmental rationality, with notable examples in this regard being Rose (1999), Terranova (2000) and Rose and Miller (2008), a common feature of all of these accounts is their neglect of the importance of the hegemonic dimension of neo-liberal governmental rationalities and, as such, they are blind to some of the most important tendencies operative within neo-liberalism.

It is this general theoretical orientation – the notion that the most productive way of analysing neo-liberalism is to apply Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, supplemented by Foucault's theory of governmentality – that will determine the overall methodological approach of this thesis. What this means is that the method used in what follows is discourse analysis and, specifically, a post-structuralist form of discourse analysis which – taking its cues from Laclau and Mouffe – is focused on identifying the logics of difference and equivalence which structure particular discourses, as well as the subject positions, symptomatic figures and empty signifiers which allow them to perform that structuring function. However, in line with recent currents in the British politics literature (for example, Finlayson, 2012), this thesis seeks to build on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory by bringing into its purview other important aspects of discourse besides the ones it is typically focused on, such as the governmental rationalities that coalesce out of particular hegemonic strategies, and which often come to determine the latter's ultimate direction of travel. This means that,

in concrete terms, the thesis is interested in a wide variety of different kinds of discursive articulatory practices, such as the things that politicians say in their public speeches, what is articulated in political campaign literature and political advertisements (such as those stored in the Mass Observation Archive), the role played by the mass media in reinforcing particular values and viewpoints, and with policy documents of various kinds (for example, those stored in the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers archive) and internal government memos, where these are available – in short, with anything that provides a trace of a particular ideological view of the world or governing rationality.

The Research Aims of This Thesis

Demonstrating that combining the insights of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony, on the one hand, and Foucault's theory of governmentality, on the other, provides the best way of understanding the history of neo-liberalism in British politics is the primary goal of this thesis. The central argument set out in the chapters that follow is that what is needed in order to make sense of recent British political history is an approach to the problem of state projects such as Thatcherism and New Labour which is sensitive to their interconnection as successive moments in an unfolding neo-liberal governmental project, united by a common governmental rationality, but which can also account for the discontinuities between these projects in hegemonic terms. This thesis shows that, while it can certainly be said that there is a specific form of neo-liberal *governmentality*, it cannot be said that there is a specific form of neo-liberal *hegemony* or ideology. Part of the reason why the existing British politics literature on neo-liberalism, and the individual literatures on Thatcherism, New Labour and the Big Society, are limited is because neo-liberalism is too often associated with a specific collection of ideological

elements which came to prominence in the Thatcher years – such as the valorisation of the free market, the vilification of the ‘nanny state’, attacks on the ‘dependency culture’, and a hardline discourse on law and order. One of the aims of this thesis is to show that these elements have no stronger a claim to constitute the nucleus of any supposed neo-liberal ideology than does Blairite discourse on the Third Way, or Cameron’s ‘liberal conservatism’. Each of these sets of ideological elements have at various times furnished the neo-liberal governmental project with a hegemonic basis, but to describe such a diverse array of ideological elements as instances of neo-liberal ideology robs the concept of any real analytical purchase.

Approaching the problem of the interrelationship between Thatcherism and New Labour, and neo-liberalism more broadly, in this way is important because, not only does the existing literature on New Labour fail to account for the lines of continuity and discontinuity between Thatcherism and the neo-liberalisms which followed it in a satisfactory way, but so too does the broader literature on neo-liberalism. The literature on neo-liberalism is similar in many ways to the literature on New Labour, with all of the most prominent accounts of the history of neo-liberalism having started out from a critical realist epistemological foundation, but with some accounts, such as Hall (2011) and MacEwan (1999) choosing to foreground the ideological aspects of the neo-liberal project and others, such as Harvey (2007), Dumenil and Levy (2004), Plehwe *et al* (2006), Prasad (2006), Frieden (2006), Gill and Law (1989), Cox (1992), Overbeek (1993) and, from a regulation theory standpoint, Jessop (2002) choosing to focus on the structural economic factors at play in the collapse of Fordism and, along with it, the Keynesian welfare state. In another echo of the literature on New Labour, the literature on neo-liberalism also includes a number of Foucauldian accounts of the spread of neo-

liberalism as a form of governmental rationality, with notable accounts in this relation including Peck (2010) and Couldry (2010), but – once again like the literature on New Labour – these accounts neglect to analyse the necessary hegemonic preconditions of neo-liberalism as a governmental project.

A second major goal of this thesis is to demonstrate the value of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony and Foucault's theory of governmentality as theoretical frameworks for understanding the functioning of power in advanced post-industrial societies and, in particular, the precise modalities of 'state projects' as agents of political change. For Foucault, the political is coterminous with the establishment and re-establishment of governmental rationalities and the narrative that Foucault sets out in his work on governmentality is one of the gradual extension of a form of governmental power from the 18th century onwards – which took the *population* as its primary target, *political economy* (broadly defined) as its major form of knowledge, and *apparatuses of security* as its primary means of application – and which has found it necessary to remould itself in select historical junctures in order to overcome governing problems of various kinds (Foster *et al*, forthcoming). In what follows, the emergence of the neo-liberal state project is viewed as a response to one such conjuncture. As such, this thesis represents a contribution to attempts by Foucauldian scholars to make sense of the functioning of power in contemporary capitalist societies in terms of this gradual extension of forms of governmental power, but also one in which the hegemonic dimension of this process is not overlooked.

However, in this relation, another aim of this thesis is to contribute to the positive development of these theoretical frameworks by bringing to light some of their aporias.

In what follows it is argued that, despite furnishing a theory of government which can be used to make sense of a range of historical governing rationalities, Foucault has a blind spot, and that that blind spot is his inability to explain how these governing rationalities are able to achieve widespread popular support in an age of mass publics and democratic politics. In the same vein, I aim to show that, despite furnishing a theory of hegemony which can be used to explain the popular appeal of specific forms of governmentality, Laclau and Mouffe have their own blind spot, which is their lack of any theory of government beyond a handful of vague neo-Gramscian remarks referring to Kondratieff waves of economic growth punctuated by a succession of governing crises. In addition to this, I aim to show that these two bodies of theory are compatible with one another, including in basic ontological and epistemological terms. It can be argued that asserting the importance of both Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical approach and Foucault's power analytical approach in achieving a proper understanding of important recent trends in British politics amounts to a statement of ontological and epistemological heterodoxy, especially given Foucault's differentiation between 'discursive' and 'extra-discursive' relations (Foucault, 2002: 50), and Laclau and Mouffe's explicit rejection of this split and their insistence on the discursive nature of all experience (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 110). However, despite this, this thesis will make the argument that it is only by adopting such a 'heterodox' position that we can arrive at a well-rounded account of neo-liberalism.

Meanwhile, a final goal of this thesis is to contribute to attempts currently underway to make sense of the type of politics characteristic of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government and the Big Society project with which the latter is closely associated. This represents one of the major sources of the novelty of this thesis given

that no single coherent narrative of the historical significance of the coalition government has yet become dominant. This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of the politics of the coalition government by bringing attention to the lines of continuity between Thatcherism, New Labour and Cameronism in terms of the unfolding of forms of neo-liberal governmentality, and the lines of discontinuity between Cameronism and what came before it in terms of hegemonic politics. Viewing neo-liberalism in the way advocated above allows us to see that the Big Society is merely the latest stage in the neo-liberal project and that 'Cameronism' – if we can call it that – is a state project similar in kind to its Thatcherite and New Labour predecessors.

The Limitations of This Thesis

At this juncture, it seems appropriate to also consider some of the limitations of this piece of research. There are two principal ways in which the scope of this thesis is limited. The first of these relates to the division between the national and the international as objects of political analysis. Despite being mindful of the fact that neo-liberalism has from the very beginning been very much an international phenomenon, emerging as a new governing rationality in a number of countries more or less simultaneously in the mid- to late-1970s – and while not seeking to diminish the accounts put forward by figures such as Peck (2012), Jessop (2002) and Prasad (2006), which have identified a range of important differences between different national variants of neo-liberalism – this thesis is really only concerned with the history of neo-liberalism as it relates to British politics. Even though it can certainly be argued that it is not possible to be interested only in 'neo-liberalism in British politics' given the fact that British proponents of neo-liberalism have frequently looked abroad for inspiration in both ideological and policy terms, and that this has been one of the reasons for the

success of neo-liberalism in Britain, these linkages between British neo-liberals and their international counterparts have not been included in the scope of this thesis. The reason why is that the analysis of neo-liberalism set out in what follows is essentially a temporal one. This thesis attempts to chart the evolution of neo-liberalism as a form of governmentality in Britain over time and to link this process of evolution to the concurrent vagaries of hegemonic politics in Britain, and because neo-liberal projects have unfolded according to different timescales in different countries, broadening the scope of the thesis to encompass neo-liberalism as it appeared in the United States or Australia or New Zealand, or any other country, would complicate matters enormously and require research that – despite being a potentially very fruitful potential area of future research – is beyond the scope of this thesis.

A second major way in which the scope of this piece of research is limited relates to the level of detail it is possible to go into in describing successive stages of the neo-liberal project in the context of a doctoral thesis. The principal concerns of this thesis are the politics of Thatcherism, the politics of Blairism and the politics of Cameronism, and it associates each of these political projects with decisive moments in the history of neo-liberalism in British politics. However, this thesis fully acknowledges that this is a partial simplification of a complex historical reality, and that there were important developments in the neo-liberal project in the years between Thatcher leaving office and Tony Blair becoming Prime Minister, and between Tony Blair leaving office and the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. As such, what follows is admittedly a somewhat parsimonious analysis of each of these respective political projects, and some important happenings that would otherwise merit analysis have been left out, but it is probably fair to say that this is justified on the grounds that

providing an exhaustive account of both the hegemonic and governmental dynamics of neo-liberalism, which would necessarily have to stretch back at least to Hayek's rise to prominence in the 1940s, right through to the present day, and encompass detailed analysis of a plethora of White and Green papers, Acts of Parliament, ministerial speeches, government pamphlets and think-tank polemics and research papers, is simply unmanageable within the constraints of a doctoral thesis.

How the rest of this thesis will unfold is as follows. Chapter two contains an analysis of what is really the political form of the first stage of neo-liberalism in the UK: Thatcherism. This chapter aims to illuminate the salient features of Thatcherism as a hegemonic project, structured around an extended discussion of the Jessop-Hall debate on Thatcherism, but one in which a novel, specifically discourse theoretical take on Thatcherism, is put forward. This chapter will also try to illuminate the role of Thatcherism as a form of neo-liberal governmentality, arguing – counter to many of the established narratives of Thatcherism as a form of neo-liberal governmentality – that to describe Thatcherism as a kind of 'roll-back' neo-liberalism is to underestimate the pervasiveness of Thatcherite interventionism in the social, cultural, political and economic life of Britain over the course of the 1980s. In chapter three the focus shifts onto the New Labour project. Conceiving of New Labour as a form of 'bureaucratic populism', this chapter will attempt to show how the project acted to furnish neo-liberalism with a new hegemonic basis in the wake of the gradual disintegration of the Thatcherite hegemonic formation which had previously served this purpose. It will also try to show how New Labour acted to greatly entrench the neo-liberal revolution in government and to elucidate some of the specific technologies of government New Labour introduced into the civil service, the welfare state, and elsewhere. Chapter four

will turn to the politics of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government and try to show how Cameron has attempted to once again reinvigorate the hegemonic basis of neo-liberalism through the discourse of the Big Society. However, it will also be concerned to show how the Big Society agenda is actually far more radical in terms of the transformation of government than most commentators suppose, and will attempt to bring to light some of the specifically neo-liberal technologies of government that have been introduced under its auspices. The thesis concludes with some reflections on the likely future course of both the Cameron project and British neo-liberalism as a whole, given the tumultuous time the Cameron government has experienced since the budget of March 2012, which has had clear implications for Cameron's basic hegemonic strategy. Some commentators have seized on these difficulties to pronounce the early death of the Big Society, with the government seemingly having reacted to crisis by courting the right wing of the Conservative party with a series of panicked policy announcements motivated more by short-term electoral concerns than a clear governing strategy. In this chapter the argument will be made that, while we might be witnessing the death of the Big Society as a *hegemonic* project, in the sense that Big Society discourse has lost much of its popular appeal since its inception, the remoulding of the state apparatus along Big Society lines and the roll-out of neo-liberal technologies of government based around such notions as 'social action' and 'empowering local communities' is proceeding apace and shows no sign of slowing down.

Chapter Two

Thatcherism, Authoritarian Populism and 'Roll-Back' Neo-Liberalism

Revisiting the Hall-Jessop Debate

In a context in which the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat government is in the process of carrying out what may turn out to be one of the most fundamental transformations of the British state in its history, and a transformation which encompasses public spending cuts, the privatisation of a wide range of public services, the expansion of markets and 'quasi'-markets into the furthest reaches of the state sector and attacks on trade unions, it seems appropriate to revisit the topic of Thatcherism. In this chapter the argument is made that the best way of understanding Thatcherism is through a combination of the theoretical insights of Laclau and Mouffe's post-structuralist, post-Marxist discourse theory and Foucault's theory of governmentality or, more precisely, by acknowledging the dual nature of Thatcherism as, on the one hand, the first stage in the unfolding of neo-liberal governmentality in Britain and, on the other, as a hegemonic project which provided that governmental project with the first of a series of hegemonic bases through which it could secure ongoing popular support. This argument is set out in the following stages: to begin with, the literature on Thatcherism is considered, with special attention being paid to the debate between two of the most widely read academic critics of Thatcherism, Stuart Hall and Bob Jessop. After that, Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical schema is discussed in detail, with a view to showing how it enables political analysts to overcome the residual economism that is a feature of the work of both Hall and Jessop. Also in this section the hegemonic politics of Thatcherism are considered, with special attention being paid to the way in which Thatcherite discourse provided its subjects with a new 'picture of reality' that helped to overcome the dislocatory effects of the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state. In the final section of the chapter Foucault's theory of governmentality is set out and the main contours of Thatcherism as a form of neo-liberal governmentality – which relate principally to successive Thatcher governments' privatisation and

marketisation drives, and to efforts at cultural change through the promotion of entrepreneurial and consumerist subjectivities – are considered.

'Uni-Dimensional' Accounts of Thatcherism

As David Marsh (1995: 595) has pointed out, Thatcherism became something of an academic and journalistic industry in the 1980s and early 1990s, and much of the analysis produced therein was superficial and atheoretical. The most rudimentary analyses of Thatcherism sought to make sense of the phenomenon simply by reference to the force of Thatcher's own personality and strength of will. Analyses of this kind include Kavanagh (1990), King (1988), Minogue (1988) and Riddell (1983). These 'uni-dimensional' (to use Marsh's phrase), almost journalistic accounts of Thatcherism granted Thatcher almost unlimited agency in accounting for Thatcherite policy change and neglected to analyse any of the deeper structural factors at play in the emergence of Thatcherism. A second kind of uni-dimensional account of Thatcherism were the ideology-focused accounts put forward by, for example, O'Shea (1984) and Wolfe (1991). In these accounts 'ideology' was taken as the key explanatory variable in relation to the unfolding of the Thatcher project, and the changes wrought by Thatcherism in British society were understood as a result of the hegemonic victory of the ideas of the New Right, particularly among key public intellectuals, who subsequently acted to disseminate New Right ideology to the masses and, thereby, secure for Thatcherism a strong popular base.

In stark contrast to the ideologistic accounts of Thatcherism put forward by O'Shea and Wolfe, yet similar with regards their shared uni-dimensional nature, were the

economistic Marxist accounts of figures such as Nairn (1981), Ross (1983) and Coates (1989). These functionalist accounts of Thatcherism focused straightforwardly on the role of Thatcherism in overcoming a crisis of capital accumulation and sought to bring to light the relationship between Thatcherism as a *state project* and the machinations of business interests in the financial sector and footloose international capital more broadly. In the same vein, Peter Taylor (1992) has argued that Thatcherism can be seen as a function of structural changes in the world economy or, more specifically, as part of the British political class's response to the onset of the second, recessionary phase of the Kondratieff wave of economic growth that began in the early post-war period (for a discussion of Kondratieff waves see Schumpeter, 1939). From this perspective, the role of Thatcherism was to deliver the message that the expectations built up in the immediate post-war period on the part of the electorate to do with the provision of public services and the management of the British economy in such a manner as to virtually guarantee full employment were no longer realistic, and that expectations would have to be moderated if Britain was to become 'governable' once again (Taylor, 1992: 43). Furthermore, according to Taylor, Thatcher was successful in delivering this message and in finding a way out of the 'politics of crisis' that characterised late-1970s Britain due to her ability to successfully articulate a new vision of Britain's place in the world which heavily evoked Britain's imperial past (albeit without really doing anything to restore Britain to its former glory), but which also carved out a role for Britain as junior partner to the US in the second Cold War, and as a core member of the EC.

Meanwhile, a final approach to explaining Thatcherite policies which could be considered uni-dimensional in nature is the 'statecraft' approach of Jim Bulpitt (1986; for a similar, statecraft-focused account of Thatcherism see Stevens, 2002). What was

novel about Bulpitt's approach was the way in which he framed Thatcherism – or, more specifically, successive Thatcher governments – as rational, self-interested political actors whose objective self-interest lay primarily in winning elections. In Bulpitt's statecraft framework, winning elections is a function of four things: successful party management; the development of a winning electoral strategy (that is, 'a policy package and image capable of being sold successfully to the electorate'); what Bulpitt calls 'political argument hegemony', or the ability of a party to frame important political problems in its terms; and, lastly, the ability to portray an image of governing competence (Bulpitt, 1986: 21). From Bulpitt's perspective, the significance of the first Thatcher government lay in developing for the Conservative party a new statecraft and, in particular, a new basis for it to be able to credibly portray a governing competence.

According to Bulpitt, the Conservatives were left in a precarious position as governing party hopefuls by the early-1960s due to the ascendancy of a 'post-Keynesian' politics which necessitated close co-operation between the governing party and social groups traditionally locked-out of 'high politics', such as organised Labour – something which the Conservative party was singularly poorly positioned to be able to deliver due to the unwillingness of key figures within the labour movement to work with a Conservative government, almost regardless of the benefits offered (Bulpitt, 1986: 29). Thatcher's solution to this problem was to fashion a rival politics to the developing post-Keynesian consensus based on monetarist ideas. Monetarism promised to be able to allow politicians to tackle the most pressing economic problem of the day – which according to the Thatcherites was inflation – but in a way that did not require incomes policies, which were hazardous for the Conservatives because they involved corporatist-style bargaining with employers and unions. This is because monetarism suggested that

inflation could be controlled by manipulating a single economic variable – namely, the money supply – by restricting and expanding the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement according to changes in the rate of inflation. The most important thing about this from Bulpitt’s perspective was that it amounted to the ‘depoliticization’ of the management of the national economy around which the Conservatives could fashion a new governing strategy which rested on a separation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics, and the almost complete autonomy of the centre – which was much more conducive to Conservative interests than any kind of governing strategy within the aforementioned post-Keynesian consensus (Bulpitt, 1986: 32).

Despite the merits of some of these ‘uni-dimensional’ accounts of Thatcherism, it is probably fair to say that they were substantially bettered by the ‘multi-dimensional’ accounts put forward by Hall and Jessop, whose debates in the early 1980s over how best to grasp the historical specificity of Thatcherism defined how much of academia conceived of and reacted to Thatcherism throughout the long period of Conservative electoral hegemony in the 1980s and early-1990s. However, the Hall-Jessop debate is seminal for more reasons than this, given that it addressed a range of issues which are still pertinent in the broader literature on British politics today, such as how to conceive of the limits of discourse and the relationship between the discursive and the extra-discursive, whether or not to grant economic and institutional factors any explanatory power in understanding change in society, and how best to periodise different epochs within British and world politics.

For these reasons, returning to the Jessop-Hall debate may shed some light on the present conjuncture, but besides this it is also important to look back on the Jessop-Hall

debate for another reason: namely, in order to address some of the failures and aporias of that debate. As illuminating as parts of the debate were, and despite how much more theoretically sophisticated the work of Hall and Jessop was in comparison to many of their contemporaries, it left a number of problematic issues unresolved and neither party ever really arrived at a satisfactory explanation as to what Thatcherism was and where it was headed. In returning to this literature, I hope to highlight the weaknesses of both Stuart Hall's authoritarian populist (hereafter 'AP') account and the rival 'two nations' account put forward by Jessop and his collaborators. In doing so I also hope to shed light on the present conjuncture in British politics because, it is the intention of this thesis to argue, the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government's Big Society project is in many ways a continuation and evolution of Thatcherism, and we cannot hope to understand that project without first arriving at a clear understanding of the impact of successive Thatcher governments over the course of the 1980s.

The Hall-Jessop Debate

The proximate starting point of the Hall-Jessop debate was a 1979 article by Hall which appeared in *Marxism Today* titled, 'The Great Moving Right Show'. In that article Hall set out his AP account of Thatcherism, which explicitly borrowed much from Gramsci's (1971) and Poulantzas' (1978) theoretical writings. One of the major criticisms levelled against Hall by Jessop and his collaborators over the entire course of the Hall-Jessop debate was that there was a great deal of imprecision in the ways in which Hall made use of the concept of AP. Although, as will be shown later on, several of the criticisms Jessop *et al* made of AP were not entirely analytically sound, it is probably fair to say that this one was. In setting out his account, Hall at times seems to imply that AP encompasses more than a hegemonic project and that it is about more than just the

imposition of a new, Thatcherite common sense, such as when he describes AP in the following terms, as 'an exceptional form of the capitalist state – which, unlike classical fascism, has retained most (though not all) of the formal representative institutions in place, and which at the same time has been able to construct around itself an active popular consent' (Hall, 1979: 15). In this definition the project to construct an 'active popular consent' forms only part of the broader phenomenon of Thatcherism, which seemingly also encompasses a particular form of state. Elsewhere in the piece and, crucially, when conducting his concrete analyses of Thatcherism, Hall seems interested only in the hegemonic aspect of the project. The main focus of Hall's attention is the way in which Thatcherism engages in a struggle for hegemony and it is in describing the precise modalities of this struggle that much of the value of Hall's contribution lies.

Hall sees Thatcherism as a rough-hewn ideology which marries a range of traditional Tory themes – 'nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism' (Hall, 1979: 18) – with the neo-liberal economics associated with figures such as Hayek. However, what really interests Hall is the way in which abstract philosophies designed to help govern a society and an economy are translated into everyday common sense. He is interested in the ways in which out of an *ideology* is fashioned a populist *idiom*: the way in which Thatcherism encourages its subjects to think about issues of public spending using the model of the household budget, the way in which it legitimates an attack on the principle of collectivism embodied in the welfare state as an attack on the 'nanny state', the way in which it frames the issue of mass unemployment in terms of the need for the unemployed to 'get on your bike' (Hall, 1979: 17). Not only that, but Hall is also highly attuned to the part played in all of this by the way in which Thatcherism constructs for itself out of the ideological material at its disposal a series of enemies of the British

people, such as the 'scrounger', the mugger, the immigrant and the subversive and politically-motivated teacher. In this relation, he is particularly interested in the way in which several of the major newspapers act as 'ventriloquist voices' for Thatcherite ideology in its battle to either win the hearts and minds of the British people, or to scare them over to the cause of Thatcherism with its hard-line rhetoric on law and order (Hall, 1979: 18). In response to all of this, Hall calls on the Left to wage its own ideological war of position. He advocates a kind of 'Thatcherism of the Left' – an ideological struggle which would disorganise the forces of the Right, disarticulate Thatcherite common sense and, out of that, fashion a new socialist common sense, but in a way which recognises that the hegemonic successes of Thatcherism in mobilising support for the attack on the post-war settlement were only possible because of genuine popular discontent with that settlement (Hall, 1979: 16).

Jessop *et al's* (1984) main problem with Hall's account relates to what they refer to as 'ideologism'. They argue that Hall's account 'deals one-sidedly with the ideological dimension of Thatcherism', and that this ideological bias has its roots in the intellectual origins of the AP approach in the work of Gramsci, Althusser and, worst of all, the post-structuralism of figures such as Laclau (Jessop *et al*, 1984: 37). They further argue that this grounding of Hall's work in the ideologistic trends within Marxism is reflected in his preferred methodology, which they take to be a kind of discourse analysis primarily concerned with identifying the precise ways in which the discourse of Thatcherism interpellates its subjects and disorganises the hegemonic formation underpinning the post-war settlement, while seeking to replace it with a new, Thatcherite common sense. They also argue that Hall's intellectual lineage is visible in his substantive research focus, which tends to be on 'the media and politics as centres of ideological struggle,' at

the expense of other important areas of struggle in the economic and political realms (Jessop *et al*, 1984: 37). Their central concern seems to be that, in collapsing everything into discourse, Hall has blinded himself to the other dimensions of social reality upon which Thatcherism also operates and an appreciation of which no well-rounded account of Thatcherism can afford to do without.

A second major problem that Jessop *et al* identify in Hall's work relates to what they see as a lack of nuance in his account of Thatcherism. They argue that Hall views Thatcherism as a kind of 'monstrous monolith', not just in the sense that he does not take into account the Janus-faced nature of the Thatcherite project as it presents a different 'face' to each of the groups to which it seeks to appeal, but also in the sense that he overlooks the internal contradictions within Thatcherism at any given moment and homogenizes Thatcherism over time (Jessop *et al*, 1984: 59). Meanwhile, a third major problem with Hall's account, according to Jessop *et al*, is that Hall is wrong to view Thatcherism as having achieved hegemony and in supposing that the success of Thatcherism is primarily attributable to its having won an ideological 'war of position' in the Gramscian sense. They argue that Thatcherism has failed to produce 'a new, national-popular consensus' and that the real reasons for Thatcherism's success lie in its pragmatism and willingness to appeal to the basic interests of the working class in terms of 'lower direct taxation, council house sales, rising living standards for those still in private sector employment, lower inflation, and so forth' (Jessop *et al*, 1984: 42). In addition, Jessop *et al* argue that Hall's account concedes too much to Thatcherism in that it implicitly accepts much of the Thatcherite narrative of 'creeping socialism' throughout the entire post-war period and the subsequent 'crisis of socialism' in the late-1970s. According to Jessop *et al*, Hall takes it for granted that the Keynesian welfare

state was a socialist political project simply by virtue of the fact that it was brought into being by Labour as the party of the working class, and overlooks both the role played by Liberals and 'One Nation' Tories in the creation of the welfare state and the extent to which many of the things commonly taken to represent the novelty of Thatcherism – such as Treasury dominance in the formation of economic policy, the international orientation of the UK economy and subordination to US diplomatic and military policy in international affairs – were also features of the post-war settlement (Jessop *et al*, 1984: 40). Lastly, Jessop *et al* argue that Hall's reading of Thatcherism promotes 'inadequate strategic conclusions', in that his proposing as solutions to the Thatcherite problem ideological struggle and a 'Thatcherism of the Left' neglects certain important tasks yet to be completed or even seriously contemplated by the Left in the economic and political spheres (Jessop *et al*, 1984: 59).

Hall addressed each of these criticisms in turn in his reply to Jessop *et al*. In response to the claim that he is guilty of viewing Thatcherism as a 'monstrous monolith' Hall points out that a key feature of the AP account ever since its inception was its focus on the contradictory nature of the Thatcherite project and the way in which it married diverse ideological traditions and, in particular, traditional elements of conservative and liberal ideology (Hall, 1985: 122). Likewise, Hall successfully shows that the claim that he views Thatcherism as hegemonic, and that he views the Keynesian welfare state as a socialist project, to be unfounded, pointing out that he only ever posited that Thatcherism was *dominant*, not hegemonic (Hall, 1985: 119), and that he only ever viewed the Keynesian welfare state as a compromise *social democratic* project which, although it did represent a very real achievement for the working class in certain important respects, was also an instrument in disciplining it in others (Hall, 1985: 123).

However, the way in which Hall deals with Jessop *et al*'s criticism relating to the notion that Hall's analysis is ideologicistic is unsatisfactory and deserves more careful consideration.

Hall's basic response to the charge of ideologism is to claim that Jessop *et al* have misunderstood his intentions in setting out his AP approach, and that they were mistaken for having assumed that AP was ever intended to be anything more than a partial account of Thatcherism. In Hall's own words,

I have never claimed for [AP] the general explanatory sweep which Jessop *et al* attempt to graft on to it. I am therefore not at all surprised to find that AP is only a partial explanation of Thatcherism. What else *could* it be? It was an attempt to characterize certain strategic shifts in the political/ideological conjuncture... It references, but could neither characterize nor explain, changes in the more structural aspects of capitalist social formations (Hall, 1985: 119).

Hall then goes on to distance himself from the 'neo-Kantian' discourse theory of Laclau and argues that, while Laclau's early work had some value in terms of helping us to understand the way in which ideology interpellates subjects, his later work – which is marred by 'the dissolution of everything into discourse' – is of much less use in analysing concrete social formations (Hall, 1985: 122). This is an unusual aspect of the Hall-Jessop debate given that the charge of ideologism forms the centrepiece of Jessop *et al*'s critique of Hall's work, because Hall is essentially affirming here the fact that he shares with Jessop *et al* the same basic critical realist ontology and epistemology, which conceives of ideology as a 'level' of society, to be placed alongside other levels – such as

'the economic' and 'the political' – in any well-rounded account of a phenomenon such as Thatcherism. In what follows the argument is made that, although Hall is right to point out that Jessop *et al*'s claims of ideologism are unfounded, given that Hall's AP account of Thatcherism was from the very beginning premised on this understanding of ideology, Hall was mistaken in adopting this perspective in the first place, and his analysis would have been much more productive had the caricature of his position set out by Jessop *et al* been accurate, and had he really adopted the 'fully discursive' position of Laclau.

'Ideologism' and Political Analysis

Three concepts form the basis of Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical schema: discourse, social antagonism and hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 112) understand discourse as 'a system of differential entities' in which a permanent fixation of meaning is impossible. This understanding of discourse can be arrived at either by means of a deconstruction of the notion of the totalising structure, or by means of a deconstruction of the notion of atomised social elements (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 97; Torfing, 1999: 85). In a rehearsal of Derrida's (2001: 350) widely-read critique of the concept of structure as it appears in the social sciences, Torfing (1999: 85) argues that structure has been 'another name for the closure of a topography, a construction, or an architecture, whose internal order is determined by a privileged centre.' What this implies is that change within any structure will necessarily be the result of the unfolding of its own internal logic, stemming from the privileged centre of the structure.

What is problematic about this is not only that it implies that, due to the closed nature of any structure, the passage from one structure to another can only be thought of in terms

of 'chance, hazard or catastrophe' (Torfing, 1999: 85; Derrida, 2001: 350), but also that it is logically contradictory to suppose that the centre can produce 'structuring' effects, and shape the rest of the structure, while itself avoiding being structured reciprocally. Gramsci's 'politician' Marxism, which Hall and Jessop engage with in their own distinct ways, is typical of this kind of logically contradictory political analysis. On numerous occasions throughout the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci affirms his essential harmony with the classical Marxist proposition that the economy is determinant 'in the last analysis', but he also concedes that it is possible for superstructural phenomena to have their own determining effects, arguing that 'if it is true that parties are only the nomenclature for classes, it is also true that parties are not simply a mechanical and passive expression of those classes, but react energetically upon them in order to develop, solidify and universalise them' (Gramsci, 1971: 227).

If parts of the superstructure can even partially condition parts of the economic base in this way, then it is no longer possible to determine the source of these structuring effects. If we insist on maintaining that they come from the 'privileged centre' of the structure – the economy – then we are positing the determining effect of something which has itself already been determined. Likewise, if we posit the determining effect of superstructural phenomena then we make the same mistake, but merely substitute 'ideology' for 'the economy' as the privileged centre of the whole. This flaw is clearly reproduced in Jessop *et al's* work, with their insistence on the 'structural determination of hegemony' (Jessop *et al*, 1984: 92), but it is also to be found in a different form in Hall's work, despite the fact that Hall is careful to distance himself from simplistic 'economistic' analyses of politics and to posit the contingency of the complex inter-relationship between the economic and the political. Hall insists that there is no

necessary relationship between the economic and political spheres, but due to his failure to problematise the 'structured' nature of the separate spheres that, in combination, make up the social formation – that is, due to his failure to investigate the potentially non-necessary and contingent nature of the relationships between the internal components of these different 'levels' of society in the same way that he investigates the non-necessary and contingent nature of the interactions between the levels themselves – Hall replaces an essentialism of the totality (which is the main flaw in Jessop *et al's* more overtly economic analysis) with an essentialism of the *elements* of that totality, each of which forms its own 'mini'-totality in Hall's schema.

The logical conclusion that both Jessop *et al* and Hall are pushed towards, but which neither really confront, is the 'incomplete, open and politically negotiable' character of every identity and a definition of discourse as a relational system of signifying sequences within which the meanings conferred on the constituent parts of the discursive whole *by* the discursive whole are never fixed once and for all due to the lack of a fixed centre (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 104). From this perspective, discourse can be considered an experiential 'lens' through which we encounter the social world and, rather than being a term used to designate a linguistic region within the social, is rather co-extensive *with* the social, in the sense that the social world is only meaningful thanks to the structuring effects of discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 107). Furthermore, this view of discourse leaves us without any means of differentiating between forms of knowledge which are 'ideological' in nature and forms of knowledge which are not, given that it logically follows from this definition that the social theorist can only operate within discourse and not from some privileged position outside of it. However, the salient point in all of this for present purposes is the way in which particular

discourses are able to carve out spaces for themselves separate from what Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 111) refer to as the 'field of discursivity'.

The field of discursivity is the name Laclau and Mouffe give to the region of the social which is discursive in nature, but which, unlike discourse *per se*, is not characterised by a definite *regularity in dispersion* or *fixity* in terms of the relationship between discursive elements. It is a kind of discursive background out of which particular discourses form and into which discourses fall when crisis conditions impair their ability to provide a stable picture of reality. An example that serves to illustrate the nature of the relationship between discourse and the broader field of discursivity is the discourse of what can be termed the Keynesian welfare state and its position in relation to the free market society envisioned by figures such as Hayek and the other members of the Mont Pelerin Society in the immediate post-war period. The experience of the Great Depression and the failure of austerity policies in the inter-war period, as well as the success of statist intervention in the economy in the form of the New Deal and the Allied war effort, and the pre-eminence of Keynesian ideas in policy and academic circles after the Second World War, meant that the classical liberal economics advocated by Hayek and his peers had not only fallen out of favour among economists, but appeared in the minds of most policy-makers – and most people – to not accord with even the most basic of social axioms. Robbed of its academic and policy-making bases of support, and thrown into disarray by events, classical liberal ideas on the economy lost their ability to function as a ready-made framework for understanding economic problems and melted into the broader field of discursivity. However, in a turn of events which demonstrated the ability of discursive elements which have become part of the field of discursivity to once again become part of a stable discursive

formation, the subsequent crisis of Keynesianism led to the reactivation of these ideas as a filter for understanding the economic and political problems of the late-1970s (Thompson, 1990; Barry, 1987; Gamble, 1994).

The distinction between discourse and the broader field of discursivity is an important one because it relates to the issue of how to properly conceive of the limits of any given discourse or discursive formation. From Laclau and Mouffe's post-structuralist perspective, the idea of some kind of 'privileged centre' giving the discursive totality its sense of coherence is discounted, for the reasons outlined above. Likewise, Laclau and Mouffe take issue with the idea that the limits of a given discursive totality can be established by identifying that which is *beyond* the discursive totality, on the grounds that, if we can straightforwardly define that which is beyond the discursive totality, then what we are dealing with is just another difference or set of differences forming part of the same discursive totality. In Laclau's own words, 'the limit of the social cannot be traced as a frontier separating two territories... [given that] the perception of a frontier supposes the perception of something beyond it that would have to be objective and positive – that is, a new difference' (Laclau, 2008: 68). As a result, Laclau and Mouffe conclude that the only satisfactory means of establishing the limits of a given discourse is to account for what they term 'social antagonism'. In order to determine the limits of a given discursive totality it is necessary to take into consideration the existence of something that is beyond the limits of the discursive totality in question that is not simply another difference, but something that poses a *threat* to all of the differences making up that discursive totality (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 143).

A similar understanding of the inescapability of social antagonism can be arrived at by alternative means, by considering Laclau and Mouffe's theory of subjectivity. For Laclau and Mouffe, the subject is neither the unitary subject of Enlightenment thought nor the sum total of a collection of discursively-constructed 'subject positions', as in some versions of post-structuralist thought. For Laclau and Mouffe, the subject is the 'gap' in the discursive structure in the sense that, if the subject forms an identity based on a series of identifications with discursively-constructed subject positions, and if the social world and their actions within it are only intelligible on the basis of the discourses within which these subject positions are situated, then strictly speaking when we talk about the subject's meaningful actions within the social world we are talking about discourse, and not the subject proper. This is because the subject is only present *before* discourse, so to speak, in the unrepresentable moment of identification – the moment of recognising themselves in a collection of subject positions and of being interpellated by a worldview which gives them a basis for making sense of the social world. In Laclau's own words,

if, on the one hand, the subject is not external to the structure, on the other it becomes partially autonomous from it to the extent that it constitutes the *locus* of a decision not determined by it... the subject is nothing but this distance between the undecidable structure and the decision (Laclau, 1990: 30).

One of the consequences of this is that the subject is the subject of a 'lack'. The subject feels that they are a 'self', but because the self emerges from a misrecognition – because when they recognises themselves in a particular set of subject positions all they are doing is identifying with a collection of elements of discourse which by their very nature

are unfixed and unstable – they are never able to achieve a final suturing of their identity (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 98).

The reason why this is relevant to the present discussion of Thatcherism is because the subject spends their life attempting to expel from themselves the lack which vitiates their being by entering into a series of antagonistic relationships with discursively constructed ‘others’. In other words, they will attempt to exteriorise their own auto-negativity onto another and, in so doing, construct for themselves the illusion that by annihilating the antagonistic other they will simultaneously be able to annihilate the cause of their lack and achieve a fully sutured identity. Of course, this is not possible: the annihilation of the antagonistic other is inevitably the moment in which the subject feels the greatest sense of lack, simply because it is in this moment that they are confronted with the reality that the final suturing of their identity will always escape them (Žižek, 1989: 252). Nevertheless, the construction of such antagonistic relationships is a fundamental part of the general *modus operandi* of hegemonic politics and the principal means by which a discourse is able to carve out a space for itself separate from the broader field of discursivity.

If we look at the public face of Thatcher herself – the face she presented in parliament, in campaign speeches, in television interviews and the like – and what Hall would refer to as the ‘ventriloquist voices’ responsible for popularising Thatcherite discourse we quickly arrive at an appreciation of the way in which this aspect of Laclau and Mouffe’s post-structuralist discourse theory helps us to overcome some of the limitations and aporias present in Hall’s and Jessop *et al*’s respective accounts, and of the centrality of the construction of a series of antagonistic ‘others’ to Thatcherism as a political project.

It is well-known that Thatcher took pride in steadfastly opposing the ‘socialist menace’ – both at home in the form of Labour party militants and trade union ‘wreckers’, and abroad in the form of the Soviet Union – but this socialist menace was only one among a varied multiplicity of social antagonisms, and formed only part of a much more complex constitutive outside, integral to Thatcherite discourse. Also included were the symptomatic figures of the Irish republican terrorist, the vandal, the mugger, the immigrant, and several others besides. The following passage is taken from one of Thatcher’s most widely seen television appearances and serves as a good illustration of the role played by social antagonism in Thatcherite discourse:

‘...there was a committee which looked at it and said that if we went on as we are then by the end of the century there would be four million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in. So, if you want good race relations, you have got to allay peoples’ fears on numbers... we must hold out the clear prospect of an end to immigration because at the moment it is about between 45,000 and 50,000 people coming in a year’ (Thatcher, 1978a).

This passage is interesting for a number of reasons: firstly, because it is performative, in the sense that it brings into being the state of affairs it purports to merely describe. That is, what Thatcher presents as a mere *response* to peoples’ fears is actually an invocation for people to *have* those fears. Secondly, it is interesting because of the way in which it treats the ‘problem’ of immigration. In setting out their theory of social antagonism, and

in an effort to differentiate between 'real opposition' and antagonism proper, Laclau and Mouffe state that 'It is because a physical force *is* a physical force that another identical and countervailing force leads to rest; in contrast, it is because a peasant *cannot be* a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner expelling him from his land' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 125). The reason why immigration into Britain is a problem is never explicitly spelled-out in this passage, but it is implied that 'Britishness' is contingent upon preserving a distinctive 'British character', and that immigration into Britain leads to the dilution of that character due to the fact that immigrants necessarily bring with them a 'different culture' that eats away at, and will eventually 'swamp', the indigenous British culture.

In other words, in the case of Thatcherite discourse on immigration, it is because the British people *cannot be* the British people (that is, because the distinctive culture that makes them British is being watered-down by immigrant cultures) that an antagonism exists with continued immigration into Britain, and it is only by destroying the antagonistic other (namely, the immigrant) that the British people will be able to achieve a fully sutured identity. The 'British people' has no actual referent; it is a signifier without signified. It is simply the name of the community constructed within Thatcherite discourse, and the reason why it is necessary to articulate this community as threatened by immigration is because, without this threat (and a number of others like it), it falls apart: this community has no positive being of its own and the notion that it does can only be kept alive if that being is articulated as 'barred' in some way. Social antagonism is both constitutive and negating, and it is because immigration into Britain negates the identity of the British people that it is also constitutive of the latter.

In fairness to Hall and Jessop *et al*, it would be wrong to argue that their respective accounts of Thatcherism completely neglect this important aspect of the functioning of the Thatcherite project: they do recognise that the way in which Thatcherism constructs a series of enemies and defines itself in opposition to those enemies is an integral part of how Thatcherism works. Recalling Jessop *et al*'s 'Two Nations' thesis, based on the idea that one of the key operations of Thatcherism is the way in which it sets out a vision of the social dividing the productive from the parasitic – the entrepreneurial, individualistic businessman from the unemployed, pensioners, the disabled and public sector workers – clearly demonstrates this (Jessop *et al*, 1984: 51). Meanwhile, Hall's account of Thatcherism is even more attuned to the centrality of the construction of threats to Thatcherite discourse, with his analyses of the 'scavenger' as the new 'folk devil' of British political discourse and the way in which Thatcherism solidifies the image of the 'over-taxed individual' by counterposing it to the 'coddling' nanny state (Hall, 1979: 17).

Nevertheless, it remains true that due to their unwillingness to adopt the 'fully discursive' position of Laclau and Mouffe, both Hall and Jessop *et al* are unable to explain why the strategy of dividing social space in this manner is so effective. What is more, in Jessop *et al*'s work in particular there is a great deal of equivocation with regards the ontological status of the social actors that make up both sides of Thatcherism's 'Two Nations', and it is not at all clear whether they are considered to be objective essences or discursively constructed subject positions. As a result, to the extent that Jessop *et al* do conceive of them as objective essences, they are blind to the power relations enveloped in the subject positions through which Thatcherite discourse encourages its subjects to experience the social world. This brings us to the discussion

of the third core concept in the work of Laclau and Mouffe: hegemony, and the closely related issue of how to properly conceive of crisis from the post-Marxist perspective of Laclau and Mouffe.

Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Keynesian Welfare State

The aspect of Thatcherism which does more than any other to differentiate it from that which came before it is the presence of crisis conditions. In contrast to the Conservative party discourse of the preceding years, it was only in the mid-1970s that the British social formation entered into a period of crisis, lasting until at least the midway point of Thatcher's time in office. However, to say that Britain experienced a crisis in the middle of the 1970s is not to say much unless we specify in some detail what is meant by the term 'crisis'. In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci differentiates between two types of crisis: namely, 'conjunctural' and 'organic' crises. According to Gramsci (1971: 177), the latter are of a fundamental nature and are 'relatively permanent', while the former are of an 'occasional, immediate, almost accidental' nature and lack 'any very far-reaching historical significance'. These categories roughly correspond to the distinction Jessop (2002: 2) establishes between a crisis *in* a social formation and a crisis *of* a social formation:

If the crisis of the KWNS [Keynesian Welfare National State] essentially involves a crisis *in* that regime and its role in reproducing the accumulation regime with which it is linked, then piecemeal reforms in one or both might restore its role without changing its basic organizational form. But, if there is a crisis *of* the KWNS, a new regime of economic and social reproduction would be necessary.

Within this conceptual schema, Thatcherism would represent an instance of the latter: it is a moment of organic crisis; a crisis *of* the social formation and one which cannot be domesticated by the system which pre-exists it. In short, it is a crisis with structuring effects. However, this conceptual schema should not be taken as a ready-made model for understanding the precise nature of the crisis which Thatcherism encountered, for reasons which are set out below.

The problem with the Gramscian distinction between conjunctural and organic crises is that these categories refer to changes (in the case of the former, minor; in the case of the latter, major) of empirically-existing social structures. This much is clear from the following passage:

A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them. These incessant and persistent efforts (since no social formation will ever admit that it has been superseded) form the terrain of the “conjunctural”, and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organise (Gramsci, 1971: 178).

Gramsci’s insistence that every type of society is structured around a single hegemonic centre, and that this centre has a necessary class basis, can be considered problematic on the grounds that, as explained earlier, it presupposes the existence of an economy which structures the rest of society, but which has no conditions of existence of its own, even though economic processes clearly cannot take place without precise political,

legal, and cultural conditions of existence (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 138). It can also be considered problematic on the grounds that it fails to take into account the unfixed and contingent nature of all social identities and the role played by social antagonism in the construction of the social world. From the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe, society – understood as a collection of empirically-existing social structures, processes, events and things – cannot be said to have an objective existence. The social world is an entirely discursive structure which owes its existence to the structuring effects of social antagonism. This, in turn, means that the component pieces of the social world – including such things as Gramsci’s ‘economy’ – are permanently on an unstable footing.

What this implies in relation to the present discussion of the ontological status of crises is that they have no ontological status, in the sense that they represent the moment in which the dominant systems of representation for the social world encounter events which they are unable to domesticate. In Laclau’s terminology, the moment of crisis is the moment of *temporality* – the ‘pure event’ which escapes representation by discourse – in contrast to the moment of *spatiality* – the moment in which a definite regularity in dispersion is established among a given set of discursive elements. This new regularity will necessarily include a narrative of the crisis, but it is important not to confuse this narrative (which forms part of a new discursive system of representation) with the crisis itself (which represents the failure of the pre-existing system). In Laclau’s own words:

Symbolization means that the total succession is present in each of its moments. This synchronicity of the successive means that the succession is in fact a total *structure*, a space for symbolic representation and constitution. The spatialization of the event’s

temporality takes place through repetition, through the reduction of its variation to an invariable nucleus which is an internal moment of the pre-given structure (Laclau, 1990: 41).

Once a historical process is symbolised it partakes in the relational character of discourse. Hence, both synchronicity and diachrony are moments internal to the spatial and it is only when that space is dislocated – that is, when a systematic discursive ensemble ceases to make sense, or when a structural transformation of that discursive ensemble ceases to make sense – that we can talk of temporality proper, in which case we are referring to crisis. Therefore, with this in mind, we can modify Gramsci's concepts accordingly and arrive at the following definition: an organic crisis is a conjuncture in which 'there is a generalized weakening of the relational system [that is, the discursive formation] defining the identities of a given social or political space, and where, as a result there is a proliferation of floating elements' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 137). This is the situation with which Thatcherism was confronted upon first emerging onto the British political scene: a crisis in the dominant systems of representation. Moreover, it was under the auspices of Thatcherism that a new system of representation came into being – or, at the very least, that the existing formation was salvaged through the recombination of its constituent parts, along with the introduction of a range of novel elements.

This understanding of the crisis of the post-war settlement and the role of Thatcherism in that crisis is at one with the understanding put forward by Hay (1999: 321), at least insofar as it highlights the jarring novelty of Thatcherism, and is at odds with the kinds of accounts put forward by Marsh and Rhodes (1992), Jessop *et al* (1984) and Kerr

(1997), which emphasise the incremental nature of the emergence of Thatcherism in British politics. However, the kind of structure we are dealing with in the case of Thatcherism is not, as Hay would have it, a state structure comprised of a collection of relatively autonomous governing institutions, but rather an entirely discursive structure. Crucially, this is not to argue that Thatcherism represented a ruptural point with the post-war settlement in the realm of *ideology*, as Hall (1988) and Letwin (1992) would argue, but rather to argue in favour of breaking down the artificial division between the ideational and the material, and to making the case that the novelty of Thatcherism lay in putting forward an alternative worldview, conceived of in the broadest sense possible, through which its subjects could experience and make sense of the social world.

From this perspective, crisis happens not because of an accumulation of objectively-given contradictions within the state, or within a given regime of accumulation, but rather because of the failure of existing discursive systems of representation to be able to explain unexpected events, and if we can identify the 'contradictions' which led to a crisis then the crisis is, strictly speaking, over. As such, from a discourse theoretical perspective, we can acknowledge that the notion of crisis is central to Thatcherite discourse, but at the same time we can also show that the crisis articulated within Thatcherite discourse bears no relation, in any final ontological sense, to the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state. The latter, it has already been noted, resists any attempt at symbolisation and, as such, when Thatcher purports to represent that crisis, to give the crisis a unique Thatcherite inflection, she fails, and necessarily so. However, what is within her grasp is the formation of a new structural objectivity and the salient point in all of this is that she was largely successful in making this new objectivity – this new

'picture of reality', which *did include* an account of the crisis of the post-war settlement – hegemonic.

Now, to make this claim is to do little more than to argue that Thatcherism constitutes itself as a mythical space. Laclau describes the functioning of myth in the following terms:

The 'objective' condition for the emergence of myth... is a structural dislocation. The 'work' of myth is to suture that dislocated space through the constitution of a new space of representation. Thus, the effectiveness of myth is essentially hegemonic: it involves forming a new objectivity by means of the rearticulation of the dislocated elements. Any objectivity, then, is merely a crystallized myth. The moment of myth's realization is consequently the moment of the subject's eclipse and its reabsorption by the structure – the moment at which the subject is reduced to 'subject position' (Laclau, 1990: 61).

In a context of structural dislocation a new discursive formation will coalesce on the basis of the exclusion of a constitutive outside, and the constituent parts of this new discursive formation will be joined together in a chain of equivalences made possible by a common antagonism with this constitutive outside. Furthermore, these discursive elements, joined together as a chain of equivalences, will require a nodal point to represent the universality of the chain, beyond the mere differential particularisms of the equivalential links. This means that one link in the chain of equivalences, whose body is 'split', will take on the function of representing an absent universality and it is this relation, 'by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a

universality entirely incommensurable with it,' that Laclau and Mouffe (2001: xiii) refer to as a *hegemonic* relation.

Laclau also notes that one of the defining characteristics of the functioning of myth is that, in a context of generalised disorder, the need for order becomes imperative and any order – almost regardless of its ontic content – is called forth in order to fill this gap in the structure. In Laclau's own words:

The discourse of a 'new order' is often accepted by several sectors, not because they particularly like its content but because it is the discourse of *an* order, of something that is presented as a credible alternative to a crisis and a generalized dislocation (Laclau, 1990: 66).

Thatcherism emerged in a context of precisely this kind of 'structural dislocation'. It also took the form of a new 'space of representation', which had as its goal the suturing of the dislocated space with which it found itself confronted. Not only that, but its success in hegemonic terms was, in large part, attributable to the fact that this situation called forth some kind of order, almost regardless of its ideological character. As such, Thatcherism came to represent more than its own literal content: namely, the very principle of spatiality itself. Furthermore, it also embodied for society the very principle of opposition to the lack of structuration in the order which it sought to replace. This is an important point: from the point of view of the subject, Thatcherism was not so much opposed to the post-war settlement as to the *dislocated nature* of that settlement and this is the principal reason for its success in hegemonic terms (Laclau, 1990: 62).

This accounts for the role played by Thatcherism in relation to the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state, but a few remaining points ought to be made before looking at the hegemonic politics of Thatcherism in more detail. The first of these is that, in real world situations, the types of dislocation referred to above never take the form of total dislocations; there is never an absolute crisis and structuration is never entirely absent. Indeed, this eventuality is literally impossible: a crisis cannot exist without some kind of structuration because in order for there to be a crisis, for there to be a dislocation, something has to be dislocated, and that something is the structurality characteristic of the pre-existing discursive order. The discourse which has been completely dislocated is, in the words of Laclau and Mouffe, 'the discourse of the psychotic' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 112) and we never arrive at the point at which the discursive horizons of society have broken down to such an extent that literally any order will suffice.

In other words, a suturing myth may emerge on a terrain which has been severely dislocated, or it may emerge on a terrain which is barely dislocated at all, but in all cases it is necessarily confronted with a situation of *relative* structuration. To make use of another duality central to Laclau's work: what we are dealing with is a widening of the terrain of the political, but never one severe enough to ever eclipse that of the social, defined as those parts of the social world in which sedimented discursive elements tend to assume the form of objective presences, in its entirety (Laclau, 1990: 35). It is a situation in which the undecidable nature of a series of discursive elements constituting the field of objectivity has been revealed, but also one in which this revelation has been far from total, and this is why it is important for the suturing myth to have some kind of affinity or continuity with that which it supersedes. This implies a very different understanding of the way in which political projects such as Thatcherism found success

by 'resonating' with pre-established discourses than those set out in much of the existing literature.

Hay (2002: 214), starting out from a critical realist epistemology which maintains a separation – albeit at times a messy one – between the ideational and the material, argues that ideas have to be factored into any account of political change on the grounds that they mediate the interaction of strategically-minded actors with their strategically-selective contexts, and that ideas and theories about the social world will only stand the test of time if they are seen to resonate with the structural constraints present within that social world. Hay cites the example of the theories of American economist Arthur Laffer, who argued that tax cuts would be such a spur to entrepreneurial spirits that they would unleash a wave of economic growth which would lead to a greater overall tax take. This idea found favour in the first Reagan administration which, partly as a consequence of Laffer's theories, introduced drastic tax cuts for the rich, only to find that the predicted increase in revenues never materialised, thus discrediting the notion of the Laffer curve.

From the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe, the need for ideas to resonate is seen as equally important in explanations of political change. However, the conceptual separation between the material and the ideational, maintained by Hay, is not a valid one for Laclau and Mouffe, and the pre-existing structure which new ideas have to resonate with is entirely discursive in nature. What this means, in turn, is that the new picture of reality provided by Thatcherism became hegemonic largely because it resonated with the worldviews put forward by past hegemonic projects, or at least the parts of those worldviews which had not yet lost their effectiveness in hegemonic terms.

The advantage enjoyed by Laclau and Mouffe over figures like Hay in viewing the role of ideas in this way is that it avoids explanations reliant upon the notion of 'structure', which is implied in Hay's account in the form of strategically-selective environmental constraints, and which is problematic for all of the reasons set out above. Furthermore, it also allows Laclau and Mouffe to sidestep the thorny issue of having to set out the criteria for distinguishing between materially-existing structural constraints and 'ideological' representations of the latter.

To return to the discussion of Laclau's concept of myth, and his understanding of the way in which a new order will often achieve hegemonic status simply because it is *an* order, 'something that is presented as a credible alternative to a crisis and a generalized dislocation', we can also say that not just *any* hegemonic project will be successful. The success of a given hegemonic project seeking to impose a new picture of reality on society in a context of organic crisis will depend on the extent to which it is seen to be a credible new vision and the extent to which it resonates with key parts of pre-existing discursive structures. Furthermore, we can also say that the more severe a crisis, the greater the extent of the dislocation of the pre-existing discursive order and, consequently, the wider the areas of social life which must be reorganised by a new hegemonic project (Laclau, 1990: 66).

In which case, the following two assertions can be made: firstly, that one of the major reasons for Thatcherism's success in hegemonic terms lay in its harmony with key elements of the discursive structure it sought to supersede: for example, Thatcher's hegemonisation of the historical legacy of British imperialism (Thatcher, 1977); the essential continuity between her conceptualisation of the workings of the 'free market'

and Hayek's concept of 'catallaxy' (von Hayek, 1945); or, her attempt to reassure voters that the NHS was 'safe' in her hands (Thatcher, 1982). The second assertion is that we can gauge the severity of the crisis experienced by the post-war settlement which Thatcherism sought to replace by the degree of radicalism characteristic of the Thatcherite project itself. Given the fact that Thatcherism found it necessary to attempt to resonate with key elements of the discursive structure it sought to supersede, we can say that that discursive structure was far from entirely dislocated. However, given also the high degree of radicalism characteristic of the Thatcherite project relative to that pre-existing discursive structure, we can also say that the crisis experienced by the Keynesian welfare state was not insignificant in nature.

Meanwhile, another important thing to note with regards the present discussion of Thatcherism and crisis is that Thatcherism did not simply emerge on a terrain wracked by crisis; it also helped to intensify the crisis which it encountered simply by virtue of the fact that it presented itself as – and, to a great extent, was seen to be – a new principle of spatiality. As Laclau notes in relation to the functioning of mythical spaces:

the mythical space has a dual function and a split identity: on the one hand it is its own literal content – the proposed new order; but on the other, this order symbolizes the very principle of spatiality and structurality. *The critical effects of the mythical space on the dominant structural space will therefore increase the latter's deconstruction...* the mythical space will appear as pure positivity and spatiality, and to this end it will present that to which it is opposed as a non-space, a non-place where a set of dislocations are added together... [furthermore,] *in order to conceive of itself as a space – as the point of a fully realized objectivity – it will have to present those dislocations as equivalent, but as systematic, nonetheless'* (Laclau, 1990: 62, my emphasis).

In other words, the mere *appearance* of the new principle of spatiality in the form of Thatcherism was enough to multiply the dislocatory effects of crisis on the pre-existing discursive order of the Keynesian welfare state.

Lastly, it should also be noted that the type of universality characteristic of the particularity which, as part of the equivalential chain making up a given discursive formation, takes on a universal structuring function in relation to that chain, is a contaminated universality in the sense that it lives in an unresolvable tension between universality and particularity. It functions as a metaphor for an absent fullness in society, but its status as a mythical space is never secured once and for all and is, on the contrary, always reversible. In fact, any mythical space is almost destined to lose its status as such, sooner or later, due to the difficulties inherent in satisfying a diverse array of often conflicting social demands. This is put neatly by Laclau (1990: 61):

if the very form of fullness has a space of representation, then the latter will be the locus to which *any* specific demand will be referred and where *any* specific dislocation will find the inverted form of its expression... This opens either the possibility that the moment of the general form of fullness might predominate – in which case the literal content will be deformed and transformed through the addition of an indefinite number of social demands – or that the literal content of the mythical space might predominate – in which case its ability to hegemonize the general form of fullness will be reduced; a growing coexistence will exist between unexpressed demands and a *supposed* universality that is incapable of delivering the goods; and the mythical space will lose its dimension of imaginary horizon.

If the former course is pursued – if the general form of fullness predominates – hegemony will be formally achieved, but it will be a vacuous hegemony, without any substantive literal content; meanwhile, if the latter course is pursued – if the literal content of the metaphoric space of representation predominates – the latter may have some tangible success in terms of putting forward new policies, restructuring the economy, and transforming civil society, but only at the cost of fatally weakening its ability to bind together an extensive chain of equivalential identities, with the result being the fracturing of its hegemonic bloc and the emergence of rival hegemonic blocs constituted around alternative myths. This can be seen in the breakdown of the Thatcherite hegemonic bloc in the late-1980s and early-1990s, as the policy programme of the first two Thatcher governments – encompassing reform of local authority spending, the privatisation of the public utilities and the implementation of New Right ideas in the area of monetary policy, among other things – started to bear fruit. As will be argued in greater depth in chapter three, the patent failure of this policy programme to satisfy all of the social demands comprising the Thatcherite hegemonic bloc, which was inevitable from the outset, cleared the way for the emergence of a new suturing myth on the terrain of British politics in the form of New Labour’s Third Way ideas from the mid-1990s onwards, which also promised to be able to satisfy a wide range of social demands, and which would also, in due course, break down as a consequence of the failures of New Labour in office.

The Hegemonic Politics of Thatcherism

An appreciation of these foundational concepts in the work of Laclau and Mouffe – discourse, social antagonism and hegemony – can help us to overcome some of the aporias in the Hall-Jessop debate and to arrive at a more productive understanding of

the Thatcherite phenomenon. It has already been shown how the concept of antagonism sheds light on the centrality of the construction of threats within Thatcherite discourse. However, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony can also help us to better understand the nature of the crisis that Thatcherism confronted (and partially engineered), as well as the function of 'empty signifiers' in suturing the space dislocated by this crisis. One of the major issues at stake in the entire Hall-Jessop debate was the issue of how to properly conceive of the role of 'economic factors' in accounting for the success of the Thatcherite project. The centrepiece of Jessop *et al's* critique of Hall's work was, as mentioned above, the notion that Hall's *AP* account of Thatcherism was at best only a partial account given that Hall was overly-focused on the 'ideological' aspects of Thatcherism and failed to give proper weight to the economic 'core' of Thatcherite hegemony. In Jessop *et al's* (1985: 91) own words:

the Gramscian heritage is problematic for all those inspired by him. Gramsci focused mainly on the politics and ideology of class leadership and neglected the structural determinations of hegemony. Hall shares this neglect... Yet the long-term stability of hegemony is rooted in specific forms of state, with their own structural or strategic selectivity, as well as in specific forms of organizing the system of production and the mental-manual division of labour.

One of the points that Jessop *et al* seek to emphasise is that a key reason for the success of Thatcherism was that the latter was able to construct a workable new economic settlement. However, as has already been shown in the above discussion of Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of discourse, it is not possible to distinguish between 'the economic' and 'the ideological' as two distinct levels of society given that social actors

have no way of experiencing the social world except through discursive systems of representation which are inherently ideological.

With this being the case, the workable new economic settlement Jessop *et al* are so keen to draw attention to cannot be said to exist except within precise discursive confines. This is a serious error in Jessop *et al*'s account because it blinds them to the real significance of the 'economic' components of the Thatcherite project. The economic aspects of Thatcherism are significant and worthy of our attention, but not for the reasons Jessop *et al* suppose. They are significant because they performed an important hegemonic function; they acted as a space of representation for the formation of a new structural objectivity and were, to use Laclau and Mouffe's phrasing, 'particularities' (simple discursive elements forming part of an equivalential chain) which took on a 'universal structuring function' (that is, they came to symbolise an absent fullness in society and the very principle of spatiality itself) in a context in which the relational system upon which the post-war settlement was predicated had been severely dislocated. This much is evident from even a cursory glance at some of Thatcher's public speeches. Consider, for example, the way in which Thatcher frames the debate around inflation. For Thatcher, inflation is not a simple economic problem to be tackled with whatever technical means are at the disposal of policy-makers so as to encourage savings and investment and, ultimately, to achieve a slight increase in rates of economic growth.

On the contrary, in Thatcherite discourse tackling inflation takes on a global structuring function and is articulated in such a way as to make it seem as though tackling inflation is coterminous with tackling a broad range of societal ills and satisfying a broad range of

social demands which, looked at objectively, have very little to do with inflation at all. In Thatcherite discourse, inflation is 'the greatest enemy of the weak' (Conservative party, 1976: 57); it is a bane on the lives of pensioners – 'Many, many people who put a bit by during their working years, if they had for example say £100 in the Post Office at the beginning of the Labour Government would have seen the value of the £100 eaten away until, today, it would only purchase goods worth £48' (Thatcher, 1979a); it is what strangles the lifeblood of the economy – that is, small businesses – and is the reason for both the recession and continued low rates of economic growth (Conservative party, 1976: 35). Not only that, but it is also articulated as a cause of the moral decline of British society – 'I believe that if we went on as we have been under Labour, then the kind of society that we've known would be in very severe danger in the future. You just think. There would be no purpose in thrift at all or in self reliance, if every five years the value of your savings was halved' (Thatcher, 1979b) – and social conflict – 'nothing threatens the social fabric of a nation more than the conflicts and divisiveness which inflation creates' (Conservative party, 1983).

What is more, tackling inflation is just one among several key planks of Thatcherite economic policy that function as empty signifiers in this way. Cutting taxes, doing away with incomes policies, deregulating the economy and getting rid of 'red tape', curbing trade union power – these things which Jessop *et al* (1985: 96) make sense of in terms of Thatcherism forcing Britain to adapt to the strictures of post-Fordism are in actual fact surfaces of inscription designed to hegemonise a range of social demands. Thatcherism is not, as Jessop *et al* suppose, primarily an economic project, but with an authoritarian populist 'political' adjunct. On the contrary, the 'economic' aspects of the

Thatcherite project are just as deeply 'political' as any other aspect and play an important role in Thatcherism's functioning as a hegemonic project.

In a similar vein, Jessop *et al* (1984: 42) also criticise Hall on the grounds that his *AP* account of Thatcherism overstates the extent to which the discourse of authoritarian populism became hegemonic and was a major factor in the political success of Thatcherism, arguing that the Conservative party under Thatcher mobilised two kinds of working class support – deferential voters inspired by the 'traditional emotions' and rational, self-interested voters swayed by the prospect of getting rich quick in Thatcher's new Britain:

support for Thatcherism should not be reduced to 'authoritarian populism' (which largely continues the appeal to the 'traditional emotions' in changed circumstances) but should also be related to more pragmatic interests in lower direct taxation, council house sales, rising living standards for those still in private sector employment, lower inflation, and so forth.

The argument here is essentially that *AP* did have some success in hegemonic terms, but that its appeal was limited, and that another of the key reasons for the success of Thatcherism was, simply put, the bribing of the working class – that is, an attempt to appeal to the 'basic interests' of the working class in order to win their votes and obviate the need to win hegemony. However, based on the above discussion of the post-structuralist understanding of discourse provided by Laclau and Mouffe, it is evident that it is not possible – or, at least, not as productive – for social theorists to talk of the 'basic interests' of the working class. The interests of a given social actor can not be

determined based on a 'correct' reading of that actor's objective circumstances within a given system of social relations; on the contrary, all interests are constructed within discourse, and the interests of the subjects of Thatcherite discourse are no exception. An example will serve to illustrate this point.

In the above passage, Jessop *et al* refer to 'council house sales' as an instance of Thatcherism attempting to appeal to the 'pragmatic interests' of working class voters. The implication here is that with big discounts being offered under the Right to Buy scheme (which represent a very direct and immediate economic gain for working class council tenants), and with home-ownership seen to be a shortcut to entry into the ranks of the 'respectable' middle classes, working class people would see that their immediate economic interests, as well as their interests in terms of advancing their social status, are better served with the Conservatives than with Labour, and will vote accordingly. However, it is not difficult to see how social actors in these circumstances might see their interests differently. They may see their own self-interest in terms of gaining social status and a discount on the purchase of a house, but it is equally plausible that a social actor in the same position will see the sale of council houses as an attack on the principle of social housing (which, as a member of the working class and a client of the welfare state, they value very much) and as an attempt on the part of the elitist Conservative party to reverse the hard-fought gains that the working class made in the immediate post-war period. Not all working class people aspire to be middle class and to own their own home and, to the extent that some of them do, it will be the result of the structuring of a discursive field and the hegemonic victory of right-wing political forces such as Thatcherism – not because of their structural position within an objectively-given system of social relations. Furthermore, due to the undecidable nature

of discourse, the way in which subjects will conceive of their 'basic interests' in any given situation will be impossible to predict in advance with any degree of certainty, even if we can speculate based on the prevailing balance of hegemonic forces.

With all of this being the case, we can safely say that bringing the theoretical insights of Laclau and Mouffe to bear on the analysis of Thatcherism can help us to overcome some of the aporias in the Hall-Jessop debate and, by extension, the accounts of such figures as Marquand (1988), Gamble (1994), Marsh (1995) and Hay (1996), whose accounts are similar to Hall's and Jessop *et al's* in terms of treating ideology as a sphere of the social. However, as useful as Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse can be, it is not all that is needed in order to be able to arrive at a well-rounded account of Thatcherism, and one which really gets to grips with the latter's historical specificity. What Laclau and Mouffe give us is an appreciation of the hegemonic aspects of the functioning of the Thatcherite project: the role played by Thatcherism in relation to the crisis of the post-war settlement and in furnishing a new discursive framework with which to make sense of the dislocated terrain of British politics after that crisis. However, as Foucault has convincingly argued, hegemonic power relations form merely one part, and a small part at that, of the broader system of power relations in operation in contemporary capitalist societies:

in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse' (Foucault, 1980b: 93).

What is missing from Laclau and Mouffe's work is an appreciation of Thatcherism as a governmental project – as something with the goal of reorganising a historically-specific configuration of power relations so as to make the process of governing easier – and it is in this respect that the work of Foucault can be used to supplement the work of Laclau and Mouffe to give a more well-rounded account of Thatcherism.

Foucault and Government

Foucault's (2009:144) definition of governmentality is worth quoting at length in order to avoid overlooking any of the specific uses to which the concept can be put:

By this word "governmentality" I mean three things. First, by "governmentality" I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. Second, by "governmentality" I understand the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power – sovereignty, discipline, and so on – of the type of power that we can call "government" and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges. Finally, by "governmentality" I think we should understand the process, or rather, the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually "governmentalized."

Based on this definition, we can say that governmentality is a historically specific configuration of power, brought into being in the mid-eighteenth century, which is primarily concerned with managing *populations* through the application of *mechanisms of security*, developed in a body of knowledge we can call *political economy*, and which later came to encompass such disciplines as economics and political science.

It is a type of government which, unlike its *Polizeistaat* predecessor, does not take the strengthening of the state through a meticulous accounting, control and direction of the state's resources as its major concern, opting instead for an essentially liberal type of government – liberal in the sense that it is reflexive and self-limiting, both productive and wary of freedoms, and respectful of the 'natural' laws of society insofar as it directs its efforts towards ensuring that those natural laws are allowed to function without impediment, as a means of regulating in as congenial a manner as possible the behaviour of the population, considered as a whole and as individuals. It is a configuration of power which requires that the modern prince ask himself, 'Am I governing at the border between the too much and too little, between the maximum and minimum fixed for me by the nature of things?' (Foucault, 2008: 19) However, what is more important than Foucault's description of this new, liberal form of power, which supplanted, to a large extent, disciplinary and juridico-legal mechanisms with mechanisms of security, for present purposes at least, is that by approaching the question of power in this way Foucault (2008: 322) opens up a new 'level of analysis' of power in a more general sense, and furnishes social theorists with a set of conceptual tools which can be used to make sense of the ways in which power has functioned at the level of whole societies for the past several hundred years.

The term itself, 'governmentality', is derived from a synthesis of the French words *gouverner* and *mentalité* – 'governing' and 'mode of thought' – and can be roughly translated into English as meaning 'governmental rationality' (Gordon, 1991: 1). However, it must be noted that 'governmental rationality', for Foucault, does not mean the rationality characteristic of a specific type of state, whether that be the twentieth century welfare state or the seventeenth century police state. On the contrary, it encompasses a much wider variety of power relations than those localised in or emanating from any particular kind of state. This is because Foucault (1994: 341) subscribes to a much broader understanding of government than is common today, which was prevalent in the sixteenth century, and which he describes in the following terms:

[Government] designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It covered not only legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, that were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern in this sense is to structure the possible field of action of others.

In other words, Foucault views government as a matter of the 'conduct of conduct', and within this definition 'conduct' can be taken to mean either 'to conduct oneself' in a manner appropriate to a given situation – such as a work environment, a Jobcentre or a hospital ward – which implies some kind of self-reflection on the part of subjects, or to particular behaviours and actions themselves (for example, 'work', 'job-seeking' or 'care-giving') (Dean, 2010: 17). Furthermore, these meanings of the term apply not only

to those who are governed, but also to the governors. For example, in the same way that a job-seeker is expected to demonstrate the correct dispositions towards finding work and gaining new skills in their dealings with Job Centre officers, and to carry out all of the tasks given to them by those officers, the latter also know that they are expected to maintain a professional disposition when dealing with clients, to dress in a manner appropriate to their employ, and to meet any targets they are given in terms of caseloads or benefits sanctions by their line managers.

Neo-Liberalism From a Governmentality Perspective

Where neo-liberalism fits within this broad schema is as a particular variant of governmentality and one which first problematised and then replaced the 'social liberal' variant which was dominant in the immediate post-war period. Social liberalism – which was itself a problematisation of earlier liberal forms of government – was premised on the government of 'society'. It sought to tackle a range of problems produced or left neglected by earlier forms of liberal government including poverty, poor housing conditions, inadequate health care for large swathes of the population, a lack of economic productivity on the part of the uneducated poor, persistent pockets of criminality in the major urban centres, and widespread moral breakdown throughout society (Dean, 2010: 66). In particular, it sought to deal with the 'social question' of how to deal with the potential for social unrest given high levels of inequality and poverty in a context of ostensible civil and political equality, and it sought to do this by means of the 'welfare state'. However, from a governmentality perspective the welfare state was not so much a completed institutional edifice, but a rationality of government:

The 'welfare state' was... an ethos of government or its ethical ideal and much less (and to varying degrees in different national contexts) a set of accomplished reforms and completed institutions. Above all, the welfare state was to be the *telos* (i.e. the final end or goal) of particular problematizations, interventions, institutions and practices concerning unemployment, old age, disability, sickness, public education and housing, health administration, and the norms of family life and childrearing (Dean, 2010: 68).

For example, this welfarist orientation meant that social policy was geared primarily towards 'the objective of everybody having relatively equal access to consumer goods' and was designed as 'a counterweight to unrestrained economic processes which it is reckoned will induce inequality and generally destructive effects on society if left to themselves' (Foucault, 2008: 142). In other words, in the era of social liberalism, social policy functioned as a palliative of capitalism – as something which can and must co-exist with capitalism in order to mitigate its failings.

By the late-1970s the critiques of prominent public intellectuals and social commentators such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman had congealed into a 'politically salient assault on the rationalities, programmes and technologies of welfare in Britain, Europe and the United States', centred around the notions that the welfare state was unsustainable from a financial standpoint, illiberal from the perspective of the rights of the individual, and enervating of the moral fibre of those 'on the social' (Rose, 1996: 51). This was the milieu in which a new form of government – neo-liberalism – coalesced from a diverse array of concepts, themes, theories, technologies of government and objects to be governed. However, neo-liberalism was not straightforwardly a reprise of classical liberalism. In Foucault's (2008: 131) own words,

neo-liberalism is not Adam Smith... the problem of neo-liberalism [is] not how to cut out or contrive a free space of the market within an already given political society... The problem of neo-liberalism is rather how the overall exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market power.

Whereas in the era of classical liberalism the market was an autonomous, self-regulating sphere which good government ought to respect and keep a safe distance from, in the era of neo-liberalism (and especially in Anglo-American forms of neo-liberalism) the market becomes the principle upon which the whole rest of society is remodelled: 'Government... has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market' (Foucault, 2008: 145). What this implies, in turn, is that from the perspective of neo-liberalism, the state is viewed not as the paranoid entity it is in classical liberalism, reluctant to intervene for fear of disturbing the beneficent workings of the free market, but rather as something with a substantial regulatory role to play in relation to that which it governs and oversees.

Indeed, in Foucault's own words, 'neo-liberal governmental intervention is no less dense, frequent, active, and continuous than in any other system', including the system of post-war social liberalism that it succeeded (Foucault, 2008: 145). For example, in relation to efforts to promote entrepreneurship throughout society action is required on a wide range of 'subjective' and 'organisational' conditions, with the organisational conditions including the privatisation of nationalised industries, the minimisation of

rigidities in the labour market, and the provision of an adequate supply of appropriately skilled labour. Meanwhile, the subjective conditions are focused mainly on counteracting the problem of 'welfare dependency', achieved through the implementation of a more onerous conditionality regime in relation to the receipt of a range of benefits and exhortation on the part of politicians and various other social commentators for the unemployed to 'self-actualize' through participation in the labour market (Rose, 1999: 144). What this means is that neo-liberals view capitalism in institutionalist, not naturalist, terms and are cognisant of the fact that capitalism is an artefact: something which will continue to exist and function efficiently only if the necessary underlying social and political conditions are met, and only if the artificial game of capitalism is set in motion by its overseers. The competitive freedom of the market is seen as something to be engineered, not as something that will spontaneously manifest itself and produce its regulatory effects for society in the absence of what the German neo-liberals called a '*Vitalpolitik*': 'Not only must government block and prevent anti-competitive practices, but it must fine-tune and actively promote competition in both the economy and in areas where the market mechanism is traditionally least prone to operate' (Olssen, 2006: 218).

In contrast to the situation prevalent in the era of social liberalism, in which the end of social policy was the insurance of the individual against a variety of potentially very consequential risks, 'contemporary programmes of welfare reform take the ethical reconstruction of the welfare recipient as their central concern' (Rose, 1999: 263). They are also based on what Rose refers to as 'the new prudentialism', in which

insurance against the future possibilities of unemployment, ill health, old age and the like becomes a private obligation. Not merely in relation to previously socialised forms of risk management, but also in a whole range of other decisions, the citizen is enjoined to bring the future into the present, and is educated in the ways of calculating the future consequences of actions as diverse as those of diet to those of home security (Rose, 1996: 58).

Part of this 'bringing the future into the present' involves viewing oneself as a vessel of human capital, which can and should be stocked up through an on-going process of 'life-long learning'. The end goal of this process is to improve one's 'employability' by acquiring both substantive skills and skills in finding work. In Rose's words, 'The new citizen is required to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling, enhancement of credentials and preparation for a life of incessant job seeking: life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self' (Rose, 1999: 161). Within this paradigm, social policy ceases to be seen as a palliative of capitalism and instead takes on the function of equipping individual citizens with the abilities and dispositions necessary to 'play the game' of capitalism. An income is still guaranteed, but it is not designed to integrate those without work into the same circuits of consumption as those who are in work. This income is typically designed to be sufficient to allow the recipient to play the role of 'job-seeker', but also meagre enough to ensure that the recipient does not remain a job-seeker indefinitely, and this is the way it must be if capitalism is to be able to produce its desired regulatory effects, because if entry into the ranks of consumer society is open to everyone, regardless of whether or not they have a job, there is no motivation for them to act as the entrepreneurial subjects neo-liberalism wants and needs. The price mechanism is disturbed and the system of

incentives and disincentives upon which a healthy capitalism depends ceases to exist (Foucault, 2008: 203).

However, this is not all that is at stake in the emergence of neo-liberal forms of governmentality. Neo-liberalism brings with it, in addition to all of the changes described above, a whole plethora of new regulatory governmental techniques designed to circumvent the obstacles encountered in the era of social liberalism and to allow for more efficacious and efficient forms of 'control at a distance'. Take, for example, the introduction of various 'calculating technologies' into the field of expert knowledge. A variety of sites that were previously integrated with the state apparatus – universities, schools, hospitals, various clinics, advice centres and other providers of social services – are 'set free' from the state, but at the same time made governable through new financial mechanisms of control. They are made into *calculable spaces*, subject to the disciplinary effects of budgets, targets, performance indicators, and audit. The result of the introduction of this new financial reality was that these calculable spaces

required [their] inhabitants to calculate for themselves, to translate their activities into financial terms, to seek to maximize productivity for a given income, to cut out waste, to restructure activities that were not cost-effective, to choose between priorities in terms of their relative costs and benefits, to become more or less like a financial manager of their own professional activities (Rose, 1999: 152).

For the centre, the utility of this new kind of accounting discourse lay in the fact that it punctured the enclosures of expert knowledge and made them amenable to

governmental strategies based on winning 'value-for-money', efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness to 'customer' needs (Rose, 1999: 151).

What is significant about all of this for present purposes is that Thatcherism played the crucial role in the unfolding of this neo-liberal governmental project in the British context because, not only did Thatcherism take the form of a hegemonic project designed to secure widespread popular support in a context of antagonistic liberal democratic politics – the basic contours of which were set out above – but it also represented an attack on the social liberal form of governmentality that predominated in the post-war period, and the emergence of a new governmental configuration designed to overcome some of the problems encountered by social liberalism as a form of governmentality.

For authors such as Peck and Tickell (2002: 388), Thatcherism represents the 'roll-back' phase of neo-liberal governmentality – meaning that its primary function in relation to the broader neo-liberal governmental project was to dismantle parts of the social liberal state in order to pave way for the 'advanced' neo-liberal governmentalities associated with political figures such as Blair and Cameron. They describe the initial roll-back phase of neo-liberal governmentality in terms of:

a shift from the philosophical project of the early 1970s (when the primary focus was on the restoration of a form of free-market thinking within the economics profession and its subsequent [re]constitution as the theoretical high ground) to the era of neoliberal conviction politics during the 1980s (when state power was mobilized behind

marketization and deregulation projects, aimed particularly at the central institutions of the Keynesian-welfarist settlement).

'Roll-out' neo-liberalism, meanwhile, they associate with key transformations in the heartlands of neo-liberalism around the turn of the century to do with the activation of the 'state-building' moment within neo-liberalism. Within the UK, this coincided with the emergence of New Labour as a political force and a recognition on the part of the governing elite that 'the perverse economic consequences and pronounced social externalities of narrowly market-centric forms of neoliberalism' were unsustainable and could only be remedied with a more active approach to policy-making, encompassing a range of highly interventionist economic and social policies geared towards 'extending and bolstering market logics, socializing individual subjects, and disciplining the noncompliant' (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 389).

The argument put forward in what follows is that this account of Thatcherism as an instance of 'roll-back' neo-liberalism is at best only a partial account and that, not only were many of the features of Peck and Tickell's 'roll-out' neo-liberalism apparent from almost the very beginning of the Thatcher project, but that Peck and Tickell's basic argument does not accord with the basic premise of Foucault's theory of governmentality, which as was noted above is that what differentiates classical liberalism from neo-liberalism is the recognition on the part of the latter that the market is an artefact – something which only exists because it is brought into being, and which only persists because it is maintained – and, rather than being a non-political sphere of interaction between atomised economic actors, is actually the site of diverse array of governing techniques and political strategies. With this being the case it is

wrong for Peck and Tickell to suppose that the 'roll-back' of parts of the state machinery of social liberalism is coterminous with the 'roll-out' of markets, given that markets have their own conditions of existence which can only be met by interventionist means on the part of the state.

That is not to say that Peck and Tickell's account of Thatcherism as a form of roll-back neo-liberalism – concerned with 'assault and retrenchment... deregulation and dismantlement' – does not have a large element of truth to it. The abolition of the metropolitan county councils, widespread departmental budget cuts, some instances of deregulation, the paring back of the range of responsibilities of bodies such as the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and the abolition of some government bodies, such as the National Enterprise Board, altogether certainly were reflective of a roll-back moment within the Thatcher project and, considered in isolation, do paint a picture of a political project whose *modus operandi* is retrenchment and dismantlement. However, this cannot be said to be Thatcherism's defining feature given that there were a range of other, more interventionist, moments within Thatcherism which proved to be much more consequential in the long run. While it is true that an acknowledgement of the interventionist nature of Thatcherism is not new*, Thatcherite interventionism is about more than just the temporary empowerment of the repressive state apparatuses as a means of shepherding-in, in as trouble-free a manner as possible, a free market order and the exigencies of maintaining governing competence. Furthermore, it is only by approaching the problem of Thatcherism from a Foucauldian governmentality

* There is, for example, a degree of overlap between accounts of Thatcherism put forward by the likes of Gamble (1994), who bases his analysis of Thatcherism around the notion of the free economy and the strong state and, to a lesser extent, Bulpitt (1986), who demonstrates a clear understanding of the way in which Thatcherism seeks to make maintaining governing competence easier by divesting the state of a range of responsibilities that encumbered it in the era of the 'Keynesian consensus', and the Foucauldian approach advocated in this thesis.

perspective which is sensitive to the myriad ways in which Thatcherite interventionism manifested itself that we can hope to finally arrive at a sound appreciation of the longer-term historical significance of the Thatcher project.

Thatcherism as Neo-Liberal Governmentality

What defines Thatcherism as a form of neo-liberal governmentality is the broad attempt to re-impose the discipline of the market onto society so as to render it more amenable to good government. Thatcherite governmentality employed a diverse array of means in striving to achieve this end, several of which involved a high degree of governmental interventionism in markets and a recognition on the part of policy-makers that market mechanisms require constant upkeep if they are to perform their regulatory function for society. In what follows the argument is put forward that the most important trends in neo-liberal governmentality in the Thatcher years include privatisation, which functioned as a neo-liberal technology of government for the purposes of regulating citizens using market mechanisms and which, rather than being a simple instance of the 'roll-back' of the state, often required extensive state intervention to achieve this end; marketisation, which served similar purposes, but in what was left of the state sector after Thatcher's privatisations; cultural change and the promotion of new subjectivities, most notably in relation to the creation of an 'enterprise culture'; and depoliticisation, which can be seen as part of a broader effort to deal with a perceived crisis of governability in British society from the mid-1970s onwards.

Privatisation as a Neo-Liberal Technology of Government

In any discussion of the political significance of Thatcherism, one thing that usually figures prominently is the privatisation programme of successive Thatcher

governments. For Peck and Tickell, and for other observers of Thatcherism such as Hall, Jessop and Gamble, Thatcher's privatisation programme represents an instance of the 'rolling-back' of the frontiers of the state. Adopting a Foucauldian governmentality perspective, however, leads us to see it in a different light. Foucault (1980a: 88) argues that critical realist social theories, and especially Marxist social theories, are guilty of an 'economism in the theory of power'. By this, Foucault means a theory of power in which 'power is conceived primarily in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance simultaneously of the relations of production and of a class domination which the development and specific forms of the forces of production have rendered possible'. What is problematic about this, for Foucault, is that these theories take for granted the fact that the directionality of the relationship between capitalism and the state is fixed, and that the latter lies in a dependent relationship to the former, and he wishes to question whether, rather than assuming that the state performs a functional role in relation to capitalism by providing it with a range of ideological and repressive state apparatuses with which to secure its continued existence, as do Marxist social theorists, it might be better to view the economy as lying in a dependent relationship to a particular form of state power.

To relate this to the present discussion of Thatcherism, the salient question is whether Thatcherism as a political project is an adjunct to a particular form of economy, which Jessop and others refer to as 'post-Fordism', or the type of economy that has emerged over the past several decades is really an adjunct to a distinctly Thatcherite political project. If Jessop and Hall would answer that Thatcherism represents a political response – in the form of the 'competition state' or the 'Schumpeterian post-national workfare regime' – to the imperatives of globalisation and a post-Fordist world

economy, then for Foucault it is a form of political power which takes precedence, and it is better to view recent changes in the economic sphere under the rubric neo-liberal governmentality than *vice versa*. In other words, what we have seen over the past several decades is not a process of the state adapting to the imperatives of globalisation, however defined, but rather the gradual expansion of a governmental rationality which employs the market as its primary means of application; not a colonisation of the state by the market, but a colonisation of the market by the state, by means of a political rationality which seeks 'a general regulation of society by the market' (Foucault, 2008: 145). As such, from a Foucauldian perspective, the privatisation drive of successive Thatcher governments has to be seen in its proper context as part of a broader governmental strategy; it represents an attempt to create a particular type of subject, and one who is forced in some instances, and incentivised in others, to preoccupy themselves with the often difficult task of having to successfully negotiate the vagaries of the marketplace in a context of an ever-shrinking sphere of public goods and an ever-expanding sphere of precarious access to the private goods that are essential for survival or, at the very least, a successful existence in post-industrial capitalist society.

If we view the relationship between capitalism and the state in this way, rather than in the way preferred by Gramscian social theorists such as Hall and Jessop, then some of the idiosyncratic aspects of the neo-liberalisation of the state over the past third of a century begin to make sense. The failure of some high-profile privatisations, such as the privatisation of the railways in 1994, with the government subsidy to the privatised railway companies having quintupled to more than £5bn since then, is well known (Hutton, 2011). However, similar failures also characterised some of Thatcher's flagship privatisation policies, such as the reforms to the state earnings related pension scheme

(SERPS) and the expansion of personal pensions. Financial incentives introduced after 1985 for people to opt out of SERPS and take up private personal or occupational pensions cost the national insurance fund £2bn – a sum which almost bankrupted it and which was ultimately paid out of general taxation (Bradshaw, 1992: 96). Likewise, in some instances, the cost of preparing the nationalised industries for privatisation was so high that it negated almost all of the financial benefits of privatisation for the public accounts. This suggests that the primary goal behind privatisation was not to cut back on public spending and to shrink the state, or to stop the ‘crowding-out’ of private sector firms by the public sector, but to broaden the scope of markets as a technology of government.

In a similar vein, it was widely acknowledged prior to the first major round of privatisation under Thatcher beginning in 1984 with the part-privatisation of British Telecom that privatisation would not deliver the promised economic gains for either taxpayers or the consumers of the goods and services of the nationalised industries unless the introduction of competition into these industries formed a major part of the plans for privatisation. As one of the architects of privatisation in the Thatcher years, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Jon Moore (cited in Dunn and Smith, 1990: 37), stated in 1983, ‘The long-term success of the privatisation programme will stand or fall by the extent to which it maximises competition. If competition cannot be achieved, an historic opportunity will have been lost.’ However, in many instances, privatisation went ahead without any effort on the part of state authorities to ensure that the privatised industries would be operating in a context of competitive market forces, which belies the fact that the overriding imperative behind the programme was to ensure that the consumers of the goods and services of these formerly nationalised

industries would, in future, be doing so on the basis of a private market exchange. The simple fact that the privatisation programme of successive Thatcher governments meant the transfer of a range of publicly held assets to the private sector, or to quangos, does not mean that the state is in retreat or that it wants to govern less. This is only the case if the sphere of government is seen to be coterminous with simply 'whatever the state does', which implies a much more limited conception of government than is possible from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective. On the contrary, from this perspective Thatcher's privatisation programme represents merely a transformation in the existing system of government and the enactment of a deliberate political strategy predicated on the utility of markets as a technology of government, which is qualitatively the same as any other, including the more 'statist' governmental strategies preferred by social liberalism.

Furthermore, this is the case without having to mention any of the very directly interventionist measures enacted by state authorities in connection with the privatisation programme of successive Thatcher governments which, the historical record shows, are themselves myriad and substantial. To take one salient example, and looking strictly at the formal privatisation process itself, the privatisation of British Telecom and British Gas, and later on the water and sewerage and electricity industries, required major governmental interventions in the form of the setting-up of a range of regulatory bodies mandated with bringing artificial market forces to bear on the privatised industries, many of which were considered to be monopoly industries. The case of water and sewerage privatisation is illustrative of the broad thrust of these regulatory interventions.

Upon privatisation in 1989 the National Rivers Authority was established and charged with overseeing water quality and safety, while the Office of Water Services (Ofwat) was set-up to deal with the regulation of the specifically 'economic' aspects of water and sewerage privatisation. It was given a mandate of protecting consumer interests, promoting economy and efficiency, and safeguarding the long-term viability of water and sewerage services in England and Wales, and in order to help carry out this mandate it was given powers to: set overall price limits on water and sewerage services, with a view to setting prices at such a level that they be low enough to benefit consumers and incentivise efficiency savings on the part of water and sewerage companies, but also high enough to incentivise long-term investment in water and sewerage infrastructure; establish a range of customer service standards in relation to everything from flood readiness to companies' policies on vulnerable and indebted customers; compare companies' performance against the most important service standards; and enforce compliance with these service standards by means of a range of financial penalties and, in the most severe cases, the withdrawal of licenses (*Water Industry Act 1991*). In light of this diverse array of interventionist measures it is difficult to see how the privatisation programme of successive Thatcher governments can be seen straightforwardly as merely just another instance of the 'roll-back' of the frontiers of the state.

What is more, this kind of interventionism is also evident outside the de-nationalisation of the public utilities in other areas of Thatcherism's privatisation drive, such as in the 'contracting-out' of some formerly publicly-run services. The history of contracting-out in the state sector in the 1980s under Thatcher is not one of public bodies being 'set free' to win better value for money for taxpayers by voluntarily out-sourcing services,

but rather one of central state authorities busily intervening in and remoulding public bodies so that they were forced into contracting-out services regardless of whether they wanted to or not. For example, from 1983 onwards district health authorities were forced into competitive tendering for laundry, domestic and catering services (Wistow, 1992: 109) and in 1988 legislation was introduced which required local authorities to out-source services such as refuse collection, cleaning, school catering, ground maintenance and vehicle repair (HMSO, 1988b). Likewise, the quasi-privatisation of local authority housing entailed extensive government intervention in the form of the introduction of the Right to Buy policy, giving council tenants the option to buy their home at a large discount and the right to a mortgage with their local authority if necessary, and measures to increase the role of housing associations in the provision of housing, with the latter being seen by government as a kind of transitional 'halfway house' between the social housing provided by local authorities and the market-based private rented sector. These measures included such things as the introduction of new legislation preventing local authorities from subsidising local authority rents through local taxes, the shifting of grants for the construction of new social housing from local authorities to housing associations, and changes to the housing benefit system which favoured housing associations over local authorities (*Housing Act 1980*).

One of the key, but often unacknowledged, features of the privatisation programme of successive Thatcher governments was a persistent effort to augment and even, in some cases, create markets which, if they could be made to function efficiently, could help central state authorities achieve certain policy objectives. To continue with the example of housing policy under Thatcher, not only do we see, as outlined above, privatisation in the form of the straightforward sale of council houses under the Right to Buy and a

range of measures designed to bolster the position of housing associations as midwives of a more market-based approach to housing; we also see intervention in the form of new legislation specifically designed to reinvigorate the private rented sector by establishing new types of tenancies – ‘protected shorthold tenancies’ and ‘assured tenancies’ – which gave tenants greater security of tenure and landlords a clearer legal basis for evicting troublesome tenants (*Housing Act 1980*).

Added to this, we also see the setting-up of a fund dedicated to providing private sector landlords, or prospective private sector landlords, with financial help towards the costs of any repairs and renovations necessary to prepare their dwellings for the rental market. These measures, and others like them, served to incentivise private sector rental arrangements over social housing. In a similar vein, we also see around the same time the emergence of a policy of ‘encouraging suitable market conditions’ for the growth of owner-occupation, encompassing action to maintain artificially low interest rates for homeowners repaying a mortgage and tax relief on mortgage interest, the deregulation of the mortgage industry, and the free availability of land through a more flexible planning system (*Housing: The Government’s Proposals White Paper 1987*). Again, given such extensive interventionism on the part of the state, it is difficult to see how all of this could be fitted into a simple narrative of Thatcherism as a form of ‘roll-back’ neo-liberalism.

The Artificial Marketisation of the Public Services as a Neo-Liberal Technology of Government

A similar story can be told in relation to the marketisation of the public services, if we define marketisation as the process of subjecting the institutions of the state to artificial

market forces for the purpose of achieving certain state objectives. Marketisation represents one of the most clearly interventionist components of Thatcherite neo-liberalism given the difficulties inherent in simulating market forces in a context of state-ownership and monopoly provision, and the historical record shows that not only did successive Thatcher governments engage in the marketisation of the public services, but that this marketisation drive was both wide-ranging in scope and meticulous in practice.

One of the defining characteristics of Thatcherism's marketisation drive was an assiduous attempt to introduce a private sector management style into the public sector, partly as a means of making the public sector more efficient and partly as a means of defeating a public sector ethos that was seen to be a bulwark of socialism. As Atkinson (1990: 13) notes,

The civil service was one of the few constants in government during the post-war era, therefore it was seen as a key part of the post-war consensus which Mrs Thatcher wished to overthrow and thus it was held at least partly responsible for Britain's decline. Given these factors it is hardly surprising that reforming the civil service has been high on Mrs Thatcher's list of priorities since 1979.

Thatcherism employed a variety of measures in attempting to reform the public sector along market lines. One of the first major reform efforts was the setting up of the Rayner Scrutinies under Sir Derek Rayner who, rather than being a career politician and civil service insider, had extensive private sector management experience as chairman and chief executive of *Marks & Spencer*. Rayner was charged with promoting efficiency and

eliminating waste in Whitehall departments. An Efficiency Unit was set up which identified £421m worth of efficiencies between 1979 and 1983 after a series of intensive, departmentally-specific 90-day scrutinising exercises (Atkinson, 1990: 14). In a similar vein, and around the same time, the FMI (Financial Management Initiative) was established. FMI was designed to 'give managers more power to manage and to emphasise the importance of management over the senior civil servants' more traditional... role as policy advisers to ministers' (Atkinson, 1990: 14). What is most interesting about this initiative, from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective, is the way in which FMI formed part of a broader drive to entrench a greater cost consciousness on the part of civil servants and ministers, and the devolution of financial management to the lower rungs of the organisational structure, down to middle managers who were re-fashioned into 'budget-holders' and given a range of new financial responsibilities which would guarantee a new ethos in the management of taxpayer money (Atkinson, 1990: 14; see also Marsh and Rhodes, 1992: 37).

Restoring management's 'right to manage' and the decision-making prerogative of public sector managers was another of the key themes of Thatcherism's marketisation drive. The Ibbs report of 1988 acknowledged the specialisation dominating the civil service, and especially its upper rungs, was one of 'policy advice' and insisted that private sector-style management skills were severely lacking. As a result, it recommended splitting-up the policy advice and service delivery functions of the civil service by hiving-off service delivery to independent agencies, while leaving senior civil servants specialising in policy advice attached to their departments (Atkinson, 1990: 16).

In a similar vein, after 1982 the Thatcher government launched an attack on the 'consensus management' style prevalent in the NHS at the time. There was a perception, held by Thatcherite policy-makers, that the extant management system in the NHS was not providing for suitably accountable management of taxpayers' money. It was also believed that the overall style of management in the NHS was too consensus-based. Reforms to the health service in 1974 had set up a management structure in which management responsibilities at the regional, area and district levels were handed over to teams of managers consisting of an administrator, treasurer, nurse and up to three doctors, and for any major decisions to be taken the consent of all parties was required, which meant that that each effectively held a veto on policy (Wistow, 1992: 105). In addition, there was a lack of any line relationships between any of the different tiers of management. Faced with this situation, policy-makers sought to impose a more orthodox system of management based on a private sector model. The centrepiece of these reforms was the drive to establish 'a clearly defined general management function at all levels in the [health] service' (author of the Griffiths Report on the NHS, Roy Griffiths, cited in Wistow, 1992: 105), with a more orthodox, 'principle-agent' management relationship in place between a central Supervisory Board chaired by the Secretary of State, a Management Board within the DHSS chaired by a Chief Executive, and general managers at regional, district and unit levels. However, they also included such things as a new system of annually agreed and monitored performance targets at all levels of the service; the strengthening of hospital medical executive committees 'to increase medical participation in decisions about the use of hospital resources'; and the handing-over of management budgets to clinicians so as to force 'front-line' service providers in the health service to face up to the reality of limited 'resource availability' (Wistow, 1992: 104). What is especially interesting about the latter from a Foucauldian

governmentality perspective is the way in which the devolution of powers – in this instance, the control over budgets for spending on healthcare to GPs – is tied into broader governing strategies at the macropolitical level. It is also worth noting that these reforms to healthcare in the Thatcher era involved ‘management training’ for GPs, so as to equip them with the necessary skills and proclivities to make the most of their new responsibilities as financial managers.

Meanwhile, later on – after 1989 – there was an effort on the part of policy-makers to introduce competition into the NHS through the separation of purchaser and provider functions. The *Working for Patients* White Paper set out plans to allow district health authorities (DHAs) to purchase services from any NHS or independent provider to meet the needs of their resident populations, encouraging provider units to compete for contracts with DHAs. Under the plans, formerly-DHA managed provider units were given the option of becoming NHS trusts, ‘independent of DHA control, free to set their own terms and conditions of service, to borrow capital and to accumulate surpluses for reinvestment’, with the ultimate result being a collection of provider units bearing a much closer resemblance to private healthcare providers than would otherwise be the case (Wistow, 1992: 110). The White Paper also set out plans for a much clearer organisational separation between policy formulation and service delivery in the health service, involving the creation of a National Health Service Management Executive charged primarily with service delivery, with responsibility for the formulation of policy remaining with central state authorities. The goal of these reforms was to distance ministers from ‘detailed operational matters while continuing to control the direction of policy and those responsible for overseeing its execution’ (Wistow, 1992: 109).

One of the necessary preconditions for this large-scale transformation of the management style prevalent in the public sector was an increase in the information-gathering capacity of the peripheral parts of the state machinery. Increasing the information-gathering capacity of the periphery allowed policy-makers to centralise knowledge about what was happening throughout the state machinery while decentralising responsibility for the execution of policies. This meant that, even if on the face of things the state was in decentralising mode in divesting itself of a range of burdensome responsibilities and handing them over to parts of the periphery, it was in centralising mode in equipping itself with greater *oversight* capacity, which it could then use to direct the rest of the state machinery at arm's length. Deficiencies in the information-gathering capacity of the periphery were seen to be partly a matter of organisation and partly a matter of resources, especially in relation to new information and communication technologies. So, beginning in the mid-1980s we see the gradual diffusion of ICTs throughout the peripheral parts of the state machinery. For example, beginning in 1985 there was a major push to ensure that all local social security offices would have ICTs installed by the end of the decade (DHSS, 1985). In a similar vein, the 1989 *Caring for People: Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond* White Paper was explicit about the need for 'an improvement in information gathering systems' throughout the healthcare system, which would require the spread of ICTs throughout all levels of the NHS (DoH, 1989).

With regards organisational change the scope of reform was no less substantial. For example, in 1981 the House of Commons Select Committee on Public Accounts (cited in Wistow, 1992: 104). insisted that accountability in the health service could not be achieved without 'a flow of information about the activities of the district [health

authorities], which will enable the regions, and in turn the DHSS, to monitor performance effectively and to take the necessary action to remedy any serious deficiencies or inefficiencies.' This resulted, among other things, in the implementation of an annual review system, a new package of performance indicators, a range of cost improvement programmes and experiments with private audit (Wistow, 1992: 104). Similarly, the *Education Reform Act* 1988 contained provisions requiring a broad range of schools to furnish central state authorities with more information about how schools were being run so as to facilitate easier oversight by central state authorities (HMSO, 1988a). Meanwhile, much earlier on, during the first Thatcher government, MINNIS (Management Information Systems for Ministers) was established, which was designed to 'provide information for ministers about what was happening in their department' as a means of facilitating a more private sector style of decision-making throughout Whitehall (Atkinson, 1990: 14).

Also early on in the Thatcherite project came one of the most crucial developments in the unfolding of neo-liberal governmentality in British politics: the *Local Government Finance Act* 1982, which led to the creation of the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission was tasked with auditing public bodies so as to ensure that proper arrangements are in place for 'securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in [the] use of resources'. This links in with the broader desire of policy-makers in the Thatcher era to introduce a more private sector management style into the public sector and to bolster the information-gathering capacity of peripheral state agencies, given that the legislation placed a legal obligation on public bodies to furnish the Audit Commission with information on a broad range of performance indicators and to be more meticulous with regards accounting procedures (HMSO, 1982). This can be seen as part of the

spread of an audit culture which took hold in the public sector over the course of the 1980s as a proxy for market pressures and which, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, also formed a major part of the type of neo-liberal governmentality characteristic of the New Labour governments.

The marketisation drive of successive Thatcher governments also encompassed the introduction of artificial market pressures into the education system. The principal means by which this was achieved was through the promotion of 'parental choice' by means of new legislation and changes in policy at the departmental level. The *Education Act* 1980 placed a legal obligation on local education authorities [LEAs] to make arrangements to allow parents to express a preference as to the school to which they wished to send their children and to 'comply with any preference expressed' wherever this was possible. It was thought that parents knew which were the 'good' and which were the 'bad' schools in their local area based on reputation and that

If more parents could send their children to their first choice of 'good' schools, then enrolments would drop at the 'poor' schools and – faced with a threat to their survival – the staff at the poorer schools would make strenuous efforts to improve their performance or, in the last analysis, face closure (McVicar, 1990: 135).

In this way, a crude kind of market mechanism would be harnessed which would allow the best schools to flourish and for the overall quality of education to improve over time. Later on, with the *Education Reform Act* 1988, there was an attempt to bolster this mechanism and to give parents, as well as policy-makers responsible for the disbursement of funds to primary and secondary schools, more information upon which to judge the

merits of schools in this quasi-market (HMSO, 1988). The act required all state schools to furnish central state authorities with an unprecedented amount of information on a range of performance indicators and policies, encompassing what is taught in schools, how it is taught and the 'educational achievement' of pupils (Clarke *et al*, 2007: 31).

Another crucially important consequence of the act was the introduction of the National Curriculum into schools in England and Wales. The National Curriculum required every state school to teach a range of 'core' subjects – namely, mathematics, English and science – a range of 'foundation' subjects – history, geography, technology, music, art, physical education and a foreign language – as well as to provide 'religious education' for all pupils (McVicar, 1990: 137). This represented the formulation of a standardised metric which could be used to compare the performance of schools against one another in the form of league tables.

Cultural Change and the Promotion of New Subjectivities

Another of the ways in which the interventionist nature of Thatcherism as a form of neo-liberal governmentality manifested itself was through its attempts to promote broader cultural change in pursuit of the goal of a general regulation of society by the market. In setting out his theory of power, Foucault argues against what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis' – the idea that power is something which can only be described in negative terms as instances of 'exclusion', 'repression', 'censorship', and 'concealment' – and insists that, in actual fact, power is better thought of as something which *produces*:

power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them (Foucault, 1991: 26).

Among other things, power is productive of subjectivity, and the ways in which subjects conceive of themselves is tied into broader governing strategies at the macro-political level. Thatcherism as a form of neo-liberal governmentality was highly attuned to this reality and the type of cultural change Thatcherism sought to effect was largely predicated on the promotion of a range of new subjectivities which were functional to broader Thatcherite governing strategies. This is reflected in a movement towards the re-articulation of the clients of the welfare state as 'consumers' of public services, with public sector workers playing the role of 'service-providers' in a more market-like setting. It was thought that framing public service provision as just another type of private market exchange would lead to the moulding of subjects that are more demanding, both with respect to the quality of public services (which would tend to push the quality of those services up) and the 'cost' of public services in the form of higher taxes (which would lead to a more 'accountable' electorate).

Much the same was true with regards the attempt to create a 'property-owning democracy', principally by means of the Right to Buy programme and, later on, measures designed to spread share ownership built into the privatisation programme of successive Thatcher governments, including tax incentives for employee share

ownership, Personal Equity Plans, and the undervaluation of shares in the nationalised industries upon privatisation. The goal behind these policies was to give ordinary working people a stake in capitalism so as 'to obtain more involvement, more commitment, and more popular understanding of the process of creating wealth' (Dunn and Smith, 1990: 35). That the spread of an enterprise culture required active state intervention was more or less acknowledged by key figures within Thatcherism, with Nigel Lawson (cited in Dunn and Smith, 1990: 32) publicly stating that

Strong sustainable growth is achieved... by allowing markets to work again and restoring the enterprise culture; by removing unnecessary restrictions and controls and rolling back the frontiers of the state; by reforming trade union law and promoting all forms of capital ownership; and by reforming and reducing taxation.

What Thatcherism was trying to achieve by promoting wider home- and share-ownership was the creation of subjects who were more entrepreneurial in spirit – preoccupied with paying-off a mortgage and with the value of their share portfolios – and, therefore, more easily governable.

This drive to effect broader cultural change also took the education system as a major prize. The *Education Act (No. 2) 1986* contained provisions designed to foster closer connections between schools and business, specifying that school governing boards should seek to appoint members or representatives of the 'local business community'. This can be seen as part of a broader attempt to fashion a new 'educational settlement', in which:

the educational priorities of school and the post-school transition became increasingly geared to the needs of industry, with a resultant blurring of the distinction between 'training' and education. In the belief that there was a central 'mismatch' between the needs of employers and the skills and attitudes possessed by young school leavers, emphasis was placed on the need for the more extensive vocational education of youngsters (Atkinson and Lupton, 1990: 54).

The underlying rationale behind this policy was set out clearly in the 1987 Conservative manifesto:

Parents want schools to provide their children with the knowledge, training and character that will fit them for today's world. They want them to be taught basic educational skills. They want schools that will encourage moral values: honesty, hard work and responsibility. And they should have the right to choose those schools which do these things for their children.

The Training Commission (formerly MSC) launched its Enterprise Scheme in the late-1980s, which promised money to cash-strapped colleges in return for reforms in the direction of vocationalism, personal transferable skills and the enterprise culture. In a similar vein, the Department for Education and Science launched the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative around the same time, aimed at giving young people 'the skills and attitudes they would need for the work place' (McVicar, eds, 1990: 135). Also around this time, City Technology Colleges were introduced, which were exempt from LEA control and which had part of their foundation costs met by private sector 'sponsors' in return for the crafting of education and training courses which more closely aligned with the needs of the local business community (McVicar, 1990: 136).

The rationale behind this policy was later to find fuller expression in New Labour's Education Action Zone (EAZ) policy, discussed in greater depth in chapter three.

Meanwhile, in higher education, this same desire to spread 'entrepreneurialism' was reflected in reforms to the Universities Funding Council which ensured that roughly half of the membership of the body responsible for distributing public funds to higher education institutions came from the private sector, with the *Education Reform Act 1988* specifying that in appointing governors from outside the public sector 'the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of including persons who appear to him to have experience of, and to have shown capacity in, industrial, commercial or financial matters of the practice of any profession' (HMSO, 1988b).

A similar story can be told in the field of social welfare, even though public opposition to major reform of social security in the 1980s meant that the ambitions of some key Thatcherite politicians and policy-makers had to be scaled-back somewhat, and that those workfare-style policies that were introduced were often done so surreptitiously. In a general sense, there was a shift towards placing the responsibility for unemployment more squarely on the shoulders of the unemployed. As Atkinson and Lupton (1990: 53) have noted, 'the problem facing the nation was... redefined: from the economic problem of insufficient jobs to the social problem of poorly skilled or badly motivated unemployed people.' As part of this, the MSC and a range of other government bodies with responsibilities in the area of social security were transformed so that tackling the problem of the 'workshy' became the overriding priority.

An incipient workfarist approach to social welfare was clearly evident in this period. With the failure to find work having been re-articulated as a failure on the part of the unemployed, there were moves towards mandatory training schemes and 'socially useful activity' in return for benefits, and the state's obligations to the unemployed were increasingly being pared-back to the provision of the means of 're-skilling' (McGlone, 1992: 169). The Youth Training Scheme, designed to give young school-leavers a recognised qualification and to 'serve as a bridge between school and work', was introduced in 1983; similar measures included the Job Training Scheme, aimed at improving the job prospects of adult persons unemployed for over 6 months; the Community Programme, designed to provide the long-term unemployed work experience on 'community projects' and the chance to gain a reference to use in future job applications; the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which provided limited funding to the unemployed for the purposes of starting a new business; JobsClubs, designed 'to help the unemployed help themselves back into jobs'; and Restart, a mandatory scheme for all persons in receipt of unemployment benefits for over 12 months, and which aimed to provide help to the long-term unemployed through interviewing and counselling (Conservative party, 1987). In addition, budgets for 'work creation' schemes were cut drastically, especially for the 'undeserving' long-term unemployed (Atkinson and Lupton, 1990: 54).

Meanwhile, there was a concerted effort to deal with the problem of the 'unemployment trap', and in so doing to expand the range of citizens forced to contend with market forces for survival, which took in such measures as a major expansion of in-work benefits and a shift towards the disbursement of benefits in cash rather than in kind (DHSS, 1985). The rationale behind the shift towards cash rather than in-kind benefits was that

it would simultaneously lighten the workload of state agencies involved in the disbursement of in-kind benefits and force the unemployed to maintain the habit of engaging in private market transactions on a regular basis. In addition, there were straightforward cuts to levels of benefits payments and a tightening of eligibility criteria for many benefits, such as the raising of the time limit for suspension from unemployment benefit for leaving a job voluntarily from 6 to 13 weeks (McGlone, 1990: 169). The ultimate goal of all of these reforms, and the reason why they are significant from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective, was the creation of subjects who understood that the cause of their lack of employment was a mixture of a lack of entrepreneurial spirit and a deficiency in the necessary skills and training to form a functional cog in the machine of the market economy.

Depoliticisation as a Response to Governmental Overload

A final way in which the interventionist nature of Thatcherism as a form of neo-liberal governmentality manifested itself was in relation to efforts to depoliticise broad areas of public policy pursuant to the unencumbering of what was seen by Thatcherite policy-makers to be an overloaded state machinery. Depoliticisation can be defined as a governing strategy which involves 'placing at one remove [from the state] the political character of decision-making' as a means of 'shielding the government from the consequences of unpopular policies' (Burnham, 2001: 128), and many of the elements of Thatcherism discussed above can be seen in this light. For example, the privatisation of the public utilities can be seen as an attempt to absolve the state of responsibility for adopting a hard-line stance in negotiations with what were, up to that point, public sector unions and for cuts to public services, increases in the costs of public services (in the form of higher energy or water bills), or simply even a decline in the quality of public

services in general. If the public utilities had not been privatised and the government saw it necessary to, for example, increase energy prices, and if this policy proved unpopular, then the target of any public outcry would have been the government. Post-privatisation, the immediate target of this kind of public outcry is the private company running the service in question, which has been legitimated by the quasi-autonomous public body regulating it, and which has no reason to worry about what might happen at the next general election if unpopular policies are not reversed.

Much the same can be said with regards the policy of transferring ownership of local authority housing to housing associations and other bodies, which was a crucial component of Thatcherite reforms to housing, given that it deprives those who were previously local authority tenants of certain rights associated with renting a local authority property which granted tenants greater security of tenure, and given that it insulates local authorities from certain 'difficult' political decisions. As the 1985 *Housing: The Government's Proposal's* White Paper points out: 'At the local level, short term political factors can override efficient and economic management of housing in the long term, leading to unrealistically low rents and wholly inadequate standards of maintenance' (HMSO, 1987). Privatisation in this instance took these 'short term political factors' out of the equation and made it easier for (quasi-autonomous) government bodies to increase rents. Meanwhile, housing was not the only area in which the use of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations (quangos) proved useful to broader Thatcherite depoliticisation strategies. Despite being elected on a promise to dismantle a vast range of wasteful and inefficient quangos, once in government, and after an initial 'QUANGO cull', Thatcher set about capitalising on their

useful depoliticising function, with quango spending rising from £2.9bn in 1979 to £5.9bn in 1988 (Atkinson, 1990: 19; see also Rhodes, 1992: 69).

However, perhaps the most interesting example of Thatcherism's attempts at depoliticising areas of public policy is the Poll Tax. One of the overriding priorities of the first Thatcher government was dealing with what was seen to be rampant local authority overspending, with local government forming 'the major administrative agency of an expanding welfare state' in the post-war period, with major items of spending including education, housing, personal social services and environmental services (Horton, 1990: 172). Upon taking office in 1979 Thatcher attempted to continue the policy of previous Labour governments of winning reductions in local authority expenditure by 'persuasion', mainly through a combination of consultation, exhortation and cash limits. This resulted in the target set for the 1979-1980 financial year being overspent by some £300m (Horton, 1990: 176). In response, the Thatcher government resorted to more direct means – primarily the introduction of new legislation – to achieve spending cuts. A new Block Grant system was introduced with the *Local Government Finance Act 1982*, which attempted to limit revenue and capital expenditure through a range of targets, thresholds and related penalties (Horton, 1990: 177). However, the legislation was seen to have failed given that many local authorities chose to exceed their targets and thresholds, and simply pay the penalties thereby incurred simply through rises in local taxes – that is, the 'rates'. In response to this, the attention of the Thatcher government turned to rate-capping local authorities, but a mixture of legal opposition and creative accounting ensured that this policy also ran into difficulties.

The ultimate solution to the problem of local authority overspending was seen to lie in building 'accountability' into local authority finances and in 1988 the *Local Government Finance Act 1988* was introduced which replaced domestic rates with a new 'Community Charge'. The Community Charge differed from the domestic rates system in that, whereas the domestic rates were calculated on the basis of the nominal rental value of each property, the new tax was a flat-rate 'charge' payable by all adults aside from a few excluded groups, such as the homeless, long-stay hospital patients and prisoners (Horton, 1990: 178). The basic goal behind the Community Charge was to make a clearer connection in the minds of voters between spending on public services and the 'cost' of this in terms of higher local taxes, as was made clear in the *Reform of Social Security: Programme for Action White Paper* (DHSS, 1985):

The Government remain firmly of the view that action is needed to improve local accountability... [U]nder present arrangements a large number of people have no financial interest in the current level of rates charged or of any proposed increase... The minimum contribution proposed by the Government will be on average a very modest proportion of household income, but it will help to strengthen awareness of local policies and priorities.

It was hoped that, faced with the possibility of an increased Community Charge, local electors would be more hesitant to call for increases in spending on the public services provided by local authorities and, in this way, 'overloaded' local authorities could be gradually unencumbered. Meanwhile, the thinking behind naming this new tax the 'Community Charge' was that doing so would reinforce the notion that local authority services, like services bought and sold by consumers up and down the country in their

daily lives, necessarily come with a 'charge' attached (DoE, 1986). In addition, the tax was purposefully designed to be 'highly perceptible', with every local resident receiving a personalised tax bill, in contrast to the situation under the domestic rates in which many council and private tenants paid rates as an inclusive charge with their rent. As such, these changes can be seen as part of the initial phase of the gradual emergence of the image of the 'citizen-consumer' as a the dominant subjectivity through which citizens came to experience their interaction with public services in the Thatcher years and beyond (notably with the Major government's 'Citizen's Charter' and then New Labour modernisation drive within the public services) (Clarke *et al*, 2007: 29).

Conclusion

What the preceding analysis shows is that Thatcherism as a 'state project' had a dual nature, or two basic modes of operation. On the one hand, it was a political project defined by a distinctly neo-liberal governmental rationality. This meant that it in many ways it lived-up to its own representations of itself as a reprise of classical liberalism, concerned with promoting free markets and removing from the scene of the economy the dead hand of state interventionism. However, it also meant that, in practice, it was a highly *interventionist* political creed in its own right, given the fact that it recognised, implicitly, that the free market order that it sought to institute could not possibly survive – or be brought into being in the first place – without a series of deliberate and persistent interventions in the economy and broader society, and not just in the ways identified by Gamble (1994) to do with the need for a temporarily emboldened state to oversee the dismantling of the post-war settlement and deal with the social unrest consequent upon the imposition of a neo-liberal order. It also required intervention in such diverse areas as: *privatisation*, including measures to mitigate the effects of the

privatisation of monopoly industries such as the utilities and the railways; the *artificial marketisation* of the public services; the redefinition of the role of the state, including the 'depoliticisation' of a range of policy areas as a means of dealing with the problem of 'governmental overload'; and the promotion of a range of new subjectivities that would act as vessels for the transmission of governmental injunctions formulated at the macro-political level, to the micro-political level of everyday life.

However, on the other hand, it is equally clear that Thatcherism had a hegemonic function in the sense that it understood the need to win popular support for its dismantling of the post-war settlement and the neo-liberalisation of society and, as a result, set about creating new nodal points to act as 'surfaces of inscription' for a range of social demands, and also established a series of social antagonisms as part of the creation of a constitutive outside of Thatcherite discourse. In this relation, Thatcherism found success by presenting itself as a new order in a context of generalised disorder, but also one which – as a new, stable 'picture of reality' – resonated with aspects of past hegemonic projects, with notable examples being Thatcher's appropriation of the historical legacy of British imperialism and the affinity between her free market rhetoric and the long-standing social Darwinist and classical liberal currents within British politics. Also of key significance in this relation was the construction of the symptomatic figures of the 'welfare cheat', the 'scrounger' and the Commonwealth immigrant.

Understanding the dual nature of the Thatcherite state project – that is, its functioning as a governmental project, but one which found it necessary to simultaneously engage in hegemonic politics in order to win popular support – is of crucial importance in

overcoming some of the weaknesses in the existing literature on Thatcherism to do with essentialist understandings of economic relations and ideology, and in understanding the historical significance of Thatcherism, but it also provides us with a model for understanding Thatcherism's successors as part of the broader neo-liberal project, in the form of New Labour's 'Third Way' and the current coalition government's Big Society project, as will be shown in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three

New Labour, 'Modernisation' and Neo-Liberal Renewal

Many of the authors who have contributed to the literature on New Labour have identified Blairite discourse on 'modernisation' as a central component of the New Labour project. However, a number of these authors have attempted to minimise the real significance of this kind of discourse, with Hall (2003: 12) framing it as just another piece of New Labour 'spin' – the 'positive gloss' given to New Labour's attempts to carry on Thatcherism's project of dismantling the welfare state, opening-up public services to the private sector and re-commodifying education and healthcare, and with Michael Freedon (1999: 50) arguing that it represents little more than a refashioning of the 'socialist transcendentalism' characteristic of 'old' Labour (albeit one which has less faith in the realisation of historical inevitabilities and less patience with regards the need for the state to actively intervene in the transformation of society).

My aim in this chapter is to set out the argument that 'modernisation' should be taken more seriously than it is in these kinds of conceptualisations and that, rather than viewing it as a mere piece of epiphenomena, or as an updated version of socialist millenarianism, New Labour discourse on modernisation can be seen as straddling the two most important aspects of the New Labour project: it is both a catch-all term for the type of transformation of British society that New Labour sought to effect – that is, it is reflective of a broader transformation in the New Labour years in the direction of an 'advanced liberal' governmental rationality *and* part of the hegemonic offering presented to the electorate by New Labour, which offered the broader neo-liberal governmental project a new means of winning popular support. This argument is set out in the following stages: to begin with, the literature on New Labour which is focused on specifying the 'ideological content' of the project is considered, before moving onto an in-depth analysis of Bevir's superior 'disaggregated' approach to the analysis of New

Labour ideology. After that, attention turns to the existing discourse theoretical approaches to New Labour before the argument is made that an approach which draws specifically on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory allows us to overcome some of the flaws in the existing approaches to the study of New Labour. In doing so, Dyrberg's (2007) discussion of 'orientational metaphors' is used to make sense of the rearticulation of ideological dividing lines and the expansion of a logic of difference in New Labour discourse. In the final section of the chapter this discourse theoretical take on New Labour is supplemented by a Foucauldian reading of trends in systems of neo-liberal governmentality in the New Labour years which focuses on New Labour's attempts to develop new means of exercising more effective 'control at a distance' over peripheral parts of the state apparatus and the networks of inter-organisational collaboration that initially sprang up in response to successive Thatcher governments' privatisation and marketisation drives. The significance of New Labour's 'partnership' arrangements between the central state and various other groups involved in the delivery of public services, as well as the changed role of audit in the public sector, is considered in this relation. In addition, attention is also focused on the development of the range of new subjectivities appropriate to 'roll-out' neo-liberalism that were promoted by New Labour, including the 'citizen-consumer' and the 'life-long learner'.

Specifying the 'Ideological Content' of the New Labour Project

Much of the existing literature on New Labour is characterised by a desire to specify the precise 'ideological content' of the New Labour project. This approach to the study of New Labour is perhaps best exemplified by Driver & Martell (1998). For Driver & Martell, the key explanatory variable in accounting for the transformation of the Labour party of Wilson and Callaghan into New Labour is the way in which Thatcher and Major

transformed the terms of political debate in Britain such that the old style of Labour politics – characterised by an overly-cosy relationship with the trade unions and *dirigisme* in relation to industry – was no longer electorally feasible. By viewing the context within which New Labour emerged in this way, Driver & Martell limit themselves to an analysis of the ideology of New Labour which amounts to little more than specifying, one after another, its ‘core tenets’. This is illustrated in their description of the influence of Thatcherism on the New Labour project:

It is, we believe, evident that New Labour has become more Thatcherite, if that is taken to mean the party is more committed to free trade, flexible labour markets, sound money and the spirit of entrepreneurial capitalism, not to mention greater individual self-help and private initiative in welfare (Driver & Martell, 1998: 2).

For Driver & Martell, New Labour is a form of ‘post-Thatcherism’: Thatcherite in the sense that it has imbibed many of the neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideas that formed the intellectual basis for a range of Thatcherite economic and social policies implemented over the course of the 1980s and early-1990s, as well as many of the axioms that Hall (1979) might consider to be part of the new ‘common sense’ Thatcherism popularised, but *post*-Thatcherite in that New Labour found it electorally expedient to differentiate itself from Thatcherism in the public’s mind, and to give voters a reason to vote for a Labour party dressed-up as the Tories. The latter was to be achieved principally by means of infusing New Labour’s brand of Thatcherism with a heavy dose of communitarianism, influenced by authors such as Amitai Etzioni (1975) and Robert Putnam (2000). As Driver & Martell (1998: 28) note, communitarianism was so useful for New Labour because ‘it combines a critique of post-war social democracy

with a critique of liberalism'. In stressing, on the one hand, the situatedness of individuals in a multiplicity of social networks and the benefits to individuals of this situatedness and, on the other, the personal obligations and responsibilities that individuals take on in return for the benefits of community, Blair and the broader New Labour project set itself in opposition to both Thatcher's seeming disdain for any notion of 'society' and the social good *and* post-war social democracy's supposedly harmful emphasis on the rights of the individual citizen and, as such, allowed New Labour to govern in a Thatcherite way while appearing to be nothing of the sort, and certainly not a simple return to 'old' Labour.

From this perspective, an ideology is merely a collection of ideas that can be said to hold sway among a particular societal grouping at a given moment in time, and hegemony is simply a matter of popularising these ideas. Also from this perspective, ideological change can only be explained in terms of the effects of dominant ideas (such as those that underpinned Thatcherism) on non-dominant ideological formations (such as the Labour party under Kinnock and Smith) over time. Heffernan (2000) reaches a similar set of conclusions, but does so by way of positing the applicability of Kuhn's (1996) concept of 'paradigm shift', which was originally formulated to explain revolutions in thought in the natural sciences, to the social sciences. Whereas for Kuhn (1996: viii), a paradigm is a collection of 'universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners', and which dictate which objects are to be observed by those practitioners, what questions they are to ask about them, and the form in which they are to answer those questions, for Heffernan (2000: 10), a paradigm is 'system of ideas' which provides the ideational

material out of which specific government policies and pieces of legislation are fashioned, and which delimits the scope of the possible within politics at any given time.

Heffernan aims to show in his research that the supposedly dominant social democratic paradigm of the immediate post-war period has ceased to be – this despite the fact that Kerr (2001) has convincingly argued that no such paradigm or ‘consensus’ can be said to have ever really existed – and that the New Labour project of Blair *et al* operates largely within the dominant neo-liberal ideological paradigm established by Thatcherism. Hence his argument that ‘in terms of a spatial model of ideological comparison, Tony Blair stands far closer to Margaret Thatcher than he does, say, to a social democratic revisionist such as Tony Crosland’, and his depiction of New Labour as having simply abandoned a range of ‘old’ Labour policies which do not fit within this new paradigm, such as high rates of progressive taxation and high levels of social spending (Heffernan, 2000: ix).

Vincent (1998) is also concerned with specifying the ideological content of the New Labour project, but he reaches very different conclusions to the ones reached by Driver & Martell and Heffernan. Much of Vincent’s (1998: 53) analysis is dedicated to listing the ‘core tenets’ of New Labour ideology, which he summarises as a belief in the essential compatibility between the free market and variety of traditional socialist objectives, a scepticism of state power, a preference for decentralisation and an overriding emphasis on moral obligations (such as the obligation of those in receipt of out-of-work benefits to seek employment). However, rather than viewing New Labour as the inevitable result of ‘old’ Labour having simply capitulated to neo-liberal ideology, as do Driver & Martell and Heffernan, Vincent is concerned to show that British politics

since the Second World War has been the site of a debate between contending strands of *liberal* thought – mainly ‘classical’ and ‘new’ liberalism – and that, whereas Thatcherism represented the resurgence of classical liberalism, New Labour is a repackaged variant of new liberalism and, specifically, the ‘right-leaning’ trend of new liberal thought associated with figures such as Beveridge and Keynes.

According to Vincent, the ideas associated with key new liberal thinkers such as these have not been discarded; rather they have been re-worked by New Labour into an overarching political strategy capable of winning popular support in changed social and economic circumstances. In Vincent’s (1998: 50) own words, New Labour ‘has not abandoned a commitment to equality, community, freedom and greater democracy, but has tried to reinterpret these values in a different setting.’ For example, Keynes’ advocacy of state-created labour exchanges on the grounds that they were a necessary evil pursuant to the preservation of the labour market as a truly *liberal* institution, and his decided lack of interest in the issues of poverty and redistribution, find an echo in New Labour’s workfarist plans for the welfare state and Peter Mandelson’s ‘intensely relaxed’ attitude towards people becoming filthy rich, respectively. One obvious criticism of this take on New Labour ideology is that it gives up too much to New Labour’s own account of its historical mission, with several key figures within New Labour having justified the project as a simple ‘updating’ of socialism. Blair (1995), for example, set out the basic rationale of New Labour in these terms in a Fabian Society pamphlet in the run-up to the 1997 general election:

Our values do not change. Our commitment to a different vision of society stands intact.
But the ways of achieving that vision must change... Our challenge is not to return to the

1940s but instead to take the values that motivated that government and apply them afresh to our time.

Another, perhaps more substantial criticism of Vincent's argument, is that it is based on an impoverished conceptualisation of ideology, which is a line of argument germane to Bevir's 'interpretive' analysis of New Labour.

Bevir's 'Disaggregated' Approach to the Study of New Labour

Bevir's basic approach to the study of New Labour has already been described in some detail above, but parts of it are worth recapping here. Bevir identifies as the major flaw in the literature on New Labour the fact that many accounts of New Labour are based on 'objectified' conceptualisations of ideology. What Bevir means by this is accounts which conceptualise ideologies in a reified manner as simple collections of ideas or values which are more or less static (occasional debates around peripheral issues notwithstanding), and which form the intellectual foundations for the things governments do, and rival political parties advocate, in terms of policy. Also from this perspective, ideological change is measured in terms of how far a particular ideological configuration strays from a set of defining principles or basic tenets. Bevir targets his criticisms at both the accounts of the kind put forward by Vincent, Heffernan and Driver & Martell – which fail almost entirely to problematise the nature of ideology – as well as accounts of the kind put forward by Freeden (1998), which offer a subtler, but nonetheless still problematic account of New Labour ideology based on viewing New Labour as a highly eclectic 'ideological amalgam' of liberal, conservative and socialist ideas.

Bevir (2005: 56), in opposing such 'objectified' accounts of ideology, puts forward his own 'disaggregated' approach which refuses to ascribe to ideologies any existence independent of the particular beliefs and actions of individuals, and which views ideologies as 'contingent, changing traditions in which no value or debate has a fixed, central or defining place'. In Bevir's (2005: 57) own words:

A disaggregated account of ideology suggests that people inherit ideologies but that they then might modify them in unlimited ways. Ideologies are not constructions that combine static, albeit contested, concepts or debates. They are contingent and changing practices that people produce through utterances and actions. They are inherited beliefs and patterns of action that people apply, modify, and transform for reasons of their own.

Hence, for Bevir, an ideology – as a set of *practices* – is essentially what actors make of it, and the adoption of new ideas or policies on the part of actors which, from an 'objectified' stance, do not fit with the core tenets of the ideology to which they 'belong', does not amount to evidence that the ideology has been 'transformed' into another, entirely incompatible ideology, or that a particular ideological tradition has been 'betrayed'. It follows from this disaggregated model of ideology that, rather than ideologies straightforwardly forming the basis of specific government policies, it is also the case that specific government policies can react dynamically upon ideologies themselves (Bevir, 2005: 58). Also from this perspective, because ideologies are not 'fixed entities of which specific instances partake', it is neither possible to straightforwardly compare one ideology with another in terms of core ideas, nor to locate specific political actors – be they intellectuals, politicians or voters – 'in' an

ideology by comparing their ideas and actions with that ideology's 'core tenets' (Bevir, 2005: 56).

It is on these grounds that Bevir calls for an approach to the study of New Labour which views the latter's emergence as a decidedly *historical* process. Hence, Bevir is concerned to show that New Labour is a response to problems formulated by the New Right, but one which draws on ideological influences that were not part of New Right thinking. So, for example, instead of noting that New Labour is less hostile to free markets than the Labour party of old, and then extrapolating from this that because neo-liberalism is *also* not hostile to free markets, that neo-liberal ideology 'had an effect on' the Labour party to produce New Labour, Bevir favours an approach which problematises the experience of key New Labour figures in the project's formative years. That is, Bevir is concerned with identifying the ideological tradition that represented New Labour's starting point, the specific problems that key figures within New Labour faced at the project's outset, and the discursive material out of which these figures chose to fashion their responses to these problems.

With this being the case, Bevir locates the New Labour project within the broad social democratic tradition, but argues that what distances the project from that tradition is an encounter with the New Right and a process of opening-up to new ideological currents made necessary by this encounter: New Labour represents a response to a series of questions posed by the New Right over the course of the 1980s, but New Labour's essentially social democratic response to these problems is also informed, to a large degree, by the influence of communitarianism and the new institutionalism on key figures within the New Labour project. So, for example, one of the New Right's greatest

achievements was to make hegemonic the idea that the Keynesian welfare state failed to achieve its stated objectives – to deliver high rates of economic growth by means of state management of aggregate demand, to bring an end to capitalist crises, and to achieve ‘social justice’, among other things – and that this failure was an inevitability. However, whereas the New Right posited that the inevitability of the failure of the Keynesian welfare state was due to the fact that state intervention in the economy was *necessarily* pernicious over the long-term due to the deficiencies inherent in ‘planning’, New Labour made sense of the collapse of Keynesianism by drawing on new institutionalist ideas to do with the ‘network society’ in arguing that the Keynesian welfare state had been rendered obsolete by changed economic circumstances – Blair’s fabled ‘new times’ – and that these changed economic circumstances required the inflexible hierarchies of the Keynesian welfare state to morph into the flexible networks advocated by new institutionalists.

Much of Bevir’s analysis is dedicated to detailing the ways in which communitarianism and the new institutionalism served as valuable ideological resources for the New Labour project in these ways. He notes for example that, although both Thatcherism and New Labour were preoccupied with the notion of a growing ‘underclass’ in British society, they put forward wildly divergent explanations of, and solutions to, this problem, and in a way which reflected their disparate ideological influences: whereas for Thatcher the growth of this underclass was a result of widespread welfare dependency among the working classes in major urban areas, for Blair the underclass was viewed in a more sympathetic light and the problem of worklessness was seen as a consequence of a welfare system which *disincentivised* work, rather than as a failing on the part of the workless themselves (Bevir, 2005: 44). Bevir also attributes New

Labour's distinctive response to the problem of failing public services to the influence of communitarianism and the new institutionalism: whereas for Thatcher the notion that the marketisation of the public services could not fail to prove beneficial for the users of public services, as well as taxpayers, was axiomatic, for Blair the problems facing the public services in the 1990s and early-2000s could not be properly dealt with by means of marketisation alone, given that markets can sometimes operate against the public interest, reinforce inequalities, and entrench privilege, and that what was needed was an approach which sought to combine markets, hierarchies and networks in a 'mixed economy' of the public services (Bevir, 2005: 45).

With all of this being the case, the salient question is have we, with Bevir's 'disaggregated' approach, arrived at an entirely satisfactory account of New Labour ideology? The answer to this question is not immediately apparent given, on the one hand, the impressive range of empirical evidence Bevir is able to marshal in setting out his account of New Labour as a historical process, in showing that it is not possible to make sense of New Labour ideology except as a collection of practices, and in detailing the influence of communitarianism, the new institutionalism and a variety of other intellectual currents on the New Labour project from the late-1980s onwards. However, on the other hand, it is clear that in accepting the terms of debate upon which much of the literature on New Labour is based and in focusing almost exclusively on the ideological content of the New Labour project, there are some important aspects of New Labour ideology to which Bevir is blind.

Heffernan (2000: 8) argues in setting out his account of New Labour that 'ideas naturally determine, shape and change political attitudes, values and opinions.' This is a

highly problematic assertion for a number of reasons: firstly, because if Bevir is correct and 'ideologies' are what political actors make of them – that is, if ideologies are reified structures which consist of nothing more than the multiplicity of practices engaged in by the political actors 'belonging' to a particular ideology – then the notion of ideologies 'having an effect' on political attitudes, values and opinions becomes difficult to uphold; secondly, and more importantly, this assertion is problematic because it leaves unexplained any of the precise mechanisms by means of which ideologies are able to prove effective in hegemonising political subjects. Heffernan's stance begs several important questions in this regard. Why is it that ideas 'naturally' have any of the effects Heffernan attributes to them? Furthermore, why is it that in a context of rival visions of the social good, some ideas win out and others prove unappealing and fall by the wayside? Reifying ideology as something that naturally 'has an effect' on the political milieu surely makes it impossible to answer this latter question unless we posit, arbitrarily, that some ideologies simply have greater transformative capacity than others, but in that case we are still left wondering what it is that gives one ideology greater transformative power than any other. Is it simply the case that some ideologies resonate with human nature better than others, or is the success of a particular ideology dependent upon the degree to which it serves to justify a given set of structural economic relations?

Bevir, in setting out his interpretive account of the New Labour project, explicitly argues against the kind of 'objectified' conceptualisations of ideology relied on by authors such as Heffernan. However, it is not clear that Bevir avoids making some of the same mistakes as those authors, at least with regards their failure to problematise the broader political impact of ideologies linked to such projects as New Labour. The reason

why is because whether we view ideologies as ‘objectified’ and unchanging collections of concepts or policy stances, as do Heffernan *et al*, or as contingent, changing collections of practices, as does Bevir, we still have to explain how the component pieces of these ideologies – however defined – come to hegemonise political actors of various kinds. In other words, what we have to account for is – to use Freud’s terminology – the way in which particular ideological elements, and entire ideological formations, become ‘cathected’ for political actors – the way in which a mass of mental or emotional energy is invested by political actors in the component pieces of ideological formations such as New Labour, and which can explain their support for or advocacy of such projects. We must ask, for example, why it is that in mid-1990s Britain the notion of a ‘Third Way’ between old left and New Right found support throughout large parts of the liberal intelligentsia in Britain? Similarly, why was it that at the same time Tony Blair – as mentioned above, the living embodiment of the New Labour project – came to represent in the eyes of many voters a new dawn in British politics and the wholesale ‘modernisation’ of British society?

Bevir’s basic argument is that New Labour represents a response on the part of the Labour party to the New Right, but one which is both essentially social democratic in nature *and* heavily influenced by communitarian and new institutionalist discourses. This is a more sophisticated argument than those put forward in ‘objectivist’ accounts of New Labour ideology, which see New Labour as a straightforward capitulation to the neo-classical economics and neo-conservative social theories of the New Right. However, just like in those objectified accounts, Bevir leaves largely unexplained the reasons why communitarianism and the new institutionalism were taken up by key figures within the New Labour project – with Bevir being content to merely show that

they *were* – and, more importantly, why New Labour’s communitarian and new institutionalist-inspired ‘Third Way’ discourse was able to find widespread popular support. Whereas Heffernan somewhat simplistically posits that New Labour’s neo-liberal economic mind-set ‘had an effect’ on government policy such that, for example, New Labour in government sought to carry on the marketisation of the public services began under Thatcher, Bevir barely does any better in positing, for example, that New Labour’s adoption of social capital theory ‘had an effect’ on New Labour such that ‘community’ became one of the guiding principles of policy-formation for successive New Labour governments. What is missing from Bevir’s work is any account of how ideological elements – however defined or delineated – are able to hegemonise political actors. This is a major flaw, not only because if these ideological elements lacked the ability to hegemonise political actors, a political project such as New Labour would never have been able to build a popular base of support; it is also important because, in the absence of any such ability, key figures within the New Labour project *itself* would never have decided to take on the project in the first place.

As such, what is called for is a discourse theoretical approach to the study of New Labour which is capable of accounting for the hegemonic role of the ideological component pieces of the New Labour project, as well as for the way in which ideologies in general impact upon the broader political milieu within which they operate. That is, an approach which acknowledges that the social world is a discursive construct and which is cognisant of the fact that the discursive structures which make up reality as it is experienced by subjects is not a closed discursive structure, but is rather a contingent discursive structure, lacking any kind of central structuring element, such as the post-Marxist, post-structuralist approach taken by Laclau & Mouffe, set out in the previous

chapter. Adopting this approach is important because, if we view the context in which New Labour emerged as a discursive formation lacking a single structuring element then we can appreciate the role played by the empty signifiers of New Labour discourse – such as the ‘Third Way’, ‘modernisation’ and, earlier on, the ‘Stakeholder Society’ – in their proper context as ‘particularities’ that took on a universal structuring function. However, it is also important because it will allow us to overcome a number of other problems thrown up by the approach Bevir, and other New Labour commentators concerned with the ideological content of the New Labour project, take.

To take one salient example, it will help us to account for the apparently contradictory nature of key elements of the New Labour project. Bevir (2005: 43) correctly notes that the New Labour project is a vast assemblage of diverse ideological elements and that it comprises of everything from vestigial quasi-Keynesian economic policies, which are part of the remnants of ‘old’ Labour, to various communitarianism-inspired policies seeking to bolster the nation’s ‘social capital’, to a series of policies exported from America by Clinton’s ‘New Democrats’. However, he fails to provide an explanation as to why this diverse assemblage of ideological elements – and not some other combination – ever coalesced, and how this collection of ideological elements could be quite so diverse and, at times, downright contradictory. To take one particularly salient example, it is clear that New Labour’s communitarianism sits in a very uneasy relationship with the outright neo-liberal strands of New Labour thought (and despite Bevir not acknowledging that any of these exist, exist they do) – one stresses community, the other individuality; one stresses solidarity, the other competition; one stresses social capital, the other markets. From Laclau & Mouffe’s perspective this kind of contradictoriness in ideological formations, rather than being an inconvenience for the

social theorist, is a necessary feature of hegemonic politics, and is conceived of as nothing more than the inevitable consequence of a political project seeking to bind together a diverse constituency of subject positions in the formation of a hegemonic bloc.

Discourse Theoretical Approaches to New Labour

There are a number of accounts of the New Labour project which demonstrate an appreciation for the importance of the hegemonic dimension of New Labour ideology. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these is put forward by Hall (2003). Hall does not start out from an avowedly discourse theoretical epistemological perspective, but is concerned to understand the role of discursive strategies in accounting for the success of the New Labour project. Hall (2003: 13) sees New Labour as a continuation of the neo-liberal project began by Thatcher, insofar as it has endeavoured to expand the scope of free markets – principally by means of deregulation and attacks on trade unions – and has absolved the state of even more of the ‘wider social goals’ it took on in the early post-war period and which first came under attack in the late-1970s. However, for Hall, New Labour is not a simple reprise of Thatcherism given that the project works to give Thatcherism a new, specifically *social democratic* hegemonic ‘shell’.

Drawing on Gramsci, Hall (2003: 12) argues that New Labour represents the “transformism’ of social democracy into a *particular variant* of free-market neo-liberalism’. Gramsci (1971: 215) used the term ‘transformism’ to describe the way in which the ruling class sought to strengthen its position by means of the gradual co-optation of the elite of subordinate classes – a kind of ‘decapitation’ of hostile groups through the incorporation of their leaders into the mainstream of politics, with all the

attendant benefits and privileges that go along with membership of the 'political class', so as to make it impossible for those groups to construct a rival hegemonic project capable of unseating the existing dominant hegemonic bloc – and Hall very much sees the New Labour project as one which is not only 'elite-led' (in the sense that the impetus for it came not from pressure from party members or the trade unions, but from a small cadre of reformers centred around Blair), but also one in which that elite has been co-opted by the dominant Thatcherite hegemonic bloc.

Hall also points out that New Labour, as a new hegemonic 'shell' for neo-liberalism, was so useful for the Thatcherite project because New Labour's subaltern social democratic component meant that the party was able to retain a measure of support among its 'traditional constituents' in the working and liberal-minded middle classes, as well as those former Thatcher supporters who aligned themselves in principle with the marketisation project of successive Conservative governments throughout the 1980s and early-1990s, but who were eventually soured by the project's 'brutalism', as Hall puts it. This is the basis upon which Hall argues that New Labour's discourse of 'modernisation', and all those other instances of New Labour 'double-speak' – 'social inclusion', 'choice', 'what matters is what works' – are just a matter of 'spin': the inevitable consequence of the party having to square its vestigial social democratic agenda with its newfound advocacy of a free market, essentially neo-liberal one.

Another noteworthy account of New Labour from a Gramscian perspective is provided by Leggett (2004; see also Leggett, 2005a, Leggett, 2009). Leggett argues that one of the major flaws in the existing literature on New Labour is the fact that many authors have failed to take the New Labour project seriously by viewing it as a 'smokescreen' for

either neo-liberalism, as in the case of Callinicos (1999) and Morrisson (2007), or for a more traditional social democratic agenda, as in the case of Driver (2007). In an attempt to overcome this problem, Leggett insists that the New Labour project ought to be taken seriously – that it cannot be reduced to mere duplicitous rhetoric on the part of devious Third Way politicians and ideologues, and that the changed social conditions that are at the centre of the Third Way’s sociology (principally, New Labour’s view of globalisation, discussed in greater detail below), and which are frequently invoked to justify the modernisation of the party, are real structural limitations on political actors (Leggett, 2004: 190). However, in terms of praxis, Leggett is also concerned to show that New Labour’s treatment of this landscape is stymying and could potentially be responded to in a more truly ‘progressive’ manner, which would involve such things as ‘reclaiming’ processes of individualisation from neo-liberalism by valorising discursive articulations of individual freedom which go beyond the freedom to work hard and consume enshrined in neo-liberal doctrine, and by emphasising that the individual can only flourish in the context of a more cohesive and egalitarian society (Leggett, 2004: 196).

Despite their substantial merits, the common problem shared by both of these Gramscian accounts of New Labour, and others in the same vein such as Townshend (2009), Devine and Purdy (2009), Shaw (2007), Goes (2007), Prideaux (2007) and Gilbert (2004), is that even though they, for the most part, avoid positing an essentialism of the totality (that is, asserting the absolute determining effect of economic relations, or of ideology) they amount to what was described above as an ‘essentialism of the elements’. That is to say that they are to varying degrees reliant upon the political analyst making a determination as to which parts of the social world represent a ‘structural limitation’ and which are contingent and non-necessary, despite

the fact that – as was noted above in relation to Jessop’s (2002: 2) analysis of the ‘crisis of Atlantic Fordism’ – crises, or structural limitations in general, only take on the effects ascribed to them by these Gramscian authors when they are successfully *discursively articulated* as such.

Like Hall and Leggett, Norman Fairclough (2000) and Alan Finlayson (2003) are also interested in the role of discursive strategies in accounting for the hegemonic and, by extension, electoral success of New Labour, but go even further than these authors in the direction of a discourse theoretical take on the New Labour project. Fairclough, one of the leading exponents of the critical discourse analysis approach to discourse analysis, argues, in typical discourse theoretical fashion, that ‘All we have are different representations of reality drawing on different discourses... [even if] ‘something’ nevertheless exists separately from these representations’ (Fairclough, 2000: 155). This statement of his basic ontological position places Fairclough in essential harmony with Laclau & Mouffe (2001: 108), whose stance on the discursive nature of the social world is best summarised in the following passage:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought... An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God’, depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.

What is problematic about Fairclough's analysis from the post-structuralist perspective of Laclau and Mouffe, which underpins the present volume, is that Fairclough at times conflates the linguistic and the discursive. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, from a Laclauian perspective, discourses are systems of signifying sequences that encompass the entirety of the social world. What this implies is that:

'every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence; and... any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 107).

This important point seems to be, at times, overlooked by Fairclough, as is evidenced not only in the title of his book (*New Labour, New Language?*), but also in the following passage, and others like it, in which he states that he seeks to write 'a book about politics and government that approaches them through language, as language; or, to use a term that has come into fashion recently, as 'discourse' (Fairclough, 2000: 5). Besides introducing a measure of unnecessary incoherence into his analysis, this conflation of discourse with language also results in certain highly consequential methodological errors, such as his reliance on corpus linguistics software to analyse the public speeches of key figures within New Labour and a variety of New Labour policy documents. The problem with this approach when it comes to trying to understand the functioning of a project like New Labour is two-fold: firstly, it struggles to collate non-linguistic instances of discursive articulation despite the fact that, from the discourse theoretical

perspective of Laclau and Mouffe, the empirical act of, for example, Tony Blair taking lunch at 10 Downing Street with Margaret Thatcher – an act which can in no way be described as purely ‘linguistic’ – holds as much significance as does a formally linguistic statement of support for the Thatcherite project on the part of Blair as expressed, for example, in an election manifesto. Secondly, it fails to acknowledge that it is often the most important signifiers in a discourse which are left unspoken. Consider for example the importance of the symptomal figure of the ‘scrounger’ in Thatcherite discourse, despite the fact that Thatcher never once used the term in public, or the well-known phenomenon of ‘dog-whistle politics’. In the latter, politicians deploy political rhetoric which is ‘coded’ so as to have a relatively innocuous meaning for the electorate at large and another deeper, more politically effective, but also politically divisive meaning for a specific constituency – something which Conservative party politicians were repeatedly accused of by the Labour party and various political commentators in relation to immigration and policies affecting families in the years between the 1997 general election and David Cameron’s rise to Conservative party leader in 2005. Fairclough’s overriding emphasis on what is *said*, and his neglect of that which is politically salient despite being left unspoken, leaves him unable to grapple with these kinds of political phenomena.

A second problem evident in the work of Fairclough relates to his understanding of ideology. For Fairclough (2000: 11), ideology is seen straightforwardly as something which the powerful use in order to maintain or enhance their power. This places Fairclough’s analysis at an even further remove away from the kind of post-structuralist discourse analysis of New Labour advocated in this volume. There are two reasons why this is the case: firstly because, from a discourse theoretical perspective, we do not have

access to the real world except through its construction within extant dominant systems of representation – in which case all knowledge is more or less ideological and represents an ultimately unjustifiable sedimentation of fundamentally undecidable discursive elements. The second reason is because viewing ideology in this way necessarily entails positing a subject outside of discourse capable of instrumentally wielding ideology in order to influence or dominate others. However, this is problematic if we consider that, from a post-structuralist perspective, there are no ‘subjects’ *per se* – only subject *positions*, which are themselves constructed out of discourse and already suffused with myriad power relations, given that the discursive material out of which they are constructed is itself the outcome of past ideological struggles (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 114).

Finally, we also find in Fairclough’s work the same form of objectification – with the same ultimate consequences – also found in the work of Heffernan *et al*, and objected to by Bevir. Consider, for example, the following statement:

the Conservative Party at present (early in 1999) is in some disarray not just because New Labour won a landslide victory in the 1997 general election, but more because New Labour has built a new political discourse that has incorporated elements of the political discourse of Thatcherism, and has thus transformed the field of political discourse (Fairclough, 2000: 21).

This objectification of ‘political discourse’ is very similar in type to that which Heffernan performs in relation to the concept of ‘paradigm-shift’ and, as a result, Fairclough’s

analysis, like Heffernan's, is ultimately unnecessarily fatalistic with regards the potential for change in a post-Thatcher world.

Finlayson (2003) avoids making the same mistakes as Fairclough, most importantly avoiding committing the fundamental ontological error of conflating discourse with language that mars Fairclough's work. As a result his analysis is that much more productive, as is evident from the following passage in which Finlayson describes the series of discursive articulations made in a documentary on Tony Blair produced in 1994:

[The documentary] showed Blair in a style that has become indicative of the overall portrayal of the leader. There he is in the back of a car, the camera, hand-held and shaky, giving a sense of documentary realism, which is important to the aura of authenticity but also familiar to television viewers more used to consuming docu-soap. The whole broadcast intercuts various voxpops (touching all the key demographics – middle-aged women, young black men, thirty-something white guys in suits) talking of how they trust him, like him, think he is genuine. They are 'real' people not other politicians; they are like us and we are like them. We can feel that we are (socially, ethically, politically) close to them, and, perhaps, because of this identification, close to Blair (Finlayson, 2003: 52).

This passage is interesting because it is reflective of a type of political analysis which puts Finlayson very much at odds with Fairclough, despite the fact that the two – at least ostensibly – have similar ontological and epistemological groundings.

Whereas Fairclough's understanding of discourse means that he sees 'the discursive' as coterminous with that which is spoken (for example, in parliament or in campaign speeches by politicians), or written (for example, in party manifestos or government policy documents), Finlayson does not acknowledge any kind of separation between the linguistic and non-linguistic or pragmatic aspects of discourse, and this results in an analysis which is that much more productive, mainly in that it is cognisant of the diversity of ways in which New Labour's symbolic politics manifests itself. Indeed, thanks to Finlayson's more assured application of the concept of discourse he is able to broaden his analysis of New Labour to incorporate what is probably the most important means of communication for political parties in contemporary society, namely television. Without subscribing to this broader understanding of what constitutes the discursive, Finlayson would be blind to the political significance of the way in which the documentary is shot – for example, the fact that the 'documentary realism' style of the piece is meant to convey the fact that Tony Blair 'really means it' when he stresses the need to invest in education to get people off benefits or introduce private-sector methods into the health service in order to reduce waiting times (Finlayson, 2003: 53).

In a similar vein, Finlayson is able to show that the salient feature of the campaign posters the Labour party used in the run-up to the 2001 general election were not, as is often the case with these kinds of posters, the slogan the advertisements were centred around (in this case, 'The Tories Present: ECONOMIC DISASTER II. Coming to a home, hospital, school and business near you' – an obvious sideswipe at the Conservative party's supposed economic incompetence, exemplified by Black Wednesday), but rather the *style* in which the slogan was presented. The poster was a pastiche of a Hollywood movie poster and referenced, among other things, the popular disaster movies of the

late-1990s and the avant-garde gangster movies of the early-1990s and, in so doing, signified not only that the Labour party had a firm grip on its pop culture references, but also that it was able to take a properly post-modern, eclectic approach in relation to the presentation of its political message (Finlayson, 2003: 25). This tendency to try to not only use a particular style in conveying a message, but also to make the style part of the message itself was a recurrent feature of New Labour's political communications leading up to and throughout its time in office and Finlayson is able to shine a light on this tendency thanks to his more holistic understanding of what constitutes discourse.

Nevertheless, despite the substantial merits of Finlayson's analysis, it remains flawed. There are two main reasons why this is the case. In setting out the rationale behind his analysis of New Labour, Finlayson (2003: 9) states that his aims are to specify 'What New Labour's ideas are, where they come from, how they work, how they define interests, and the way in which they relate to, and tell us about, the present political conjuncture.' The first problem with this approach is that it places him, in at least one respect, alongside many of the accounts of New Labour critiqued above which are preoccupied with specifying the 'ideological content' of the New Labour project. By listing as aims a desire to specify 'what New Labour's ideas are' and 'where they come from', Finlayson sets himself up to overlook precisely 'how they work' and, although much of Finlayson's explanation as to the underlying reasons for the efficacy of New Labour discourse is useful, he never really arrives at a singular theory of New Labour discourse that can convincingly account for the success of the New Labour project in hegemonic terms (although, to be fair to Finlayson, he might not necessarily see this as a problem given that he explicitly repudiates any attempt to craft such a theory of New Labour on the part of social theorists) (Finlayson, 2003: 10).

The second problematic aspect of Finlayson's work is that his explanation of how New Labour's ideas 'work' in practice is flawed, given his argument that the ideological content of the New Labour project was largely determined by a rational assessment of the prevailing political milieu, and that the hegemonic and electoral successes of the New Labour project can be attributed to the fact that the New Labour modernisation project put it in tune with this milieu. Finlayson (2003: 8) argues that the success of the New Labour project can be attributed to the party making an accommodation with what it took to be the 'wider presuppositions that give form to our 'political culture'.' It rationally assessed the state of the prevailing political culture – a culture which had been largely shaped by Thatcherism – and calculated that in order to win power it would have to bring Labour party ideology in line with this political culture, and found that Giddens, Etzioni, 'globalisation' and 'modernisation' amounted to the safest passage for this journey due to the fact that drawing on these ideological resources shielded the party from accusations that it had abandoned social democracy and was just another form of 'red in tooth and claw' Thatcherite neo-liberalism.

If Finlayson's analysis represents a major advancement on existing accounts of New Labour, thanks mainly to his assured application of the concept of discourse, he does not go far enough in this direction because although, in properly discourse theoretical fashion, he acknowledges that – to borrow a phrase from Derrida – there is nothing outside of the text, he does not acknowledge that that 'text' is not a closed discursive structure, but is on the contrary one pierced by indeterminacy and contingency. In other words, Finlayson does not apply a properly *post-structuralist* understanding of discourse in his analysis of New Labour discourse and, as a result, blinds himself to the

importance of social antagonism in accounting for the hegemonic successes of the New Labour project. With all of this being the case, what is needed in order to properly account for these successes is an account of New Labour predicated on a properly post-structuralist understanding of New Labour discourse and, by extension, one which is attuned to the importance of social antagonism in winning support for the New Labour project.

Social Antagonism in New Labour Discourse

Adopting a post-structuralist perspective in political analysis leads to an understanding of both discourse and subjectivity which is at odds with most established social scientific theories, including many of those which are avowedly 'ideational' or even discourse theoretical in nature. As was argued in the previous chapter, from a post-structuralist perspective, discursive structures lack any kind of fixed centre that guarantees the coherence of the discursive structure as a whole and, as a result, the collection of meanings that go to make-up any discourse are necessarily incomplete, unfixed and open to contestation. Also from a post-structuralist perspective, the scope of political subjectivity proper is coterminous with little more than the act of identifying with a series of 'subject positions' and, due to the fact that these subject positions are themselves discursive in nature, they are also characterised by a sense of incompleteness and unfixity and are also always open to contestation. What this in turn implies is that, from a post-structuralist perspective, the process of identity-formation necessarily involves the production of a sense of alienation on the part of political subjects. The subject feels that they are a 'self', but because that self is effectively a misrecognition (that is, because it is constructed out of discursive material which is 'out there', so to speak) they are never able to achieve a final suturing of her identity (Laclau

and Mouffe, 2001: 98). The ultimate consequence of this is that political subjects will attempt to purge themselves of this sense of alienation by entering into antagonistic relationships with discursively constructed 'others' who can be articulated, at some level, as the cause of this sense of alienation. In explaining New Labour as a political phenomenon it is, therefore, important to account for how these dynamics of political subjectivity and the process of identity-formation play out in Third Way politics.

One of the defining features of both the journalistic and academic literature on New Labour has been the argument that the New Labour project lacks any real political antagonist. Journalistic coverage of the project tended to stress the way in which the old dividing lines in British politics have come under attack time and again as New Labour jostled with the Conservatives for electoral advantage, with much journalistic ink having been spilled describing the idiosyncratic ways in which Labour and the Conservatives have continued their 'tribalistic' confrontations despite an ever-growing common ground in terms of policy between the two parties (see, for example, Trude, 2008; Joffe, 2005). Meanwhile, academic accounts of the kind put forward by Fairclough (2000: 34) and de Vos (2005: 204) have sought to understand how this dynamic has played out in ideological terms, with the former arguing that, 'The political discourse of New Labour is inclusive and consensual – it tries to include everyone, there are no sharp internal divisions, no 'us' versus 'them', no enemies.' The argument here is that, whereas Thatcher – and, to a lesser extent, Major – generated political capital by constructing a series of enemies of the British people – from the miners to 'irresponsible' trade unionists, Labour party militants and Irish republican terrorists – New Labour's approach to government was a politics without adversary: a 'big tent' approach which denied the very existence of antagonism and which sought to bring

more and more previously excluded elements into the political mainstream. However, despite the fact that this line of argument captures something important about the New Labour project, we should not let New Labour's tendency to disavow some of the old ideological dividing lines in British politics blind us to the fact that New Labour's politics was *not* a politics without adversary, and that New Labour did, in fact, establish several new ideological dividing lines which would prove electorally useful for the project, and which were no different in status – ontologically speaking – than the dividing lines established by Thatcher and Major. The account of New Labour put forward by Dyrberg (2009) is useful in helping us understand that, despite the fact that New Labour, in expanding a logic of difference, pushed the frontiers of the social back, it did not eliminate social antagonism as such.

Dyrberg argues that 'orientational metaphors' play an organising role in relation to the conceptual systems that structure our reality, and that the way in which we experience space – in terms of concepts such as up/down, left/right, close/far, and front/behind – in many cases provides the discursive raw materials for our understanding of what goes on in the social world (Laponce, cited in Dyrberg, 2009: 136). Thanks to certain inescapable biological and physical constants throughout human experience these concepts occupy a privileged place in our mental apparatus and, as a result of their utility in navigating the physical world, they are often metaphorised to help explain social and political phenomena, operating as interpretive grids which organise other, second-order concepts in relation to one another 'at the threshold between, on the one hand, awareness, attention and reflection, and on the other, unawareness, inattention and reflex' (Dyrberg, 2009: 137). According to Dyrberg, the four main orientational metaphors that perform this function are the dyads of 'up/down', 'right/left', 'in/out'

and 'front/back' and his central argument in relation to the New Labour project is that, whereas for much of the early history of industrial society politics largely revolved around a clash between left and right (with the meaning of both left and right changing over time, but never in a manner that threatened the centrality of the left/right metaphor in mainstream political discourse as such), New Labour represents a movement away from left/right and towards a new kind of political discourse structured around a front/back orientational metaphor.

The basic narrative put forward by New Labour in this regard is that we are living through a period of epochal change that we are unable to resist or even direct, and which manifests itself in such things as the emergence of a 'new global economy', fundamental changes to the class structure of industrial societies, de-traditionalisation and individualisation (Dyrberg, 2009: 149; for a more nuanced view see Hay and Smith, 2005 on how New Labour discourse on globalisation would change depending upon the audience being addressed). Furthermore, these social trends – which are treated almost as a force of nature in New Labour discourse – are seen to necessitate a response on the part of the state in terms of simple adaptation to the 'realities' of globalisation (which in the first instance requires a more 'reflexive' approach to policy formation) and on the part of individuals in terms of a willingness to embrace risk and uncertainty. Another consequence of these epochal changes is seen to be the redundancy of left and right as organising principles in mainstream political discourse, given the fact that we now live in a 'post-industrial' society which lacks the class and institutional structure necessary to accommodate a politics of left and right, and given the fact that, from the perspective of the sociological analysis underlying the New Labour project, detraditionalisation and the pervasive scepticism it engenders means that the types of ideologies associated with

leftist social movements of the past are seen as forms of political fundamentalism (Leggett, 2005a: 16). In echoing traditionalist socialist and Marxist ways of conceptualising ideology as mere epiphenomena, what matters for New Labour is 'what works', and although traditional social democratic 'values' can be held onto in the new global economy, this is only if we accept there can be 'no veto on means' in terms of how those values are translated into policy (Dyrberg, 2009: 145).

In New Labour's political discourse, this reorientation around the front/back metaphor is primarily manifested in references to 'the forces of conservatism', which consist mainly of 'old Left' (that is, the 'traditional' social democratic politics of the Labour party in the immediate post-war period) and 'new Right' (that is, Thatcherism) (Leggett, 2005a: 17). These two political forces – 'old Left' and 'new Right' – are seen as two sides of the same coin: although apparently very different to one another, and despite the fact that they were one another's chief antagonist from the late 1970s up until the emergence of New Labour in the early 1990s, they are the same in the sense that they are both rooted in an outdated and inflexible ideology. Furthermore, New Labour counterposes itself to old Left and new Right by framing itself as a modernising force in British politics, with Blair himself – the 'dynamic' young leader – acting as moderniser-in-chief (Dyrberg, 2009: 134; Finlayson, 2003). In this way, New Labour can be seen as having *reconfigured* and *recombined* left and right – reconfigured in the sense that being 'on the left' and being progressive is seen as coterminous with embracing the new reality of globalisation in the specific ways advocated by Blair *et al*, and recombined in the sense that becoming part of this new progressive agenda involves combining elements of what would once have been considered either 'the left' or 'the right', such as social justice *and* free markets (Leggett, 2005a: 17).

Indeed, Randall (2009) has convincingly argued in relation to New Labour's 'temporal politics' that the New Labour project's 'selective recollections' of its recent (and not so recent) past are one of the main factors in accounting for the project's success in hegemonic terms. New Labour's 'memory' (that is, the picture of the past that it presented to the electorate) was highly selective and oversimplified complex historical phenomena for reasons of political advantage. For example, its recollection of industrial relations in the 1970s and 1980s was largely at one with the Thatcherite narrative of out of control trade union 'wreckers', described earlier on in chapter two. New Labour time and again overstated the power of trade unions before Thatcher's trade union reforms in the 1980s and failed to challenge the narrative that 'old' Labour was crippled as a government-in-waiting by the demands of trade union 'special interests'.

Key figures within New Labour were adamant that there would be no 'revisiting the political Passchaendales of the 1960s and 1970s industrial relations trench warfare' (Mandelson, cited in Randall, 2009: 192), with the clear implication being that these reforms were, as Thatcher insisted at the time, both necessary and reasonable. However, as Hay (2010) has shown, it was not at all the case that the Labour party was beholden to trade union special interests or that key events in the history of industrial relations in the 1970s and 1980s such as the Winter of Discontent were caused by recalcitrant trade unions. In actual fact, crisis points such as the Winter of Discontent were for the most part retroactively constituted as such by Conservative politicians, such as Thatcher, and a willing heavily right-leaning Conservative press, and – if anything – the trade unions were in the thrall of Labour governments ready and willing to pass the cost of inflationary pressures – caused mainly by poor economic

management, as well contingent factors such as the OPEC-manufactured oil crises of 1973 and 1979 – onto trade unions in the form of incomes policies.

Just as interesting was what New Labour chose to forget. For example, one major episode in the post-war history of the Labour party that managed to trigger New Labour's very selective amnesia was that other discourse of epochal change espoused by a modernising Labour leader in the post-war period: Wilson's discourse of the 'white heat' of technological revolution. Wilson rarely featured in any of New Labour's evocations of the Labour party's past, with figures such as Blair preferring to pay homage to the likes of Attlee and Bevin who had been effectively 'sanitised' thanks to the cleansing effect of historical distance. This can be attributed to the possibility that New Labour was worried that recollecting Wilson's modernising drive would both remind the public of the Labour party's past failures *and* expose Blair's claims regarding the historical novelty of 'globalisation' and the epochal change it represents as fraudulent (after all, if every era is an era of epochal change, then no era can be an era of epochal change).

The flip-side to this very partial remembering of the Labour party's past was the very selective manner in which New Labour set about constructing its present which, as was noted above, was characterised as a period of almost complete novelty in terms of the transformation of social structures. Furthermore, it was not just that the image of the present New Labour put forward suggested that we were experiencing new things; it was also that the pace of the appearance of 'new things' had increased. The world as seen through New Labour's eyes was one characterised by an accelerated pace of change, first and foremost in the economic and technological spheres, but in a variety of

other spheres as well (Leggett, 2005a: 2). For example, New Labour's positing of a world of hyper-mobile capital, armed with a greater understanding of the potentially hazardous consequences of national economic mismanagement than at any time in the past, made it necessary for states to forego 'unsustainable' monetary and fiscal policies and for individuals to embrace the notion of adapting to the demands of internationally-mobile capital rather than the other way around, hence New Labour's emphasis on 'lifelong learning' (Randall, 2009: 205). In an extension of this way of thinking, this accelerated pace of change in society was also seen to demand faster and more adaptive public services, hence the first Blair government's preoccupation with waiting times in the NHS and a desire to speed up criminal justice, as reflected in policies such as 7 day-a-week courts in high crime areas and police officers marching 'yobs' to cashpoints to mete out fines, running through all three post-1997 Labour governments (Randall, 2009: 205). The name 'New Labour' was intended to act as a signifier of both the outdatedness of left and right *and* the fact that the Labour party under Blair was both cognisant of this accelerated pace of social change and able to keep up with it, implying as it does a fundamental demarcation 'between the party's past and present practice, advertising a caesura in the historical continuity of the party's evolution' (Randall, 2009: 190).

'Fair is Efficient': New Labour and the Logic of Difference

The accounts of New Labour put forward by Dyrberg and Randall overlap to a large extent with the account put forward by Mouffe (2005). According to Mouffe, New Labour presented its 'Third Way' as a 'radical centre' that transcended the left/right ideological divide by arguing that, due to changes in the class structure of advanced industrial societies, 'the majority of people belong to the middle classes [apart from] a

small elite of very rich on one side, and those who are 'excluded' on the other' (Mouffe, 2005: 122). In this relation, John Prescott's famous assertion that 'we're all middle class now' is a paradigmatic example of the manner in which New Labour sought to 'go beyond' left and right as an organising metaphor, but it is not the only indicator of what New Labour's intentions were with regards the reorientation of mainstream political discourse. One of the defining features of the New Labour project was the attempt to reconcile with one another themes and ideas which were previously (that is, prior to Blair's emergence as leader of the party) seen to be incompatible. That is, New Labour sought to expand a logic of difference on the terrain of British politics.

This was manifested in a wide range of policy changes and in a diverse array of ideological transformations. Within New Labour's worldview, there no longer existed any antagonism between low taxes and high quality public services. In fact, the latter presupposed the former because low taxes were crucial in building the 'economic dynamism' that could deliver a higher overall tax take for the government, and because in a context of highly internationally mobile capital higher rates of tax are an invitation for corporations to look elsewhere to do business (Blair and Schroeder, 1999). In a similar vein, there was no longer seen to be any antagonism between, on the one hand, the existence of free markets and economic dynamism and, on the other, social justice, given that New Labour was proposing a 'Third Way in which government works in partnership with business to boost enterprise, education and employability' (Blair, 1998). From this perspective, notions of social justice as encompassing fundamental beliefs in equality and solidarity are almost entirely alien and social justice is instead understood in terms of equipping people with the skills necessary in order to be a functional part of the 'new global economy'. In other words, government's role in

relation to securing social justice became limited to ensuring that citizens do not suffer the injustice of being 'excluded' from the labour market. Likewise, any antagonism between a prosperous free market economy and the existence of the welfare state ceased to exist in the eyes of New Labour thanks to the notion of 'welfare to work', which envisioned a continuing role for the welfare state as guarantor of 'opportunity and security in a changing world', and something which could play a part in boosting the 'employability' of those in receipt of unemployment benefits (Blair, 1994).

Meanwhile, there was no longer seen to be any antagonism between the patriotism that had traditionally been the preserve of the Tory party and the internationalism traditionally associated with the left. Instead of a worldview which defined 'British interests' in opposition to the EU or to trading partners from East Asia and the EU acting through multilateral institutions such as the WTO and IMF, Blair put forward a worldview which posited an almost total coincidence of interests between Britain and the rest of the world thanks to the new reality of 'interdependence' caused by globalisation. Blair's well-known Chicago speech in which he set out his doctrine of 'humanitarian interventionism' is illustrative of this. In that speech, Blair (1999) argued that:

Globalisation has transformed our economies and our working practices. But globalisation is not just economic. It is also a political and security phenomenon. We live in a world where isolationism has ceased to have a reason to exist. By necessity we have to co-operate with each other across nations. Many of our domestic problems are caused on the other side of the world. Financial instability in Asia destroys jobs in Chicago and in my own constituency in County Durham. Poverty in the Caribbean means more drugs

on the streets in Washington and London. Conflict in the Balkans causes more refugees in Germany and here in the US. These problems can only be addressed by international co-operation. We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not. We cannot refuse to participate in global markets if we want to prosper. We cannot ignore new political ideas in other countries if we want to innovate. We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure... We are witnessing the beginnings of a new doctrine of international community. By this I mean the explicit recognition that today more than ever before we are mutually dependent, that national interest is to a significant extent governed by international collaboration.

This reframing of traditional social democratic values for the purposes of broadening the Labour party's popular appeal extended to the deeper underlying antagonism between capitalism and socialism. Blair never publicly disavowed 'socialism' as such, but the meaning of the term in his usage changed so that socialism came to be about 'community', 'cooperation', 'partnership' and a very ill-defined notion of 'solidarity' (which was presumably not the solidarity of workers against bosses, but the solidarity of society to ensure that everyone receives adequate 'life chances') (Blair, 1994).

However, what is most important about this closing down of political space by New Labour for both Dyrberg and Mouffe is that it is destructive of the overall political fabric of advanced industrial societies. For Dyrberg, leaving behind the left/right dyad is so consequential because politics is robbed of its dialogic aspect, in the sense that it makes reasonable disagreement a thing of the past and negates the possibility of meaningful political agency. In Dyrberg's (2009: 134) own words:

The function of right/left is to underpin democracy by accepting opposition and assigning equal political status to conflicting parties. This evokes images of balance, negotiation and public reason as democratic ways of dealing with differences of opinions and interests. None of these functions can be sustained by the other orientational metaphors [such as 'front/back'] whose poles are valorized positive/negative as opposed to the parity between right and left.

Meanwhile, for Mouffe (2005: 114) the most important consequence of New Labour's going beyond left and right is that it effectively made the institutions of liberal democracy in Britain redundant, which in turn has led to 'the growth of other types of collective identities around religious, nationalist or ethnic forms of identification.'

In this relation one could cite as examples: the emergence of ultranationalist or even proto-fascist political parties such as the BNP and (to a lesser extent) UKIP; the growing prominence of 'issue politics' as the UK's version of what is usually referred to as the 'culture wars' in US politics, within which issues such as abortion provide fertile ground for battles between 'pro-choice' and 'pro-life' supporters; the effectiveness of discourse on the 'war on terror' (that is, thanks to New Labour we now know that there is no real antagonism to be found *within* British politics, aside from that between the 'modernisers' on the centre ground of British politics and a handful of recalcitrant 'conservatives' in each of the major political parties, due to the fact that globalisation has already proscribed the 'necessary politics', but there *is* an antagonism between the British people and countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan due to their refusal to join the 'international community' and accept the superiority of liberal democratic political systems); and, especially, the emergence over recent decades of a populist political

discourse which takes as its chief antagonist the political class. The spread of this discourse is primarily reflected in widespread cynicism with politicians and declining voter turnout, but is also manifested in periodic crises, such as the 'sleaze' crisis of the early 1990s and the MPs' expenses scandal of the mid-2000s.

The 'Crisis' of Thatcherism

Both the expansion of a logic of difference by New Labour and New Labour's attempt to go beyond left and right in establishing a series of new ideological dividing lines within British politics (principally the cleavage separating modernisers from the 'forces of conservatism') were intended to overcome what can loosely be described as the crisis of Thatcherism. The picture of reality constructed within British politics by Thatcher from the late 1970s onwards gradually started to unravel as the 1990s approached. This was partly due to the inevitable stresses and strains contingent upon the management of a hegemonic project – that is, the difficulties that flow from implementing policies that are supposed to satisfy a wide range of social demands only to find that, after implementation, they satisfied very few. However, it was also partly thanks to the ineptitude of John Major as Prime Minister or, as Heppell (2007) has argued, the *perception* of ineptitude stemming from the difficulties inherent in the job of managing what was at the time a deeply divided Conservative party. Major's supposed failings as Prime Minister are well known, with the most oft-cited examples in this regard being Major's failure to maintain control over his party in the debates over the Maastricht treaty – which enabled the newly ascendant Labour party under Smith and, subsequently, Blair to frame the Conservatives as divided and, by extension, unfit to rule – and such things as the 'Cones Hotline' saga which made it possible for the Labour

party to portray the Conservatives as tired, useless and out-of-touch, and itself as purposeful and ready to take over the reins of government.

However, the crisis of Thatcherism was not as severe as the crisis of social democracy: Thatcherism's was a slow death, in contrast to social democracy's quick bludgeoning at the hands of Thatcher and friends, helped on by a pliant right-wing media. For a start, there was no 'Winter of Discontent' for Thatcherism, by which is meant an event which is successfully discursively constructed to signify the obsolescence of the established order. The nearest thing to Thatcherism's 'Winter of Discontent' was probably the ERM debacle in 1992, but as damaging as this event was for the Conservative party's carefully constructed reputation for 'economic competence', it did not say as much about the Conservatives at large as the Winter of Discontent was made to say about the post-war consensus, and there is also the fact that, whereas in the case of the Winter of Discontent there was an alternative political project waiting in the wings, in the case of the ERM fiasco the alternative that the Labour party had tentatively constructed in the mid- to late 1980s was in the process of being dismantled. Much the same is true of the Poll Tax in 1990: it was certainly a damaging episode for the Conservative government at the time, in the sense that it seemed in the public mind to be a rare political misstep by Thatcher and illustrative of the fact that her government was becoming increasingly out-of-touch, but at the same time it hardly became the focal point for any kind of meaningful counter-hegemonic strategy.

In the end, what proved fatal for Thatcherism was the accumulated damage of a series of policy failures and scandals, each of which built on the last in piecing together in the public mind an image of the Conservative party as having simply 'lost its way'. The

fundamentals of the Thatcherite project were not rejected outright, or even called seriously into question in mainstream public opinion. On the contrary, the problem was seen to be that the Conservative party had grown tired and wearisome in government – a problem which was compounded by the apparent youthfulness and dynamism of New Labour – and that it was, as a result, ill-equipped to carry on the Thatcher project. This helps explain why New Labour, in many peoples' eyes, bears such a close resemblance to Thatcherism. The fundamentals of Thatcherite discourse were not disturbed and New Labour – instinctively recognising this fact – set about constructing a counter-hegemonic project which would challenge Thatcherism, but on Thatcherism's own terms.

Nevertheless, in the same way that Thatcherism used an 'authoritarian populist' discourse which vilified a range of 'enemies within', along with the spectre of international communism and (to a lesser extent) the European project, to furnish subjects with a new stable picture of reality as a means of overcoming the crisis of social democracy, New Labour used a 'technocratic populist' discourse to overcome the crisis of Thatcherism. As Dyrberg (2007: 56) notes, 'The political communication of New Labour tends... to oscillate between technocratic management and emotional attachment... the rational imperative of 'the necessary politics' and the populist imperative to 'connect with people'.' New Labour's reshaping of political discourse around the front/back orientational metaphor was, in the first instance, a 'no alternative' style of politics. Globalisation was a reality which we simply had to accommodate:

A spectre haunts the world: technological revolution... Over a trillion dollars traded every day in currency markets and with them the fate of nations. Global finance and Communications and Media. Electronic commerce. The Internet. The science of genetics. Every year a new revolution scattering in its wake, security, and ways of living for millions of people. These forces of change driving the future: Don't stop at national boundaries. Don't respect tradition. They wait for no-one and no nation. They are universal (Blair, 1999).

However, New Labour did not neglect the affective dimension of politics and despite the fact that there was no viable alternative to ditching left and right, embracing modernisation was still seen to be an *ethical* imperative. As was argued in the previous chapter, one of the defining features of Thatcherite discourse on national renewal was the way in which Thatcher constructed a world in which the British people – a nation made of ‘special stuff’ – were constantly subject to the gaze of an expectant, but of late disappointed, international community, and in which the only way to satisfy this ego-ideal was to embrace the Thatcher revolution wholeheartedly and disavow the post-war consensus that had made Britain the ‘sick man of Europe’. Blair borrowed heavily from this aspect of Thatcherite discourse, but gave it a unique ‘modernising’ inflection.

In New Labour discourse the route to national renewal is Blair’s ‘Third Way’ which takes elements from, but ultimately leaves behind, Thatcherite market fundamentalism and old Labour’s dogmatism and statism:

Modernisation is not an end in itself. It is for a purpose. Modernisation is not the enemy of justice, but its ally. Progress and justice are the two rocks upon which the New Britain is raised to new heights. Lose either one and we come crashing down until we are just

another average nation, scrabbling around for salvation in the ebbing tide of the 20th Century (Blair, 1997).

A key part of this attempt to link national renewal and modernisation in this way was the redefinition of Britishness. The primary constituency to which New Labour directed its appeal – ‘the British people’ – were articulated as the ‘real modernisers’, with Blair himself merely acting as their voice in politics:

The British don't fear change. We are one of the great innovative peoples. From the Magna Carta to the first Parliament to the industrial revolution to an empire that covered the world; most of the great inventions of modern times with Britain stamped on them: the telephone; the television; the computer; penicillin; the hovercraft; radar. Change is in the blood and bones of the British we are by our nature and tradition innovators, adventurers, pioneers. As our great poet of renewal and recovery, John Milton, put it, we are “A nation not slow or dull, but of quick, ingenious and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point that human capacity can soar to” (Blair, 1997).

Although, paradoxically, while New Labour incessantly espoused the virtues of ‘community’, its failure to establish clear boundaries separating ‘us’ from ‘them’, and its failure to construct any really effective symptomatic figures, meant that community and group identities in general were much stronger in the Thatcher era than in the New Labour era, this kind of technocratic populist discourse did serve as the basis of the hegemonic project which ultimately ensured that Labour would remain in government for the 13 years following the 1997 general election.

New Labour as Neo-Liberal Governmentality

What the above should be taken to mean is that New Labour discourse on modernisation served the purpose of helping New Labour reorient British politics away from a left/right orientational metaphor and towards a front/back orientational metaphor predicated on the notion of an antagonistic struggle between, on the one hand, the 'forces of conservatism', represented by the Conservative party, recidivist elements of the Labour party and a recalcitrant public sector bureaucracy and, on the other, *modernisers*. However, this does not exhaust the significance of modernisation as a key component of the New Labour project. The reason why is because modernisation was also the guiding principle of New Labour's reorganisation of the public sector, as well as the broader neo-liberal governmentality the party embraced in the early-1990s, and which can be seen as an outgrowth of the form of neo-liberal governmentality which took shape over the course of successive Conservative governments in the 1980s and early-1990s. In particular, the argument is made in what follows that, under New Labour, we witnessed: the development of a range of new 'partnership' arrangements, based largely on financial incentives, designed to help the central state exert more effective 'control at a distance' over the networks of state and non-state bodies involved in the delivery of public services that sprung-up in the wake of previous Conservative governments' privatisation and marketisation programmes; in a similar vein, the emergence of a much more sophisticated type of audit designed to allow the central state to exercise more efficient control over peripheral parts of the state apparatus; and widespread efforts to create new kinds of subjects amenable to an 'advanced liberal' style of government, the most notable of which are the 'citizen-consumer' and the 'life-long learner'.

From 'Governance' to 'Governmentality'? Determining the Specificity of New Labour as an Instance of Neo-Liberal Governmentality

Ling (2000) posits a 'double movement' in the scope and nature of government that has taken place over the past forty years, the first part of which involves a shift from government to 'governance' in the late-1970s and the second part of which involves a shift from governance to 'governmentality' approximately a decade later. In this reading, government refers to a form of state power in which representative politicians task public officials with implementing policies designed to tackle pressing social problems, and public officials go about implementing those policies using a state machinery characterised by hierarchy and bureaucratic, inflexible rules (Ling, 2000: 87). Governance, meanwhile, refers to a form of state power which actively solicits the assistance of external organisations in the delivery of government policy, and which is largely preoccupied with managing the complex networks consisting of state, voluntary and private sector bodies that result. This shift towards the prioritisation of 'inter-organizational collaboration' on the part of the state was seen to be necessary in light of the state's failure to deliver on its commitments and avoid problems in the management of civil servants and welfare professionals in a context of low growth and assorted other economic problems, such as spiralling inflation (Ling, 2000: 88). These arguments regarding the shift from a 'rowing' to a 'steering' role for the state are well-rehearsed and mirror the types of arguments put forward by Rosenau (1992) and Rhodes (1997) and Peters and Pierre (2005) in relation to 'governance without government' and Jessop (2002) in relation to 'multi-level governance'. However, what is novel about Ling's argument is his identification of the spread of an incipient 'governmentality' in the early-1990s following the development of a number of problems in systems of governance in the late-1980s.

For Ling, governmentality involves a recognition on the part of the central state that 'inter-organizational collaboration' – in other words, bringing-in voluntary and private sector groups to assist in the delivery of policy – only works well when there is an almost total coincidence of interests between the various parties involved in the delivery of a particular policy and that, when that coincidence of interests is missing, external organisations can often lose sight of policy objectives in the pursuit of their own self-interest. As a response to this problem, governmentality involves the central state undertaking to actively *remould* the subjectivities of those involved in the delivery of policy so that the coincidence of interests that is so important to the success of any given policy initiative comes into being – or, in other words, 'changing the thinking and behaviour of individuals and organizations' so as to create a *de facto* unity of purpose among a diverse array of groups with differing backgrounds, priorities and ambitions (Ling, 2000: 95). It is important to note that, in drawing attention to the shift from government to governance in the late-1970s, and the shift from governance to governmentality in the early-1990s, Ling is not positing the complete supersession of one type of governmental power by another, in successive stages. On the contrary, what is at stake is the growing predominance of one form of power in a context in which all three coexist with one another. However, the salient question is, how well does the typology of state power provided by Ling explain recent transformations in the British state?

It is clear from the previous chapter that this characterisation of the transformation of the British state in the 1980s in terms of a shift from government to governance is, at the very least, something of an underestimation of the scope of Thatcherite governing

strategies, given that the kind of state interventionism Ling identifies as forming the basis of the governmentalisation of the public services in the 1990s was evident in Thatcherism from the very beginning. To take just a couple of examples, Thatcherite reforms to local government finances were *almost entirely* geared towards turning ratepayers exercising democratic rights in the use of public services into 'citizen-consumers' of public services, concerned primarily with 'value for money' and with getting 'something for something' in their 'purchase' of those services, and as early as the 1982 we see the emergence of policies such as the Financial Management Initiative, designed to reinstate the 'right to manage' within the civil service and to instil in civil servants a greater cost consciousness in place of their prior overriding concern with their role as policy advisors to ministers.

Nevertheless, Ling's typology does capture something important about what separates New Labour from Thatcherism. Like Thatcherism, the overriding goal of New Labour is the generalisation of the entrepreneurial form, but unlike Thatcherism, New Labour is cognisant of the need for a much more thorough kind of neo-liberal interventionism if state objectives regarding tackling the interlinked problems of 'democratic overload', incorporating new social movements into the political mainstream, restructuring the work force in line with broader structural economic transformations, and the restoration of the system of incentives that underpins a prosperous capitalism are to be met. New Labour's take on neo-liberal governmentality is both more extensive and intensive in scope than Thatcherism's: *extensive* given the need to ensure the most efficient use of Britain's stock of 'human capital', and to minimise the costs associated with 'inactive' citizens who are either unable or unwilling to participate in the 'knowledge economy', and *intensive* given the failures of Thatcherite 'governance'

strategies (Fergusson, 2000: 206). With this being the case, the typology put forward by Ling to explain transformations in the British state over the past forty years in terms of a gradual transformation of systems of government into 'governance', and then 'governmentality', can be said to be useful in drawing attention to the acceleration of the implementation of forms of neo-liberal governmentality as part of reforms to the public services in the 1990s and, especially, with the election of the first New Labour government, even if many of these neo-liberal technologies of government were first experimented with, and brought into being, in the Thatcher and Major years.

'Partnership' as a Neo-Liberal Technology of Government

Ling (2000) argues that one of the defining characteristics of New Labour's approach to reforming the public services was a major emphasis on 'partnership'. Partnership has formed an increasingly important part of the delivery of public services since the late-1970s, but a new type of partnership arrangement began to proliferate with the election of the first New Labour government in 1997. Whereas in Thatcherite reforms to the public services, partnership typically took the form of a partnership between, for example, local authorities and private sector groups responsible for providing 'outsourced' public services such as refuse collection, cleaning and school catering – a partnership arrangement which, as was noted in the previous chapter, had been mandated by legislation – New Labour opted for an approach which not only sought to bring such private and voluntary sector groups into the fold, but which also sought to remould those groups so that their aspirations and general predispositions coincided more closely with those of state planners.

Ling's analysis of the role of partnership in health policy is illustrative of the form these partnership arrangements often took and the reasons why they were thought to be so useful for central government. In the area of health policy, New Labour oversaw the spread of a range of new partnerships between policy-makers at the centre and a variety of peripheral state agencies, quasi-state agencies, voluntary and private sector groups involved in the delivery of policy, and even public service 'consumers' themselves. Crucially, these linkages of partnership did not just span the distance between policy-makers in central government and the various groups involved in the delivery of policy – there was also a burden placed on these groups to enter into partnerships with *one another*. As Ling (2000: 93) notes, one of New Labour's earliest health policy innovations was to require health authorities to work with various other NHS bodies as well as local authorities to produce health improvement programmes (HIPs) which – as the name suggests – were tasked with improving the health of local populations. However, HIP 'reference groups', consisting of health authorities, NHS bodies and local authorities, as well as any other groups deemed an important part of policy 'delivery' – such as voluntary groups and user groups– were only allowed to do so in ways that were deemed efficacious by central government and were not permitted to stray beyond or reject the priorities set out for them by centrally-imposed regulations (in this case, the *National Priorities Guidance*) (Ling, 2000: 94).

HIP reference groups were required to set out clear 'Vision Statements' which could attest to the essential harmony of interests between central government and HIP 'partners'. Furthermore, funding for voluntary sector groups, as well as any work contracted-out to private sector groups, was made dependent on these groups demonstrating the capacity to be 'good partners', and the criteria used to judge the

suitability of these groups as future partners with central government and each other in the delivery of public services was much more onerous than the criteria used in the Thatcher and Major years (Ling, 2000: 89). Whereas for Thatcher and Major private sector partners were good partners simply by virtue of the fact that they came from the private sector and were, therefore, a model of efficiency for the public sector to emulate, New Labour was only interested in working with partners capable of demonstrating an understanding of, and willingness to embrace, its agenda of modernisation.

What this meant in practice was that these groups were judged according to the following criteria: their ability to put forward a business plan that would likely lead to the goals set out in their mission statement being met; their ability to demonstrate sufficient information-gathering capacity (including having suitable performance indicators in place) to grant state planners at the centre the information they needed in order to be able to exert suitable managerial control over these groups; their 'trustworthiness' as information-gatherers (that is, can they be trusted to provide reliable, accurate information to state planners or are they likely to obfuscate); their willingness to be 'held accountable' in terms of agreeing to achieve specified policy outputs; and their ability to demonstrate that they share the same ethos as state planners, including in relation to important ideas such as 'partnership' and 'joined-up government' (Ling, 2000: 89). Once these groups had been deemed suitable partners and had become part of the governance network involved in the delivery of policy, such mechanisms as performance-related pay and 'intervention in inverse proportion to success' (or, in other words, the threat of takeover or the withdrawal of funds) were used to give partners an incentive to continue to be as congenial as possible and to strive to achieve the policy outputs identified as priorities at the outset (Fergusson,

2000: 215). Meanwhile, groups that were unable to demonstrate the necessary skills to be 'good partners', but who had at least demonstrated a *willingness* to embrace the government's modernising agenda – that is, if the reason for their failure was a simple lack of resources and organisational capacities in relation to, for example, managerial know-how or marketing expertise – were encouraged to apply for government funds to aid in their transformation into good partners (Ling, 2000: 89).

May *et al's* (2005) analysis of New Labour differs from Ling's in that they focus their attention on the various ways in which the New Labour project sought to remodel peripheral state agencies and voluntary sector groups in the area of housing policy and, in particular, in relation to the problem of street homelessness. However, their findings serve to reinforce Ling's argument that the 1990s saw a shift from governance to governmentality in the way in which the public services in Britain function. May *et al* elaborate their argument based on a comparative analysis of the Major government's *Rough Sleeper's Initiative* (RSI) launched in 1990 and the first Blair government's *Housing Action Plan* (HAP). They argue that the RSI has to be understood in the context of the economic restructuring that took place in the Thatcher years and the inadequacies of Thatcherite housing policies, which led to a massive rise in the number of rough sleepers in big cities throughout Britain. The policy was developed only reluctantly in response to growing public concern over the issue of street homelessness and the government's perceived uncaring attitude towards those affected by it, and was – to begin with, at least – afforded very little in the way of funding from central government, with the initial budget being only £15 million (May *et al*, 2005: 713). The main objective of the initiative was containment and this was to be achieved principally by means of the provision of emergency accommodation for homeless people, with

resources being concentrated heavily in the London area. Crucially, these resources were channelled not through local authorities, but through various non-statutory organisations, and were allocated on the basis of *Compulsory Competitive Tendering* (CCT). The overriding concern of CCT was with 'value for money' and it was only at a much later stage – once the failure of containment strategies had become apparent – that other concerns, such as the ability of partners to engage in 'joint-working' with other agencies, came to the fore. However, this growing concern with the *effectiveness* of non-statutory bodies in dealing with the problem of 'rough sleepers', and with placing more onerous conditions on the receipt of public funds for such bodies, represented only the minor component of the Major government's response to the initial failure of the RSI, with the major component being a renewed focus on coercion and the use of the Vagrancy Acts to forcibly displace the homeless from 'problem areas' (May *et al*, 2005: 714).

New Labour's approach to the problem of street homelessness was very different. The first Blair government's HAP was introduced in 1999 as the replacement to the outgoing Conservative government's RSI and was, from the outset, much better funded (with a budget of some £134 million) and more geographically dispersed, covering some 113 towns and cities throughout Britain (May *et al*, 2005: 715). More importantly, the conditionality in place for funding under the HAP was much more onerous than the conditionality attached to RSI funds. The Conservatives' CCT was replaced with the new *Best Value* system which, despite still having a concern with 'value for money', was much less focused on costs and much more concerned with the *modes* of service delivery. Voluntary sector groups were required – often by contract – to, among other things, demonstrate a willingness to work in partnership with both central government

and other voluntary sector groups as part of various HAP consortia (the jargon used to describe the desired approach was 'active partnership'), and to provide evidence of their ability to set-up and maintain suitable out-reach and resettlement plans for homeless people in receipt of HAP assistance, with the goal being to ensure that the HAP was better able than the RSI to ensure that the homeless – once displaced from homelessness 'black spots' – would not return. Furthermore, these groups were also required to show that they had suitable information-gathering mechanisms in place so that they could be properly monitored by state planners, and agree to meet specified performance targets in relation to reductions in levels of rough sleeping in their local areas (May *et al*, 2005: 716). Meanwhile, in an attempt to exact greater commitment from voluntary sector groups, many of the top jobs in the administration of the HAP from central government were given to key personnel from within the voluntary sector, and the massive increase in spending on dealing with the problem of street homelessness served to give groups in receipt of government funds – or even *potentially* in receipt of government funds at some future date – a greater incentive to transform into the types of partners New Labour wanted to work with.

The Changed Role of Audit in the Public Services

The 'partnership' arrangements identified by Ling (2000) and May *et al* (2005) were instrumental in allowing New Labour to exert greater control over peripheral state agencies and – in particular – voluntary and private sector bodies involved in the delivery of policy, but – as the example of the HAP brings to light – these strategies, and other similar ones predicated on state planners, in the first instance, monitoring the behaviour of partner organisations and, in the second, guiding them in the desired direction through the use of performance targets and contractually agreed policy

outputs, could not have functioned without suitable means of audit being in place. To a large extent, the changed role of audit in the public services under New Labour is reflective of the broader transformation from governance to governmentality, identified by Ling, and the emergence of a much more interventionist neo-liberal state project in the mid- to late-1990s.

It was argued in the previous chapter that the spread of an audit culture in the public services began in the Thatcher years and as early as the first Thatcher administration, with the creation of the Audit Commission in 1983. However, as John Clarke *et al* (2000) have noted, the size and – more importantly – *scope* of bodies such as the Audit Commission had changed a great deal by the end of the century and their numbers had multiplied. In the 1980s, policy-makers saw audit as little more than ‘a process of financial accounting in relation to the provision of public services, ensuring standards of probity and fiduciary responsibility in the use of public money’ (Clarke *et al*, 2000: 251). At this early stage, the goal was to use audit, as one among several private sector imports, to help rein in wasteful public spending and deal with the supposed ‘fiscal crisis of the state’. The assumed coincidence of interest between the public and ‘public servants’ in the state sector was prised apart, largely on the basis of neo-classical economic theories which constructed government officials as rational utility-maximisers whose interests most often lay in expanding their bureaucratic empires at taxpayers’ expense (du Gay cited in Clarke *et al*, 2000: 252). However, by the 1990s, the range of responsibilities groups involved in the audit of public services were encumbered with had expanded significantly.

This was an almost inevitable response to problems associated with the fundamental changes in the nature of the relationship between central government and the various groups newly engaged in the delivery of public policy, engineered in the Thatcher years. The 'dispersed' nature of the new arrangements for the delivery of public policy and – at the same time – the pressing need for the centre to maintain control over the dispersed parts of the state apparatus made it necessary for the centre to develop new ways of gathering information about what was happening at the periphery. Audit promised to be very useful in this regard, for a number of reasons. Firstly, because it ensured that flows of information would travel from the 'front line' of policy delivery directly back to the centre, without the possibility of it being distorted by self-serving bureaucrats, and secondly because systems of audit could lay claim to an 'independent' status that would guarantee their legitimacy as a means of reforming failing public services in the eyes of the public. This is because auditing bodies can draw on the authority that comes with *professional* independence based on a distinctive knowledge base and culture, *technical* independence based on possession of a set of technical skills thought to produce unbiased and impartial analysis and *organisational* independence based on an institutional separation between auditors and the bodies they audit (Clarke *et al*, 2000: 253).

Under New Labour, the role of auditors in the public sector changed dramatically. There was a general movement away from simple financial audit and towards a broader conception of audit which, although it retained a concern with adherence to correct accounting procedures and the like, was more heavily focused on evaluation and improvement of organisational performance. In reviewing the performance of statutory and non-statutory bodies involved in the delivery of public services, auditors took the

model of the small or medium sized private sector enterprise as a lodestar for reform. Hence, the professional judgements of policy experts as to what 'best practice' in the delivery of public services consisted of was subjugated to auditors' overriding concern with the public sector emulating private sector practices (Clarke *et al*, 2000: 258). Increasingly, such things as the precise organisational form of public sector bodies, the prevailing culture within these bodies, the style of management, and even specific policies themselves came under the purview of auditors, with auditors taking on the role of proposing reforms, bringing to light instances of 'best practice' and setting targets for bodies involved in the delivery of public services.

As part of this shift, there was a concerted effort to turn bodies involved in the delivery of public services into 'auditable organisations'. The prior overriding concern with the inputs into the policy-making process was supplanted by a new overriding concern with outputs. As Clarke *et al* (2000: 255) note, a recurrent criticism of public services in the pre-Thatcher era was that they were largely unaccountable to the public and that policy-makers were overly concerned with inputs into the policy-making process in terms of, for example, representations from business and trade unions, and not concerned enough with the outcomes of policy. In the Thatcher years there was a shift towards greater concern with 'the effects produced by the organization's activities'. Furthermore, these bodies came to divert an increasing amount of resources away from *doing* things and towards 'second order functions', such as accounting for what they do and marketing themselves, so that they appear in the most favourable light possible to auditors and, in turn, state planners (Clarke *et al*, 2000: 256). An important adjunct to this process of turning bodies involved in the delivery of public services into auditable organisations was the development of ways of comparing the performance of these

bodies according to criteria put forward by auditors (Clarke *et al*, 2000: 257). This represented a shift from 'compliance' in the late-1970s and early-1980s to *competition* in the public services from the late-1980s onwards. In line with the valorisation of small- and medium-sized business enterprises mentioned above, the idea behind the policy was that increased competition would necessarily deliver better performance on the part of the public services.

This transformation in the role of auditors in the public services, as well as the way in which new types of audit centred around performance evaluation meshed with the other component pieces of New Labour's governmental project, such as 'partnership', is well illustrated by the case of Education Action Zones (EAZs). The EAZ policy was introduced in 1998 with the express intention of bringing together school governors, parents, businesses and community groups in an effort to raise school standards, cut truancy, improve discipline in schools and boost staying-on rates, especially in poorer areas (Gewirtz, 2000: 145). 'Partnership' was a key theme of the EAZ policy, but it is not the case that EAZs were created in order to address some kind of 'partnership deficit' in education, given the fact that central government, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and teachers unions had worked in close collaboration with one another in the delivery of education long before the arrival of EAZs. Rather, they were created in order to promote a certain *kind* of partnership, and one which was not beholden to 'vested interests' in the educational establishment. As such, LEAs and teachers unions were marginalised in the setting-up of EAZs and in their place came a variety of voluntary sector and private sector groups, with each EAZ being required to raise one quarter of their £1 million budget from the latter (Jones & Bird, 2001: 493; Dickson & Power, 2001: 138). The thinking behind this was that, by directly exposing education providers

to private sector groups in the running of EAZs, the efficiency and innovatory potential of those private sector groups would serve as a model for the future activities of educators in the public sector. Furthermore, there was a major emphasis in the EAZ policy on these partners linking-up with groups of partners in other areas of policy – for example, Health Action Zones and New Deal for Communities groupings – as part of New Labour’s plans for ‘joined-up government’, a policy developed in recognition of the interdependent nature of social problems and the need for a concerted response on the part of policy-makers in order to guarantee success in tackling them (Dickson & Power, 2001: 137).

In order to win EAZ status, partners were required to submit to a process of competitive tendering. One of the key criteria upon which bids were to be adjudicated was the willingness of prospective EAZs to put forwards commitments to achieve specified targets in relation to numeracy and literacy standards, SATs and GCSE results, and attendance and exclusion rates (Gamarnikow & Green, 1999: 13). Furthermore, with innovation being a central aim of the EAZ policy from the outset, EAZs were granted a range of new freedoms that were not available to schools under LEA control. However, only those prospective EAZs which promised to use that freedom in certain highly prescribed ways were granted EAZ status. EAZs were allowed to opt-out of national agreements on teachers’ pay and conditions, but were expected to use this new-found freedom to increase pay differentials among teachers within the zone (in other words, to move further towards performance-related pay) and to attract ‘super heads’ and ‘super teachers’, as well as to make greater use of new types of education providers altogether, such as key skills ‘consultants’ on short-term contracts. Likewise, EAZs were given scope to diverge from the National Curriculum, but only those prospective EAZs

which stated their intention to use these new powers to focus their attention on literacy and numeracy standards and 'additional opportunities for work-related learning' – that is, the 'employability' of their students – had their bids looked upon favourably (Gamarnikow & Green, 1999: 12).

Meanwhile, the role of LEAs in the preparation of EAZ bids and in potentially running EAZs down the line was downplayed in the tendering process – despite the fact that in many zones LEAs played a leading role – due to the fact that they were thought to be incapable of being 'good partners' in the delivery of such a radical education policy. Meanwhile, bids that could cite some kind of private sector involvement were given special preference, even though in many cases private sector groups proved unwilling to participate in EAZs in any meaningful way. Indeed, many prospective EAZs resorted to, if not outright lying, then at least some very creative accounting in relation to the role of business in their future plans for their zones. The practice of listing 'in kind' support from business as part of the £250,000 contribution EAZs were required to source from the private sector was widespread, with one EAZ even going as far as to classify the attendance of business representatives on EAZ management committees as 'consultancy services' worth some £80,000 annually, and another deciding that a discount at a local museum amounted to a £14,000 contribution from the private sector (Hallgarten & Watling, 2001: 148).

The role of auditors in relation to EAZs was an important one. Basic financial audit was carried out by the National Audit Office, but the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) was responsible for carrying out a much more comprehensive type of audit. OfSTED's express aims in relation to EAZs were to 'identify the extent to which [EAZs]

have contributed to the improvement in the performance of schools serving disadvantaged areas', 'to evaluate how specific activities within [EAZs] have improved targeted pupils' achievement', and 'to identify the features of successful management' of EAZs at the level of both the schools that were part of EAZs and the Action Forums that ran EAZs themselves (OfSTED, 2003: 2).

These aims were to be achieved by means of a combination of analysis of a range of standardised performance indicators – most notably, examination data – and a rigorous inspection regime that encompassed not only standard OfSTED school inspections ('specially enhanced' to take account of the impact of EAZs), but also regular inspection of EAZs themselves. Crucially, in carrying out their inspections, OfSTED was not only interested in monitoring performance against targets established at the setting-up of EAZs, but also with the actual *means* by which these targets could be met, with EAZs being assessed in terms of, among other things: their ability to plan effectively (including setting ambitious, but also achievable, targets); the quality of 'systems of monitoring and evaluation', especially for the purposes of *self*-evaluation; the effectiveness of partnership arrangements (and especially partnerships with business); the ability of zone Action Forums to disseminate best practice; the quality of zone management; value for money (including the issue of whether or not money was spent on the right things); and the prevailing *culture* within schools (in other words, the extent to which educators were able to demonstrate their dedication, ambition, capacity for innovation, and self-reflexivity) (OfSTED, 2003: 14). As Gewirtz *et al* (2004: 322) note, this culture of incessant 'performance review' by outside bodies led schools to become experts in the art of 'spin', as they sought to impress on auditors their success in

adapting to the reforms imposed by central government as a means of safeguarding future funding opportunities.

One of the most interesting features of the EAZ policy as an instance of the extension of neo-liberal governmental power relates to the notion of 'social capital'. A prevalent theme in the literature on EAZs published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), as well as prospective EAZs' bids for EAZ status, was a 'deficit model of parenting' (Simpson & Cieslik, 2002: 126). There was a widespread consensus among educators on the frontline of policy 'delivery' and those in central government responsible for formulating education policy, that poor parenting was a key factor in explaining educational underachievement, especially in deprived areas. Parents were invariably articulated as lacking in ambition for their children, hostile to educators, unwilling to participate in schools' efforts to improve educational attainment, and lacking in basic skills in areas such as literacy and numeracy (Simpson & Cieslik, 2002: 122). These constructions of parents unfolded in a context of a generalised 'crisis of parenting' and a moral panic around so-called 'problem families' – linked to the issues of single parenting and welfare dependency – and was symptomatic of a broader trend within the New Labour project to expand the reach of neo-liberal technologies of government by means of the manufacturing of a series of crises deemed to require purposeful intervention on the part of policy-makers (see Foucault, 1991).

This 'crisis of parenting' was considered to be an especially pressing problem in relation to education due to the fact that the generation of social capital – which, for New Labour, was crucial in improving educational attainment and explained the relative success of middle class families in getting the most out of state schools – was seen to be

largely contingent upon greater parental involvement in their children's education.

Gamarnikow & Green (1999: 8) outline this view neatly:

social capital is developed in the family through involved and supportive parenting which functions as investment in children and contributes to their educational achievement or human capital. If social capital is not generationally renewed in the family and education[,] social stability and cohesion are undermined.

In response, EAZs sought to turn parents into 'good consumers of education services, with positive attitudes towards schools and education, and to engage them actively in children's and community learning', in the words of Newham's successful EAZ bid (cited in Gamarnikow & Green, 1999: 3). In practical terms, the principal means by which this was achieved was the setting-up of 'action partnerships' which staged workshops for parents at regular intervals throughout the year, and which were designed to provide parents with the information and advice they needed – including advice on how to demand – and get – more from their dealings with school staff – in order to be able to properly play the role of 'co-educators' (Simpson & Cieslik, 2002: 122). This was all discursively framed in terms of 'empowering' parents and communities, and was regarded in the official literature as an instance of 'bottom-up' policy-making (Simpson & Cieslik, 2002: 120).

Fergusson's (2000) analysis of New Labour education policy shows that the EAZ policy was a microcosm of the type of changes New Labour sought to implement in the sphere of education more broadly. Like Thatcherism before it, there was a general trend within the New Labour project to seek to devolve powers to people and bodies closer to the

'front line' of educational provision, and both Thatcherism and New Labour employed a model of self-managing schools, with head teachers being granted greater autonomy in a range of areas, including direct control over budgets and the final say in relation to staff recruitment. However, within this broad model New Labour's approach was much more interventionist and managerialist (Fergusson, 2000: 208). Thatcherism's preference was for a mixture of financial audit and the generation of 'comparative information' (that is, information that could be used to help compare the performance of different institutions of the same kind according to a standardised metric); New Labour, meanwhile, was more much interested in evaluation (based on its own, partial criteria, largely geared towards determining the willingness of organisations to embrace New Labour's 'partnership' ideal and demonstrate the capacity for self-reflexivity and 'social entrepreneurship') and implementing new ways of improving performance. This manifested itself in, among other things, a concern with increasing the information-gathering capacity of educational institutions and the implementation of various means of modifying the behaviour of educators.

The Creation of Good Neo-Liberal Citizens in New Labour Discourse

The parts of the shift towards a specifically Blairite version of neo-liberal governmentality described above are focused mainly on New Labour's attempt to change the organisational structure and management culture prevalent in peripheral state agencies and various types of voluntary and private sector groups involved in the delivery of policy. However, the efforts to remould the subjectivities of students, teachers and, in particular, parents as part of the EAZ policy described above is indicative of a broader trend within the New Labour project aimed at remoulding individual subjectivities so that the functioning of governmental power becomes

automatic and, by extension, society becomes more easily governable. Finlayson's (2007) analysis of New Labour's Child Trust Fund (CTF) illustrates well how this dynamic plays out in practice in relation to marginalised (or in New Labour parlance, 'socially excluded') sections of the population.

Finlayson describes the CTF as an instance of 'asset-based welfare' on the grounds that it represented a move away from the traditional model of welfare based on direct cash payments to citizens designed to alleviate pressing social problems and towards a model which more closely resembled the structure of middle class privilege. The policy involved issuing vouchers to the parents of all new-born children, which were to be 'topped-up' at the ages of seven and 11, and which would be accessible to the child at the age of 18. The policy also allowed parents to 'top-up' these vouchers themselves by means of a special tax-free savings account (Finlayson, 2007: 95). The point of the CTF was to 'redress the imbalance of wealth at birth by providing a 'nest-egg' that individuals can spend on vital resources such as training, education and property' when they reach adulthood (Finlayson, 2007: 95). In this way – and in an echo of John Prescott's above-mentioned aphorism, 'we're all middle class now' – the monopolisation of opportunity by the middle classes could be broken up and extended to the whole of society. Furthermore, and most importantly from the perspective of New Labour, the CTF can be considered to have been a 'progressive' form of welfare given the fact that it provided a higher initial and supplementary payment to children with parents on a low income (Gregory and Drakeford, 2006: 150).

The policy started out as a response to problems that had preoccupied social democrats for generations – such as the problem of the over-concentration of wealth, the problem

of inequality of opportunity, and the loss of legitimacy by social democracy – and drew from a diverse array of intellectual currents, from American, Jeffersonian liberalism to British socialist concerns with the importance of ‘stakeholding’ (Finlayson, 2007: 98). However, at the hands of New Labour it morphed into a technology of government – linked to the broader neo-liberal governmental project – which aimed to change the habits of the socially excluded. A lack of ‘financial literacy’ on the part of the socially excluded was identified as a major social problem and one of the principal reasons for their recurrent failure to integrate themselves into mainstream society, and was discursively articulated with moral panics focused on the ‘runaway benefits bill’, intergenerational fecklessness and anti-social behaviour (Marron, 2013).

With this being the case, we can say that the CTF policy had a number of aims. Firstly, it was designed to bolster the financial skills of the socially excluded, to increase ‘awareness’ of the importance of finance on the part of the socially excluded, and to integrate the socially excluded into the economic structures of mainstream society by setting them up with a bank account virtually at birth (Finlayson, 2007: 98; Gregory and Drakeford, 2006: 150). Secondly, it was designed to equip those in receipt of CTF support with everything they need in order to succeed in the ‘knowledge economy’. In other words, by providing the socially excluded with a ‘nest egg’ with which to navigate their way into adulthood, they were expected to become both more willing to take risks (with the ‘nest egg’ forming a safety net) and more able to plan for the future (that is, to change their outlook and general disposition so that they become more ‘future-oriented’) (Finlayson, 2007: 98).

Interestingly, this aim of the CTF would seem to be at odds with other New Labour policies, such as increases in tuition fees in higher education. However, this can be explained by reference to the fact that the goal of New Labour was not to make access to higher education more difficult (that is, by the introduction of fees), but to turn accessing higher education into a conscious *choice* for young people, and to reinforce for them the message that this will be a choice they will have to make time and again throughout their lives as part of investment in their own stock of human capital. As Finlayson (2007: 106) notes, 'In the new knowledge economy, it is believed, wealth resides in individual people, in their talents, skills and potential, and is unleashed via their multiple acts of entrepreneurialism.' It is these 'acts of entrepreneurialism' that the CTF is designed to make seem less daunting and more manageable for individuals.

Thirdly, the CTF was designed to encourage a greater sense of social responsibility and community-belonging on the part of the socially excluded by giving them a tangible stake in society (Finlayson, 2007: 101). Achieving these aims – to improve the financial literacy of the socially excluded, to make the socially excluded less risk-averse, and to encourage higher levels of community engagement on the part of socially excluded families – was seen by New Labour as a matter of achieving an 'asset-effect', on the assumption that 'having an asset will lead to positive welfare outcomes for individuals and their families (Paxton, cited in Gregory and Drakeford, 2006: 151). As such, the CTF can be seen as an outgrowth of Thatcherism's *Right to Buy*, which – as was noted above – was designed to turn those living in social housing into 'responsible', independent property-owners.

In a similar vein, Olssen (2006) has shown that the subject position of the 'lifelong learner' occupies a central place in New Labour's approach to government. The notion of lifelong learning emerged as a technology of government in a context of discussions around globalisation and the 'knowledge economy', with the aim behind the promotion of lifelong learning being to create 'infinitely knowledgeable subjects' flexible enough to adapt to virtually any business environment by virtue of their willingness to educate and re-educate themselves in line with the dictates of internationally mobile capital in a state of almost permanent revolution (Olssen, 2006: 221). As such, lifelong learning can be seen as a key component of what Jessop (2002: 90) has identified as the shift away from Fordist accumulation regimes based on economies of scale and towards post-Fordist accumulation regimes based on economies of *scope* and 'flexible specialisation'. As part of this shift, the education system under New Labour was re-oriented towards 'employability' and the teaching of 'basic skills', which were seen to be important not so much in their own right, but rather as a means of teaching young people *how* to learn, and as the foundation for a life of constant re-skilling and re-training.

More generally, from the perspective of New Labour, learning was no longer seen to be an end in itself – that is, as something to be valued simply because it allowed subjects to acquire knowledge – but rather as 'an on-going permanent addition of competences and skills adapted continuously to real external needs' (Olssen, 2006: 222). The notion of lifelong learning serves to *individualise* responsibility for learning, in that the onus in lifelong learning is on the individual to acknowledge that they are a vessel for human capital and that success or failure in the knowledge economy is dependent upon their embracing the role of 'entrepreneur of the self'. In this way, lifelong learning serves to justify the withdrawal of the obligations the state took on in the post-war period in

relation to those who are out-of-work (Olssen, 2006: 221). Furthermore, in the knowledge economy, *everyone* is required to be a life-long learner (because everyone is required to be a productive member of society, and the only means of being productive is being infinitely flexible in relation to the dictates of capital), and learning is no longer something that just *some* people do in pursuit of knowledge (Olssen, 2006: 223).

Crucially, lifelong learning demands the *internalisation* of educational aspiration and a desire to persistently acquire new competencies for the purposes of *curriculum vitae* building on the part of subjects (Olssen, 2006: 224). To this end, learning – redefined to mean the capitalisation of the self – is valorised, with special emphasis in schools on ‘staying-on’, incentivised by such things as the Educational Maintenance Allowance. Likewise, adults are targeted through the benefits system, with the unemployed being taught that the only way out of unemployment and poverty is through gaining new skills, with those who prove unwilling to embrace this new role as entrepreneurs of the self – that is, those who refuse to ‘re-skill’, or to demonstrate sufficient ‘flexibility’ in relation to changes in the labour market, or to properly market themselves to potential employers – being dealt with by disciplinary measures such as the sanctioning or outright withdrawal of benefits.

Another area in which New Labour attempted to remould the subjectivities of citizens in order to achieve specified governing objectives was in relation to the emergence of the image of the ‘citizen-consumer’. A number of authors have noted that the citizen-consumer occupied a central place in New Labour thinking (see, for example, Clarke *et al*, 2007, Hesmondhalgh, 2005, and Peters, 2004, Leggett, 2005b). It was noted above that one of the aims of successive Thatcher governments was to introduce a measure of

'parental choice' into education. This involved requiring LEAs to allow parents to express a preference as to the school to which they wished to send their children and to do their best to comply with those wishes. In addition, parents were also given access to a gradually expanding range of information to do with the performance of schools in their local area so as to enable them to make the most informed 'purchasing' decisions possible.

The thinking behind these reforms, and the reason why they are significant from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective, was that they would lead to the growth of something approaching a free market in educational services, and that this would not only lead to an increase in the overall quality of educational provision, but also have a positive effect, from the perspective of the central state, on the latter's ability to more easily manage public sector workers, who would now have to contend with the 'impersonal' discipline of the market. However, looked at in the round, the overriding concern of the Thatcher governments was privatisation of public services (whether that be to the market in the case of such things as the public utilities or to the individual household in the case of school meals), and it was only in the Major years that image of the citizen-consumer came to the fore as a tool to be used in engineering 'market-led' reforms of the public services, through Major's 'Citizen's Charter', which sought to outline in an almost contract-like fashion the key principles of public service that citizens could expect to see honoured in their dealings with the latter (Clarke *et al*, 2007: 31).

New Labour's approach to the management of the public services can be seen as a continuation of this trend in the sense that the citizen-consumer performed a crucial

function in New Labour discourse on the public services. The citizen-consumer in New Labour discourse is a demanding and sceptical consumer of public services, and can be seen as a direct analogue of the materialistic and acquisitive rational utility-maximisers of neo-classical economics (Leggett, 2005b: 553). The following passage from a 2002 speech given by then Health Secretary, Alan Milburn (cited in Clarke *et al*, 2007: 54), illustrates New Labour's understanding of the needs and desires of the citizen-consumer well:

For fifty years, the structure of the NHS meant that governments – both Labour and Conservative – defended the interests of the NHS as a producer of services when they should have been focussed on the interests of patients as the consumers of services. In today's world that will no longer do. People today expect services to respond to their needs. They want services they can trust and which offer faster, higher quality care. Increasingly they want to make informed choices about how to be treated, where to be treated and by whom.

As should be clear from the above, the dominant moment in the conceptualisation of 'choice' underpinning New Labour discourse on the public services and the citizen-consumer is not focused on the provision of high quality public services as a means to ensure that individual citizens gain access to a broader range of choices outside of their dealings with the public services. For example, it is not primarily about guaranteeing every citizen a high quality education, free at the point of use right up until university-level, so that they have the widest possible range of career opportunities to choose from. Rather, the dominant moment in New Labour's conceptualisation of choice is consumer choice – the ability to choose between competing healthcare or education

providers in the same way that shoppers might choose between two different brands of laundry detergent on a supermarket shelf (Clarke *et al*, 2007: 41).

The citizen-consumer can be seen as an inevitable corollary of New Labour's discursive framing of the present, in which we have witnessed over recent decades the emergence of a 'consumer society', made possible by the struggles of new social movements to do with racial and gender issues and the hegemonic victory of the New Right (Clarke *et al*, 2007: 40; see also Leggett, 2005a: 7):

The rise of neo-liberalism, struggles over poverty and class inequalities and the challenges of social movements around equality and citizenship were broad forces that played across public services during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century in Britain, and influenced the policies and strategies of other centre and centre-left governments in Europe (and the EU itself). Their specific power and effectivity clearly varied – but their combined effect unsettled the public realm and the place of public services within it.

Clarke *et al* (2007) have shown that the citizen-consumer has become the dominant subjectivity in policy discourses in the areas of health, policing and social care. Hesmondhalgh (2005), meanwhile, has traced the spread of this discursive articulation of citizenship in relation to New Labour policy on culture, while Wilkins (2010) and Doherty (2007) have done the same in relation to New Labour's education policies, and Pawson and Jacobs (2010) in relation to housing policy under New Labour.

The emergence of the 'citizen-consumer' as the dominant figure in public policy discourses is significant from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective because it is bound-up with a broader rearticulation of the role of the state in advanced liberalism. With citizenship being explicitly discursively articulated with consumerism, the role of the state becomes that of guarantor of the citizen-consumer's interest. Beginning with Thatcherism, but in particular since the emergence of New Labour, the state has discursively framed its own interventions as a kind of 'People's Champion' against producer capture within the public services, or as a mediator between the public and the public services (Clarke *et al*, 2007: 31). The end result of these new arrangements was to effectively depoliticise wide swathes of public policy given that, in the result of policy failures, the blame was now discursively articulated as lying primarily with the new 'arm's length' providers of public services, or even with citizens themselves – who, it is implied in cases of policy failure, have failed in their duty of consumerism to drive up standards through the judicious and informed use of their purchasing power – and not with the central state, whose job it now was to galvanise providers to overcome past failures – and all of this despite the fact that, as was noted above, running alongside this process of depoliticisation and fragmentation of the state apparatus was a gradual process of the central state expanding the range of mechanisms at its disposal designed to allow for grater 'control at a distance' (Clarke *et al*, 2007: 44).

In other words, the political significance of the citizen-consumer is two-fold: in the first instance, it has some significant implications for the citizens expected to take on a consumerist identity, which have been described above, but in the second it has significant implications for those involved in the delivery of public policy expected to cater to this new consumerist breed of citizen. These implications are far-reaching and

include such things as the need to maintain a 'customer focus', which in turn means submitting to the style of managerialism characteristic of the NPM, and a willingness to embrace reforms which envision more market-based solutions to the problems encountered in the course of delivering public services.

Conclusion

To a large extent, the paradoxical essence of the New Labour project as a form of neo-liberal governmentality is the persistent effort to regulate into being in the public sector the claimed benefits of free markets, and many of New Labour's reforms to the public services can be seen as attempts to mimic the supposed features of private sector organisations. As Fergusson (2000: 212) notes in relation to New Labour's reforms of the education system, 'the quest for perpetually improving performance becomes the trigger for practices, procedures and systems which can be monitored and evaluated to achieve just what a hypothetical market would achieve.' In other words, given that the virtues associated with free markets in terms of encouraging greater efficiency in the production of goods and provision of services were – by their very nature – unobtainable in the public sector, New Labour sought to obtain them by other means, such as the massive expansion in the role of audit in the private sector, described above. Similarly, the supposed tendency of free markets to increase consumer choice – which was thought to be unobtainable in the public sector due to the inability of public service 'consumers' to take their custom elsewhere – spurred initiatives such as the 'patient choice' drive in the NHS, which was designed to avoid patients being forced to use the health services closest to them and to give them greater freedom to choose their preferred GP and hospital. Likewise, the supposed tendency for free markets to achieve the most efficient allocation of capital possible through such mediums as the banking

sector and the stock market found its reflection in New Labour's *Best Value* tendering scheme, and the supposedly autopoietic nature of free markets was designed to be replicated by various types of public sector (and 'public-private') 'partnership' arrangements. Meanwhile, as noted above, the CTF was explicitly framed by New Labour policy-makers and politicians in terms of securing for the socially excluded the asset-ownership which had done so much to generate 'social capital' for middle class families outside the state sector for generations.

However, the salient point in relation to this is that – as the preceding analysis has shown – New Labour's attempts to regulate into being all of these supposed benefits of free markets, and to carry on the Thatcherite project of generalising the entrepreneurial form throughout society, has required decisive intervention at every step along the way, and rather than leading to a gradual withdrawal of the state from society, the 'roll-out' of neo-liberalism in the New Labour years spurred a massive growth in the reach and intensity of neo-liberal governmental technologies. The most important component pieces of this form of roll-out neo-liberalism were: 'partnership' in the public sector, as well as between the public, private and voluntary sectors; the changed role of audit in the public sector; various means of remoulding the subjectivities of individuals so as to make them more easily governable, such as the CTF and the subject positions of the 'citizen-consumer' and 'life-long learner'.

Furthermore, the broader New Labour project is predicated on the exercise of two distinct, but *interdependent* forms of power: namely, the form of power associated with the neo-liberal governmental project described above, and the form of power associated with the hegemonic project described earlier in the chapter, based on the reorientation

of British political discourse around the front/back orientational metaphor. As Foucault (1980b: 119) notes, power is something that *produces*:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression.

However, before power can produce a system of government, such as the neo-liberal system of governmentality constructed over successive Conservative and Labour governments from Thatcher onwards, it must first produce a picture of reality capable of *interpellating* subjects so that they consent to being governmentalized, or at least win enough popular support in a context of liberal democratic politics to make putting these governmental strategies into practice feasible. As was argued above, in the case of New Labour, power is exercised *through* the subject position of the 'social entrepreneur' in the sense that, once public sector workers come to see themselves as social entrepreneurs they begin to behave in ways that are conducive to broader strategies of power – for example, they become entrepreneurial, self-reflexive and self-capitalising, and choose to re-orient their attention away from the inputs into the policy-making process and towards the outputs experienced by public service 'consumers' – but without the hegemony of New Labour ideas in relation to globalisation and the exigencies of 'modernisation', this subject position might never have existed.

Chapter Four

The Big Society and the 'Neo-Liberal Revolution'

Much journalistic and academic ink has been spilled on the topic of the 'Big Society' since David Cameron introduced the concept in his 2009 Hugo Young memorial lecture, with the prevailing opinion seemingly being that the Big Society is the latest in a long line of throwaway political slogans, devoid of any substantive content (for these kinds of accounts see Bennett, 2011, Toynbee, 2010, Hall, 2011, Gamble, 2011, Clarke, 2009, Clarke & Newman, 2012, Rustin, 2011, Tam, 2011, Coote & Franklin, 2010). What follows in this chapter is an attempt to take the Big Society seriously and to determine its specificity, and the specificity of the Cameron project more broadly, as a new stage in the unfolding of the neo-liberal project in Britain. More specifically, after a review of the literature on the Big Society, which is mainly comprised of Gramscian accounts which focus on the role of Big Society discourse in helping neo-liberalism overcome the financial crisis of 2008 and Foucauldian accounts of the kind put forward by Dan Bulley & Bal Sokhi-Bulley (2012), which mistakenly treat the Big Society as an instance of 'ethopolitics', attention is turned to the hegemonic politics of the Big Society and the changes in systems of neo-liberal governmentality wrought by the coalition government. In relation to the former it is argued that Big Society discourse was modelled after Blairite modernisation discourse in the sense that the dominant moment with both was the expansion of a logic of difference, but that this project was abandoned around the onset of the financial crisis in favour of a more exclusivist hegemonic strategy in which the symptomatic figures of the benefits cheat and obstructionist trade unions and public sector workers took centre stage. Meanwhile, in relation to the latter, it is argued that the governmental politics of the coalition government diverge from those of New Labour in relation to the nature of the relationship fashioned between the central state and peripheral parts of the state apparatus (with the coalition government having pioneered a range of more 'cost effective' means of exercising effective 'control

at a distance' than those used by New Labour based on financial incentives and intensive audit), the dominant mode of the discursive articulation of citizenship (with the image of the 'citizen co-producer' coming to the fore in place of the 'citizen-consumer'), and in relation to the central state's understanding of citizen behaviour (with a movement away from rational choice understandings of citizen behaviour and towards understandings based on behavioural economics and social psychology). In contrast, it is also argued in relation to the 'responsibilisation' of those on unemployment support and others that the underlying rationale on the basis of which the coalition government has formulated policy represents a continuation of changes inaugurated during the Thatcher, Major and Blair years, with the emergence of an unprecedentedly 'workfarist' approach to the provision of unemployment support.

Making Sense of the 'Cameron Project'

It is fair to say that no definitive account of the historical significance of the Big Society has yet been put forward. This is largely due to the fact that much of the existing literature on the Big Society is either distinctly a-theoretical or focused mainly on relatively peripheral issues to do with the Big Society. A number of authors have sought to trace the lineage of Big Society ideas in the tradition of right-wing pluralism (Barker, 2011), the ideas of conservative thinkers such as Burke and Oakeshott and liberals such as de Tocqueville, Paine, Belloc and, more recently, Hayek (Jennings, 2011; Harris, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Kelly, 2011), and the 'One Nation' tradition within Conservative party politics (Page, 2010). Others have focused on the practicalities of the Big Society, with authors such as Ware (2011), Alcock, (2010), Bach (2012) and Dawson (2012) expressing pessimism with regards Cameron's ability to engineer the types of social

changes he wants to see, while authors such as Jordan (2011) have arrived at an altogether more sympathetic reading of the Big Society's prospects. Meanwhile, Buckler & Dolowitz (2012) and Dorey & Garnett (2012) have focused on the reasons for the failure of the Big Society to deliver the Conservatives a general election win in 2010, with both concluding that the main reason for this failure was the inability of Cameron to successfully balance the exigencies of party management – in particular, placating unreformed Thatcherites – and portraying the Conservative party as 'modernised' in the eyes of the wider public.

The Big Society and Gramscian Political Economy

Although these a-theoretical and sometimes parochial accounts of the Big Society make up the bulk of the existing literature on the Big Society, a number of authors have made serious attempts to theorise the project and to determine its historical specificity. Many of the most theoretically sophisticated accounts of the Big Society have been put forward by authors associated with the leftist *Soundings* journal. Foremost among these has been Hall's (2011) account of the 'neoliberal revolution'. Hall's argument is that the Coalition government headed by David Cameron represents a continuation of the neo-liberal project inaugurated by Thatcherism and that the British social formation is currently undergoing a crisis comparable in magnitude to the one which Thatcher took as her starting point in the late 1970s. Hall's analysis is avowedly Gramscian in nature and he is particularly concerned with the political and ideological dimensions of the neo-liberal project:

Gramsci argued that, though the economic must never be forgotten, conjunctural crises are never solely economic, or economically-determined 'in the last instance'. They arise when a number of contradictions at work in different key practices and sites come together - or 'con-join' - in the same moment and political space and, as Althusser said, 'fuse in a ruptural unity' (Hall, 2011: 9).

From Hall's perspective, neo-liberalism is a hegemonic project, the primary aim of which is to create a new social, cultural and political 'settlement' to replace the social democratic, Keynesian settlement that prevailed in the immediate post-war period, principally by means of transforming the prevailing 'common sense' of society. According to Hall, the defining feature of this political and ideological project is an overriding concern with the possessive individual and a desire to roll back the frontiers of the state on the grounds that the state is the enemy of freedom. According to Hall (2011: 10), for neo-liberals:

The state must never govern society, dictate to free individuals how to dispose of their private property, regulate a free-market economy or interfere with the God-given right to make profits and amass personal wealth. State-led 'social engineering' must never prevail over corporate and private interests. It must not intervene in the 'natural' mechanisms of the free market.

In other words, neo-liberalism is about the state making room for the spontaneous unfolding of free markets and, for Hall, Cameron's Big Society is just the latest manifestation of this anti-state, pro-free market philosophy, which despite its apparent inconsistency and the coalition government's crisis-ridden early period in office 'is

arguably the best prepared, most wide-ranging, radical and ambitious' variant of neo-liberalism yet, with its sustained programme of public spending cuts and relentless efforts to open-up new opportunities for the private sector to profit from what were once public services.

Michael Rustin (2011), also writing in the pages of *Soundings*, and whose account is broadly sympathetic to Hall's, argues that Hall's account of the present conjuncture in British politics grants ideology too large a role in explaining the rise of neo-liberalism and its subsequent evolution as a governing philosophy in the New Labour years and since. According to Rustin (2011: 83), in Hall's hands the concept of ideology is expanded 'such that the term 'neoliberalism' is not merely employed to describe a doctrine or system of ideas, but becomes a description of an entire social formation, seen as the enactment of its animating ideological principle.' For Rustin, this is a mistake because the sphere of ideology is just one part of the broader social formation and ideological projects such as neo-liberalism lack the capacity to transform society independently of other considerations such as the workability of specific economic strategies. With this being the case, Rustin argues in favour of an Althusserian, class-based analysis which attempts to make sense of social transformations by focusing on the social *system* as a whole, and its ability to maintain equilibrium at any given point in time based on how its constituent elements interact with one another.

For Rustin (2011: 94), neo-liberalism is a kind of 'class warfare'. It represents the breakdown of the alliance between the bourgeoisie and the working class that gave

birth to parliamentary democracy and resulted in the working class winning a range of economic and social rights in the early post-war period, and the formation of a new alliance between the bourgeoisie and the remnants of the old aristocracy. This was manifested in the case of Thatcherism in its advocacy of 'traditional' social values, a desire to re-impose social hierarchy (which was discursively framed as a return to the 'natural' order of things), nostalgia for Britain's imperial past, and an authoritarian discourse on law and order.

The past thirty years in Britain have seen a regressive development, in which assumptions of privilege and social closure that once seemed to be on the way out have subtly reasserted themselves. The cult of the super-rich, the co-option even of public sector managers into their ranks, the dispersal of the urban poor through housing and benefit policy, the culture of supposed 'excellence' and exclusivity in the university system, the immunity of the banks from retribution for their irresponsibility – all are indicators of this reassertion of the principle of hierarchy (Rustin, 2011: 94).

From this perspective, the coalition government is the latest incarnation of this composite class formation, in that it brings together 'individualist, anti-statist... Orange Book Liberals' and the 'rentier class' represented by the Conservative party under Cameron. Furthermore, the present conjuncture in British politics represents a moment of 'systemic crisis'. The neo-liberal economic model based on large cuts to public spending, deregulation, privatisation and tax cuts for 'wealth creators' first employed by Thatcher has failed, as demonstrated most clearly by the global financial crisis, but also by stagnant real incomes for the majority of people and massive – and growing –

inequality throughout society (Rustin, 2011: 88). The role the coalition government has claimed for itself in this crisis has been that of neo-liberalism's saviour. Its basic economic strategy is to 'rebalance' the UK economy through a massive programme of public spending cuts and the opening-up of new profit opportunities for private capital in the state sector by means of further privatisation and outsourcing. In other words, it is a foolhardy 'wager on growth through entrepreneurship' that is almost certain not to materialise. Without the windfall of North Sea oil and any nationalised industries with high market value to sell (in the absence of any large, potentially-profitable state-owned enterprises that can be readily sold-off at its disposal – Royal Mail aside – the coalition government has had to make do with privatising public services in a piecemeal way, mainly through its Open Public Services reforms), the coalition government lacks the option (which Thatcher had) of generating economic growth by means of cheap tax cuts. Likewise, without the option to engineer a second house price bubble – which during the New Labour years ensured that consumer spending was propped-up thanks to people borrowing against steadily rising house prices – consumer spending is likely to lag significantly behind pre-financial crash levels (Rustin, 2011: 89).

Building on Ruskin's 'class warfare' reading of the post-crisis British political economy, Clarke (2009) and Hodkinson & Robbins (2013) have drawn attention to the discursive strategies used to legitimise attempts to preserve the pre-crisis order. For Clarke, the coalition government is a 'restorationist' movement seeking a return to 'business as usual' – that is, to Thatcherite neo-liberalism – and has put forward a narrative designed to make this happen. This narrative has effectively nationalised the crisis. From the coalition government's perspective, the current crisis is a crisis of Britain's banking

sector – which has been guilty of ‘excesses’ in places, but which needs to be salvaged, not destroyed, if Britain is to have any kind of economic future. It is a crisis of British society and British government – as demonstrated most clearly by Cameron’s ‘broken Britain’ discourse and the way in which the ‘top down’, ‘Fabian’ approach of previous Labour governments under Blair and especially Brown is identified as the major factor in the widespread decline of civic-mindedness on the part of ordinary people and, as a result, the growth in public spending that ultimately led to Britain’s current economic predicament and to the British people empowering the coalition government to ‘deal with the deficit’. This narrative of the crisis serves to obfuscate the dysfunction of the neo-liberal economic model that is, in reality, responsible for Britain’s dire economic situation and justifies leaving the entire Thatcherite edifice more or less intact.

Meanwhile, in their analysis which focuses on coalition government housing policy Hodkinson & Robbins (2013: 66) have drawn attention to the implicit division in coalition government discourse between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor, with ‘deserving’ poor such as military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and ‘hard-working families’ being depicted as the victims of ‘abuses’ of the social housing system by assorted social miscreants. The goal of coalition housing policy is to make social housing the ‘tenure of last resort’ for those who are temporarily unable to secure housing for themselves in the private sector and to end the notion of a ‘home for life’ in social housing. This has been given legislative body in the form of new legislation designed to increase rents in the social housing sector to up to 80 per cent of those in the private sector and to remove the right for social housing tenants to remain in their social housing indefinitely, even if they have proven to be good tenants over a sustained

period of time (Hodkinson & Robbins, 2011: 71). With this being the case, the coalition government not only represents the continuation of the neo-liberal project began by Thatcher, but its 'radical intensification':

[Coalition housing policy] will only worsen the real housing crisis – the expansion of insecure, unaffordable housing, overcrowding, and rogue landlordism – but that is precisely the outcome desired by the class war conservatives in the Coalition as they seek to shore up private property and attack housing protections and rights so as to discipline the working class into working harder, faster, and longer for less pay (Hodkinson & Robbins, 2013: 72).

The fundamental problem with this debate between 'ideologistic' commentators on the coalition government, such as Hall, and those more concerned with class dynamics and economic strategies, such as Rustin, Clarke, and Hodkinson & Robbins, is that – to a large extent – their dispute is over relatively inconsequential matters. In basic epistemological terms, these authors are in fundamental agreement with one another and what is at stake in their debate is really only a matter of emphasis. Broadly speaking, both sides in the debate start out from a Gramscian epistemological standpoint geared towards a 'multi-dimensional' account of political phenomena, and one which pays due regard to the role of *ideology* in effecting social change, but without ever losing sight of the 'decisive nucleus of *economic activity*' around which each hegemonic project is structured (Gramsci, 1971: 161, my emphasis).

This is the basic narrative that Hall (2011: 11) puts forward of the 'neoliberal revolution':

The welfare state had made deep inroads into private capital's territory. To roll back that post-war 'settlement' and restore the prerogatives of capital had been the ambition of its opponents ever since Churchill dreamt in the 1950s of starting 'a bonfire of controls'. The crisis of the late 1960s-1970s was neoliberalism's opportunity, and the Thatcher and Reagan regimes grabbed it with both hands... neoliberalism's principal target in the UK has been the reformist social-democratic welfare state. Though this was a radically compromised formation, which depended on dynamic capitalist growth to create the wealth for redistribution, its full-employment objectives, welfare support systems, the NHS, and free comprehensive and higher education, transformed the lives of millions.

This narrative, in which neo-liberalism is seen primarily as the ideological expression of a broader class project is ultimately not very far removed from the kinds economic Marxist accounts put forward by Rustin and Clarke. Likewise, Rustin (2011: 84, my emphasis) acknowledges, even while arguing in favour of a class-based approach to analysing neo-liberalism, that ideologies '*construct* [classes] and are constructed by them', which is a line of argument as 'ideologistic' as it is economic determinist given the fact that, if 'ideology' is acknowledged to determine or even partially determine 'economic' processes, then the idea that those economic processes determine anything by themselves is logically inconsistent. Similarly, although Clarke (2009: 48) is keen to elucidate the role of the crisis of neo-liberal economics in the present conjuncture in British politics, he is equally keen to point out that there has been an *overdetermination*

of crises, only one of which is economic in nature and – of the remainder – only some of which can be said to have been determined by that economic crisis.

The problems with this kind of Gramscian political economy, to do with the unresolved tension between claims that ideology can exert a determining effect in select historical conjunctures and contradictory claims that economic factors are determinant ‘in the last instance’, and the idea that – even on its own terms – Gramscian political economy necessarily involves an ‘essentialism of the elements’ that is ultimately no less reductive than the ‘essentialism of the totality’ which characterises economistic Marxist accounts of social change, have been outlined in sufficient detail in previous chapters. As such, it will not be necessary to set out those arguments again here in full. However, one important consequence of the Gramscian view of neo-liberalism and the present conjuncture in British politics that is worth discussing in more depth here is the fact that the historical narrative of neo-liberalism they posit depicts neo-liberalism as a *return*. From their perspective, neo-liberalism is capital’s revenge. It is a return to ‘business as usual’ after the historical ‘blip’ of post-war social democracy and the temporary victory of ‘progressive’ political forces that led to the creation of the welfare state, and which secured for the working class a range of new social and political rights.

What is problematic about this view of things is that neo-liberalism is not a return to classical liberalism. The type of liberalism that prevailed prior to the Second World War took as its overriding concern the task of carving out a space within political society for the unimpeded operation of market forces. The overriding concerns of neo-liberalism

are very different. Neo-liberalism is concerned with remodelling political society along the lines of the market, and with making sure that in both 'real' markets and the quasi-markets that proliferate in the contemporary state sector subjects are capable of exercising market freedom in the correct ways (Foucault, 2008: 131). It is not, as is commonly thought, a small state philosophy, because creating these kinds of subjects requires purposeful intervention on the part of the state, and this remains true even if this interventionism takes a different form to the interventionism characteristic of post-war social democracy. Furthermore, even if Hall *et al* had acknowledged that neo-liberalism is not a straightforward reprise of classical liberalism in the sense described above we would still be left without an adequate explanation of the coalition government and its Big Society agenda because neither is it a straightforward reprise of the *Thatcherite* form of neo-liberal governmentality. Hall is keen to point out that the coalition government, and the New Labour project before it, represented qualitatively new stages in the history of neo-liberalism, but in viewing neo-liberalism as a simple reactionary creed he obscures the important differences between the Thatcherite, Blairite and Big Society variants of neo-liberal governmentality that mark them out as distinct stages within the broader neo-liberal project.

Foucauldian Approaches to the Big Society

An account of the Big Society that goes a long way towards correcting this error has been put forward by Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley (2012). Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, writing from an avowedly Foucauldian perspective, argue that the Big Society is really a form of 'Big Government', in the sense that, despite much of Cameron's Big Society rhetoric, his plan for government amounts to a form of *governmentality* – 'a modern form of managing the

conduct of individuals and communities such that *government*, far from being removed or reduced, is *bettered*' (Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, 2012: 2). Furthermore, for Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, what defines the Big Society as a form of governmentality is its reliance on what Rose (cited in Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, 2012: 8) has termed 'ethopolitics' – a form of power that 'works through the values, beliefs, and sentiments thought to underpin the techniques of responsible self-government and the management of one's obligation[s] to others'. In other words, the Cameron project is a form of government which exercises power by moulding and remoulding over time the ethical disposition of its citizens. It is a style of government which seeks to create citizens more willing to engage in the kind of 'social action' the Big Society is reliant upon – crucially, not because they have been instructed to, but because they understand that it is the right thing for 'socially responsible' citizens to do. It is a form of power which does not require a governor – at least not in the traditional sense – because citizens come to *internalise* the power relation impelling them to engage in social action in the form of their changed ethical outlook and, as a result, the act of governing can be said to have become more efficient (Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, 2012: 9).

Of particular interest for Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley in this regard is the way in which 'ethopower' is exercised through such coalition government initiatives as the National Citizens Service (NCS). The NCS – one of Cameron's flagship Big Society initiatives – is effectively a Big Society 'boot camp' for young people, designed to help them 'learn what it means to be socially responsible' (Cameron, 2009c). Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, in proper Foucauldian fashion, consider the NCS to be a technology of government and describe its functioning in the following terms:

As well as perhaps producing 'socially responsible' young people, the NCS represents a series of governmental tactics that will produce better, more productive and communally-orientated citizens – what might be termed '*ideal citizens*'. This happens through more and better government via tactics that discipline and regulate behaviour, controlling through values such as responsibility and a sense of service (2012: 7).

These values are instilled in the young people taking part in the NCS through a variety of means. For example, the early stages of a typical NCS programme involves splitting the young people up into small groups and then having them engage in a variety of 'teambuilding' exercises such as rock climbing or kayaking. Upon completion of these exercises the young people will be asked to participate in group discussion sessions in which an NCS mentor 'facilitates discussion on how to link the activities of the day to the general NCS/Big Society programme'. That is, it is explained to the young people that their success in the teambuilding exercises was dependent upon them exhibiting the values of '*trust, responsibility and understanding*,' and they are encouraged to aspire to these values in their daily lives once they have completed their service. In this way, they are turned into 'socially responsible' citizens conducive to a Big Society style of government. In a similar vein, NCS programmes will typically involve having the young people participate in an exercise modelled after the *Dragon's Den* television programme, but instead of presenting a business proposal to a panel of successful business people in the hope of winning funds for investment in a profit-making enterprise – as in the original – the young people are tasked with coming-up with a proposal for a project that will benefit their community before pitching it to NCS mentors who will agree to fund

the project should it promise to contribute to the programme's wider Big Society ideal. The goal of this exercise is to normalise the habit of 'social entrepreneurialism' on the part of the young people involved (Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, 2012: 8).

However, as a Foucauldian governmentality approach to making sense of the Big Society, Bulley & Bulley-Sokhi-Bulley's account is incomplete because it wrongly assumes that the simple fact that the coalition government has attempted to enact a variety of 'ethopolitical' strategies means that this is the essence of the coalition government's take on neo-liberalism and, as a result, it tells us little about the differences between the Big Society and the forms of neo-liberal governmentality which preceded it in British politics. Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley are correct in arguing that the NCS was designed to produce 'ideal citizens' by instilling in young people an ethic of 'social responsibility', and that coalition discourse on Community Resilience was designed to mobilise 'community representatives' willing to encourage others in their local community to assist in planning for emergencies, but this does not mean that these instances of 'Big Society' neo-liberal governmentality are the dominant moment within the politics of the coalition government, nor that they are even likely to have the effects intended for them by Cameron *et al.*

The inadequacy of the Big Society as a form of neo-liberal governmentality based on ethopolitics is demonstrable in two main ways – one of which is relatively straightforward and relates to the readily apparent flaws in some of the ethopolitical strategies Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley describe, while the other is more complex and requires

closer consideration of the concept of ethopolitics. Regarding the former, the salient question is, how much stock do we put in a political project predicated on the idea that a fundamental transformation of society and the way in which government works can be achieved by means of having young people take part in what are no doubt some very tedious re-enactments of bad BBC programming? This may seem like a glib point to make, but it does touch on a fundamental problem with the entire Big Society enterprise because, just as this kind of exercise is highly unlikely to be able to transform the behaviour of cynical young people beyond anything longer than the short-term – if at all – other aspects of the way in which the Big Society has been implemented are equally short-sighted. To take the example of ‘Community Resilience’, why should we expect the coalition government’s exhortations to lead to an increase in volunteering and community-based planning for emergencies? Furthermore, how can we be sure that ‘Community Resilience’ – to the extent that it does materialise – is a consequence of the Big Society and not something that would have happened anyway, and which has simply been labelled as part of the Big Society in retrospect? Indeed, as Byrne *et al* (2012: 29) note, exhortation – despite its obvious weaknesses as a governmental ‘technology’ – has been crucial to the Big Society project from the outset, and several other authors have drawn attention to the myriad structural constraints acting on people who might otherwise be sympathetic to the Big Society ideal and willing to engage in the kind of social action Cameron valorises.

Dawson (2012: 87), for example, argues that a fundamental contradiction lies at the heart of the Big Society project to the extent that Cameron *et al* incessantly implore people to behave in a more altruistic and civic-minded manner while at the same time

paying no mind to the detrimental effects of the spread of 'amoral' market relations and growing inequality on people's willingness and ability to engage in this kind of behaviour. According to Dawson, the Big Society is likely to lead directly to increased inequality given the fact that it tends to be people in the wealthiest communities who are the least reliant on public services and who are best equipped to take advantage of the new opportunities opened-up by the Big Society, such as the coalition government's Academies programme. Similarly, Alcock (2010: 384) has argued that the central premise of the Big Society – the idea that the state has 'crowded out' civic mindedness on the part of communities and led to a deleterious increase in individualism throughout society – is misconceived and that, in actual fact, the growth of the welfare state in the post-war period heralded not a reverse, but a major *growth* in various kinds of activity that could be expected to form part of the Big Society (such as charitable giving and volunteer work).

The second way of demonstrating the inadequacy of the Big Society as a governmental rationality is possible by means of a careful reading of Rose's explanation of the functioning of ethopolitics in contemporary society. As was noted above, Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley subscribe to Rose's (2000: 1399) understanding of ethopolitics as a form of government which attempts to shape the behaviour of individuals by means of acting upon their ethical outlook. However, what Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley fail to note is that, for Rose, the enactment of such ethopolitical strategies is reliant upon 'community'.

According to Rose, with the emergence of New Labour and the 'Third Way' in British politics we witnessed a definitive shift from the government of 'society' to the government of 'communities.' Forms of government prevalent in the 20th century which took as their object 'society' operated on the assumption that it was possible to manage society such that the interests of all sections of society could be brought into essential harmony with one another, and that the betterment of one was not at the expense of any of the others. Interventions in order to improve conditions in the workplace and to redistribute money to those lower down the income scale through the tax system would ensure the happiness of workers; interventions in order to promote the health of the working population and to tame working class radicalism by means of the co-option of the trade unions would ensure the happiness of the bosses; the construction of systems of social security would ensure the welfare of both the unemployed and the elderly (Rose, 2000: 1400). In the last two decades of the 20th century this 'social state' began to be supplanted by a new image of the state as the 'enabling state', under the rubric of which the responsibility for guaranteeing the various kinds of social welfare described above was to be 'devolved' to the population itself. However, the new freedoms this entailed did not escape the purview of the state and instead, the state sought to conduct the apparently autonomous conduct of individuals by means of acting upon the touchstone they use to orient themselves in the world – namely, their community-belonging.

For Rose (2000: 1398), community is both a network of affect-laden relationships binding together groups of people and a set of 'shared values, norms and meanings', and it is by acting upon these collections of values, norms and meanings that governmental

strategies are put into play in contemporary society. However, these governmental strategies cannot be considered *state* projects, even if we posit the widest possible definition of the state. As Rose (2000: 1399) notes:

contemporary ethopolitics reworks the government of individual and aggregate souls in the context of the increasing role that culture and consumption mechanisms play in the generation, regulation, and evaluation of techniques of self-conduct. Politically organized and state-directed assemblages for moral management no longer suffice. Schools, asylums, reformatories, workhouses, washhouses, museums, homes (for the young, old, or the damaged), unified regimes of public service broadcasting, housing projects, and the like have been supplemented and sometimes displaced by an array of other practices for shaping identities and forms of life. Advertising, marketing, the proliferation of goods, the multiple stylizations of the act of purchasing, cinemas, videos, pop music, lifestyle magazines, television soap operas, advice programs, and talk shows – all of these partake in a civilizing project very different from 19th-century attempts to form moral, sober, responsible, and obedient individuals, and from 20th-century projects for the shaping of civility, social solidarity, and social responsibility.

In other words, this transformation in the scope of government entailed a multiplication of the sites from which ethopower emanated, and the range of ethopolitical injunctions to which citizens are subjected in contemporary society encompasses not just the efforts of politicians and policy-makers, but also a variety of marketers and various kinds of cultural guardians. Furthermore, this shift from 'society' to 'community' also entailed the fracturing of the nationalist identities which underpinned the interventions of the social state.

With all of this being the case, two interlinked problems with Cameron's Big Society agenda – which Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley have failed to address – begin to emerge. Firstly, the Big Society has – to a large extent – discarded 'community' as a mediator of its ethopolitical injunctions and is, consequently, less effective as a form of ethopolitics than would otherwise be the case. As was noted above, for the most part, the Big Society is reliant on exhortation, and the manner in which it seeks to remould the ethical subjectivity of citizens involves forming a relationship directly between state (or its recognised intermediaries) and citizen. To return to the example of the NCS, this initiative bears closer resemblance to the 19th century reformatory than any of the strategies for acting upon the moral formation of communities that Rose describes in terms of ethopolitics. It is, to borrow a phrase from Rose, a 'politically organized and state-directed assemblage' for the moral management, not of communities, but of *society*, and one which is explicitly framed as part of a project which aims to re-moralise the *nation*.

For Cameron *et al* the promise of the Big Society may well be that the young people that pass through the programme will come out the other side better equipped to take part in community life, but it fails to make use of 'community' as a technology of government to aid in the construction of these communally-oriented citizens. Much the same is true in relation to other Big Society initiatives. Take, for example, the Big Society Awards (typical award, 'Award for Outstanding Contribution to Community') launched shortly after Cameron took office. These were clearly predicated on the notion that the Big Society would spring into life and that people would become more 'socially responsible' if only there was greater recognition and appreciation of socially responsible behaviour. This may well be the case, but it is difficult to see how if this recognition and

appreciation comes from the state and not from the 'community', given that the 'affect-laden' relationships Rose describes as an intrinsic part of community do not, for the most part, exist between state and citizen – and even less so now than in the past, after successive scandals – from 'cash for questions' to MPs' expenses – which have led to widespread public antipathy towards the political class.

Secondly, the Big Society fails to pay heed to what Rose, quoted above, referred to as the increasing role that 'culture and consumption mechanisms' play in the formation of the ethical subjectivities of citizens in contemporary society. We know that the ethical outlook of citizens is, to a large extent, informed by the purchasing decisions they make (think of the growth of 'ethical consumerism' in recent years, or the cult-like following that certain brands of consumer goods attract) and the various cultural identities they pledge allegiance to (such as religious identities, political identities, identities linked to various sexual subjectivities, and identities linked to various youth cultures) (Bevir and Trentmann, 2007; see also Halkier, 2004 and Stolle and Hooghe, 2004). However, Cameron (2009a) at times gives the impression that he thinks the re-moralisation of society is something that is within the grasp of the state alone (think of his comments on the need for the state to be used to 'remake society'). However, he also at times acknowledges some of the difficulties inherent in the project of a state-led re-moralisation of society:

The big society demands mass engagement: a broad culture of responsibility, mutuality and obligation. But how do we bring this about?... if Facebook simply added a social action line to their standard profile, this would do more to create a new social norm

around volunteering or charitable giving than any number of government campaigns (Cameron, 2009a).

The salient point here is that, even though Cameron may well be correct in supposing that, if Facebook were to take this line of action, the result would be a significant increase in volunteering and charitable giving, he is more or less powerless to make this happen.

One consequence of this failure to pose the question, what form of 'big government' is the Big Society, is that Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley have nothing to say about the relationship between the Big Society and the forms of neo-liberal governmentality that preceded it in British politics. This is an important question to ask because, even though the origins of the Big Society can clearly be traced back to the Thatcher experiment in the 1980s, and even though there has been a very substantial degree of path dependency characterising the relationship between successive forms of neo-liberal governmentality – from Thatcherism to New Labour to the Big Society – it is also clear that each of them has departed from the others in certain important respects – which is to be expected given the fact that the agents of each of these forms of neo-liberal governmentality operated against backgrounds of distinct ideological traditions (Bevir, 2005: 41). Furthermore, this holds true even if we limit our focus to just Thatcherism and the Big Society, given that each draws on distinct currents within the conservative and liberal canons (Barker, 2011; Jennings, 2012).

With this being the case, in what follows the argument is presented that the specificity of the Cameron project lies in, on the one hand, providing the neo-liberal governmental project it took over from New Labour with a new hegemonic basis, predicated on a logic of difference and structured around the signifying element of the 'Big Society' and, on the other, forming a new stage in the neo-liberal governmental project, and one which is only partially predicated on the ethopolitical strategies identified by Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley. More specifically, the argument is presented that the Big Society hegemonic project has failed due its inability to properly differentiate the Big Society and Cameron's vision for the country from Blairite discourse on the Third Way (which by the mid-2000s had lost much of its hegemonic capacity), and to convincingly portray the Conservative party as a 'modern, compassionate' Conservative party in the eyes of the wider public, and that the result has been a reversion to a more exclusionary hegemonic strategy based on opposition to the symptomal figures of Europe, immigrants and the feckless poor similar in its basic contours to the one employed by Thatcherism throughout the 1980s. The argument will also be made that, in its dimension as *governmental* project, the Big Society represents a partial continuation of the type of neo-liberal governmentality practiced by New Labour – specifically in relation to efforts to create an 'active society' – but also a departure from New Labour in its discursive articulation of citizens as 'co-producers' of public services and its interest in 'nudge' as an approach to public policy.

Furthermore, this argument will seek to build on the existing literature on the Big Society and, in particular, accounts of the Big Society put forward by the likes of Hall which focus on the precise means by which the neo-liberal governmental project has

won popular appeal, and accounts of the kind put forward by Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley which are cognisant of the fact that neo-liberalism in general and the Big Society in particular are – contrary to politicians’ rhetoric – forms of ‘big government’. However, in setting out this argument, an active effort will be made to avoid some of the pitfalls of this literature by not treating the hegemonic component of the Big Society project simply as an adjunct to an underlying economic strategy. Similarly, an effort will be made to try to go beyond Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley’s account of the Cameron project as a governmental project by properly accounting for the lines of continuity and discontinuity between the latter and the New Labour governments after 1997.

Over Before it Ever Really Began? The Big Society as Hegemonic Project

Looked at as a piece of rhetoric, the ‘Big Society’ is clearly an empty signifier. That is, a signifier which has been so highly overdetermined by a variety of different signifieds that it has lost the ability to signify any one thing in particular, but at the same time – and largely as a result of being so highly overdetermined – has taken on the ability to signify almost anything, and to be put to almost any political use imaginable (Torfing, 1999: 301). The polysemy of the Big Society as an empty signifier is largely attributable to the fact that it makes reference to the highly overdetermined signifier ‘society’, but the insertion of ‘big’ alongside ‘society’ as part of the Big Society transformed it into a political catchphrase that ‘concealed the vast and intricate embeddedness’ of ‘society’ in our experience of the world and which gave it the appearance of having a specific meaning (Albrow, 2012: 113). It is this tension – between a signifier that *appears* to

have a more or less specific meaning, but which in actual fact is lacking in any specific meaning due to being so highly overdetermined – that was the source of the value of the Big Society for Cameron. This is because it offered the possibility of being able to satisfy a broad range of social demands and to, by extension, hegemonise a broad range of subject positions in the formation of a hegemonic bloc capable of rivalling the hegemonic bloc which took shape in the early-1990s under the auspices of New Labour's 'Third Way'. Those to whom Cameron sought to appeal with his Big Society discourse were supposed to recognise themselves, or at least the satisfaction of the social demands they made, in the 'Big Society', and the polysemous nature of the Big Society as an empty signifier was supposed to ensure that enough people did that in order to guarantee Cameron electoral success.

However, this almost goes without saying because this is the function of every empty signifier, and every political project in the Cameronite mould puts forward its own set of empty signifiers. In the case of Thatcherism it is clear that the 'free market' acts as an empty signifier, and in New Labour discourse the same role is played by the 'stakeholder society' and the aforementioned 'Third Way'. Yet as should be clear from the argument set out in preceding chapters, Thatcherism and New Labour bear very little resemblance to one another as hegemonic projects. Whereas in the case of Thatcherism, the imposition of 'free market' policies was linked to the expansion of a logic of equivalence which pitched the white British working and middle classes against the arrayed threats of 'benefits cheats', militant leftist trade union 'wreckers', immigrants from the former Commonwealth and Irish republican terrorism, New Labour discourse was predicated on the expansion of a logic of difference, in which old

antagonisms between employers and employees, market dynamism and social justice, 'flexible' labour market policies and high quality public services, were systematically dismantled. With this being the case, the most pressing question for present purposes is what kind of hegemonic project did Cameron seek to construct in formulating the Big Society?

The answer to that question is, one very similar to the New Labour hegemonic project which preceded it: for the most part, the picture of reality furnished by Cameron after becoming Conservative leader closely resembled the one provided by New Labour. As was noted above, at the centre of New Labour discourse was a conception of the present as an 'accelerated epoch': the present is not only an almost entirely novel epoch thanks to the transformative effects of globalisation, but is also for the same reason one in which the *pace* of social change has accelerated. We live in a world of hyper-mobile capital characterised by constant technological innovation and this necessitates on the part of nation-states not only a response in terms of increased openness and flexibility in relation to flows of capital across national boundaries, but also more reflexive and more responsive public services (Randall, 2009: 202). The understanding of the world Cameron put forward early on was very similar to this, with the major differences between his and Blair's worldviews being matters of emphasis and terminology rather than anything substantive. For example, although we find Cameron more hesitant than Blair to use the term 'globalisation', he is comfortable talking about the 'global race', which – like globalisation – is something we cannot opt-out of and which demands that we take measures to placate internationally-mobile capital. While it is true that there is greater emphasis on the state's role in investing in education and in supporting nascent

sectors of the economy in formulating this response in New Labour discourse, and greater emphasis on the necessity to moderate wage demands and to rein-in public spending in Cameronite Big Society discourse, the overarching discursive framing of the present is the same in both.

In accepting the basic rationale of the Blairite globalisation thesis, Cameron reoriented Conservative party discourse around the same front/back orientational metaphor that structured New Labour discourse: the notion that Britain is competing in a 'global race' with other advanced industrialised nations for the affections of fickle-hearted internationally mobile capital is an instance of the necessary politics – a form of political fatalism in which old divisions between left and right are deemed to be less important than doing 'what works'. With this being the case, we can say that Big Society discourse – like New Labour discourse before it – was structured around a fundamental antagonism between, on the one hand, modernisers who recognise the inevitability of globalisation and the rewards that invariably flow from 'openness' to internationally mobile capital and, on the other, what Blair referred to as the 'forces of conservatism' – that is, myopic globalisation-deniers of any political stripe. In Cameron's case, these 'conservatives' were the unreformed Thatcherites in his own party willing to 'irresponsibly' cut public expenditure at the risk of jeopardising the international standing of Britain's education system – and, by extension, its skills base – as well as the remnants of the old left in the Labour party that never made their accommodation with Blairism.

However, this exclusionary moment should not be taken as the dominant moment within Big Society discourse because it is clear that the dominant moment in the hegemonic project structured around the Big Society was, as was also the case in Blairite discourse, the expansion of a logic of difference. The ideological dividing lines – between Thatcherite ‘dries’ and conciliatory ‘wets’, free markets and wasteful spending on public services, support for the family and advocacy of LGBT rights, support for a ‘sensible’ immigration policy and the uncontrolled immigration advocated by the left that would lead to the ‘swamping’ of British culture – which sustained the Conservative party from the Thatcher era onwards were, one-by-one, abandoned by Cameron as Leader of the Opposition and a determined effort was made to reach out to a range of new constituencies on behalf of the Conservative party. The phrase the ‘Big Society’ is itself indicative of the type of transformation Cameron sought to effect in this relation. The ‘society’ in the Big Society represented a third way between statist solutions to pressing social problems and the perceived neglectfulness of the Thatcherite ‘free market’ route, but one which promised to be able satisfy both the demands of Thatcherite free-marketeers for greater economic freedom (principally, freedom from bureaucratic ‘red tape’ and high taxes) and of liberal-minded ‘progressives’ for high quality public services, because the increase in volunteering and charitable giving the Big Society will engender will both allow the state to reduce spending on ineffective state bureaucrats *and* guarantee that public services are provided by the local people best equipped to deliver them – or so the theory goes (Albrow, 2012: 113).

Furthermore, in an effort to make this appeal to progressives more effective, Cameron put forward a narrative of the creation of the welfare state which entailed a very

selective remembering of the key figures in that process. As a Conservative politician, Cameron's free market credentials were never in doubt in the eyes of the wider public, but his credentials as a 'modern, compassionate' Conservative stood to benefit from a reading of the creation of the welfare state in which the role of left-wing political figures in both agitating for and in actually creating the welfare state is downplayed and the role of various Conservatives and Liberals is highlighted:

In recent years the Conservative Party has acquired a reputation for indifference to the public services. This was quite wrong – especially given the origin of the public services. It was a Conservative, Rab Butler, who introduced free secondary education for all in 1944. And in the same year it was a Conservative health minister, named Henry Willink, who published a White Paper called "A National Health Service", outlining a plan for universal, comprehensive healthcare, free at the point of need (Cameron, 2007a).

It was noted above that New Labour's 'selective recollections' of its past were an integral part of its hegemonic politics – that its recollection of industrial relations in the late-1970s as fraught with conflict, most of which was due to an over-powerful and irresponsible trade union movement, served to justify Blair's decision not to reverse the trade union reforms implemented by Thatcher during her time as Prime Minister and that its failure to recollect Wilson's previous failed attempt at modernising British society served to bolster Blair's claims that the present is an era of 'epochal change'. Much the same is true in relation to Cameron's discourse on the Big Society, and the narrative of the creation of the welfare state described above was just one instance

among many of Cameron's selective recollections of the past designed to undergird his modernising project.

Many of the innovations in Conservative party discourse enveloped in Cameron's Big Society agenda were signalling acts, intended to function in the same fashion as the signalling acts undertaken by Blair as Labour leader in the early-1990s, the most important of which in that case was the decision to rewrite Clause IV of the Labour party constitution. The name the 'Big Society' was one such signalling act, but there were a number of others. For most of the history of the environmentalist movement Conservatives were seen as uncaring in relation to the environment – too preoccupied with traditional Tory issues relating to the economy and law and order and hesitant to take any action that might be seen to impinge on the right of business-owners to run their companies as they see fit. Cameron sought to transform the image of the Conservative party in this regard by prioritising environmentalist issues. This newfound concern with the environment most obviously manifested itself in the form of a new Conservative party logo for which conveying the 'green' credentials of the Leader of the Opposition was a priority:



Fig. 1. Conservative Party Logo 2009



Fig. 2. Conservative Party Logo 2002

With the adoption of this new party logo, not only was traditional conservatism made compatible with what were up to that point alien environmentalist politics, but in the process the deep blue of the latter took on a lighter shade, meant to signify the 'progressive' intentions of the Conservatives in an era of 'compassionate conservatism'. The same basic articulation between Cameron's conservatives and environmentalism was also carried out elsewhere in Cameron's discourse. For example, in the claim that 'We're fighting for a cleaner, greener environment: locally and globally – for this generation and those that will follow' (Cameron, 2007b), in his appropriation of key elements of traditional left-wing environmentalist discourse – such as the phrase, 'think global, act local' (Cameron, 2006b) – and also in certain gestures, such as the trip Cameron took as a guest of the World Wildlife Foundation to the Arctic to witness 'the impact that climate change is having on our planet' (Cameron, 2006b). The latter was a particularly promising way of transforming the image of the Conservatives in relation to the environment due to the strong photo opportunities it provided (Cameron on an iceberg looking concerned, Cameron with some huskies looking concerned, Cameron speaking to Arctic scientists looking concerned).

What is particularly interesting about this is not the simple fact that Cameron sought to make environmentalism a key component of Conservative party politics, but rather the way in which he brought environmentalism into the fold – that is, the way in which he made it not just compatible with the other, pre-existing elements of Conservative Party discourse, but a perfectly *natural* fit, and one designed to seem to the subjects of Conservative Party discourse both logical and important. Take for example the way in

which the concept of 'green revolution' is used to marry a concern with climate change to the Majorite theme of England as a 'green and pleasant land' in the following passage:

My vision of a greener future may start with the vital need to tackle climate change but it certainly doesn't end there. We need to open up a second front in the green revolution... we need a greener earth as well as greener skies... Greener living for families and communities, and better protection for our natural environment – on land and sea – will be crucial priorities for the government I lead (Cameron, 2007c).

Another important signalling act undertaken by Cameron during his time as Leader of the Opposition related to the issue of gender inequality. This was perceived to be a 'blind spot' for the Conservatives for most of the New Labour years and, as was the case with environmentalist issues, Cameron sought to make this issue a crucial part of his appeal to the electorate as a way of signalling the modernisation of his party. Cameron attempted to place the issue of gender inequality at the forefront of his public pronouncements and, as part of this, directly attacked the way in which single mothers had been scapegoated by previous Conservative leaders and parts of the right-leaning press. The former primarily manifested itself in expressions of outrage on Cameron's part over the twin scandals of the lack of representation of women in politics and the gender pay gap in the private sector (Cameron, 2005; Cameron, 2006a). Meanwhile, in relation to the symptomatic figure of the single mother there was a marked shift in tone relative to Conservative Party discourse of the past, which viewed lone parenting as a cause of educational underachievement, moral decay and crime:

We do believe that stable relationships are important. And we do want to help girls avoid teenage pregnancy. But we reject the view that promoting the long-term interests of children means disregarding the claims of today's lone parents and their children. That's why, as well as all the things we want to do to promote stable relationships and to support married couples, we also need to think more about how society can help increase the well-being of lone parent families (Cameron, 2006c).

Something similar is also true in relation to the issue of 'same sex' marriages. In his discourse on 'supporting the family', Cameron clearly primarily has in mind marriage between a man and a woman, yet it is also clear that those who enter into same sex marriages modelled after 'traditional' marital arrangements are also welcomed into the fold:

Pledging yourself to another means doing something brave and important... You are publicly saying: it's not just about me, me, me anymore... And by the way, it means something whether you're a man and a woman, a woman and a woman or a man and another man. That's why we were right to support civil partnerships, and I'm proud of that (Cameron, 2006f).

Changing Ideological Dividing Lines in Cameronite Discourse

What the preceding analysis illustrates is that Cameron's Big Society discourse represented a movement away from the kind of hegemonic politics practiced by the

Conservative party since the late-1970s. Modelled after the modernisation project undertaken by Blair in the early-1990s, which resulted in New Labour, the objective of the Big Society was to dismantle many of the antagonisms which had sustained Thatcherism and to attempt to hegemonise a range of social demands which had up to that point been seen as incompatible with the demands of the Conservative 'base', by means of the expansion of a logic of difference. However, what is most notable about Cameron's hegemonic politics in relation to the hegemonic projects which preceded the Big Society, and which had previously served to give the broader neo-liberal governmental project a basis for its popular support, is the fact that the ideological dividing lines which currently structure it are not the same as the ideological dividing lines which structured it at the outset. In other words, whereas Thatcherism remained a highly divisive political discourse structured around the same set of antagonisms and the same Thatcherite 'common sense' from its inception to its eventual supersession by New Labour, and whereas the New Labour project was underpinned by Blairite globalisation discourse and all that entailed right up until Brown's demise after the 2008 financial crisis, the ideological dividing lines that structured Cameron's Big Society discourse were significantly recalibrated just a few years after the project's inception (and arguably before Cameron even became Prime Minister), which has meant that the Big Society no longer forms the basis of Cameron's hegemonic appeal.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the Big Society was abandoned as the centrepiece of Cameron's hegemonic strategy. Indeed, some such as Kerr (2007) have cast doubt on the notion that the Big Society ever represented a significant departure from Thatcherism and have argued that the Big Society was, even during Cameron's early

years as Leader of the Opposition, a simple restatement of the basic principles of Thatcherism, albeit in a more palatable form. Meanwhile, others such as Tim Bale (2008) have acknowledged the novelty of Big Society discourse, but have argued that there was a noticeable shift in Cameron's rhetoric and the broader Conservative hegemonic strategy from late-2007 onwards, when Cameron re-focused his attention on a number of issues which had preoccupied his predecessors – such as the family, crime and immigration – but without any attempt to soften the public perception of the Conservatives in relation to any of these issues, as he had done previously. However, notwithstanding the fact that there may well have been something of a shift in Cameron's rhetorical style of the kind identified by Bale prior to the formation of the coalition government, this can only have been a matter of emphasis rather than a wholesale transformation, because the Big Society continued to be an important part of the public face of the Cameron project at least up until the 2010 general election. After all, Cameron's most important speech on the Big Society (his Hugo Young memorial lecture) came in late-2009, and the Conservative's manifesto for the 2010 general election was titled *Invitation to Join the Government of Britain*. With this being the case it is probably closer to the truth to identify August 2011 as the turning point in Cameron's hegemonic strategy given that it was only after the riots of that month that there was a significant transformation in the shape of the hegemonic bloc towards which Cameron directed his appeal, and that it was at this point that Cameron began constructing a new 'picture of reality' – which borrowed heavily from the picture of reality provided by Thatcherism – in place of the Big Society.

The riots of August 2011 ought to be considered a particularly important event in the unfolding of the Cameron project because, for Cameron, they seemed to throw into sharper relief the fundamental problem with which he had been grappling ever since he became Conservative leader, signalling as they did the moral collapse of large sections of British society, and it was at this point that the 'broken Britain' theme which had formed an important part of his earlier Big Society discourse came to the fore in a new, more intractable form. The discursive framing of 'broken Britain' had changed: whereas 'broken Britain' was previously articulated as a matter of fixing Britain's 'broken' political system, which had been rendered obsolete due to the onset of the 'post-bureaucratic age' (Cameron, 2009a), and Britain's 'broken' economy, which was seen to be imbalanced between regions, over-reliant on just a handful of sectors and in need of the lighter regulatory touch only possible by means of the uptake of Cameron's Big Society (Cameron, 2010), it was now framed in terms reminiscent of authoritarian populist Thatcherite discourse on the morally enervating effect of the welfare state.

For Cameron, the riots were a symptom of a culture which had been perverted by an overweening state that encouraged dependency and personal irresponsibility, and any acknowledgement of the role played by underlying social problems such as poverty and inequality, which we might have expected from Cameron *circa* 2009, was entirely absent. As such, they were to be treated as instances of pure criminality. In this relation, Cameron also explicitly linked the riots to the activities of street gangs in Britain's major cities. The following passage makes clear the extent to which the 'thug' involved with violent street gangs acted as a symptomatic figure in Cameron's post-riots political discourse:

At the heart of all the violence sits the issue of the street gangs. Territorial, hierarchical and incredibly violent, they are mostly composed of young boys, mainly from dysfunctional families... They have blighted life on their estates with gang on gang murders and unprovoked attacks on innocent bystanders. In the last few days there is some evidence that they have been behind the coordination of the attacks on the Police and the looting that has followed (Cameron 2011).

Evident here is a clear shift in the tone of Cameron's rhetoric, which was reflective of a broader shift in Cameron's hegemonic politics in a more exclusionary direction, or in the direction of what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) would refer to as the expansion of a logic of equivalence. Whereas prior to August 2011 Cameron seemed preoccupied with breaking down the series of antagonisms which structured Thatcherite discourse, and which were seen early on by Cameron and other 'modernisers' within the party to be detrimental to consecutive Conservative leaders' attempts to formulate a winning electoral strategy, Cameron was now seeking to rebuild many of those antagonisms and was using them to fashion a new electoral coalition.

We must fight back against the attitudes and assumptions that have brought parts of our society to this shocking state... Do we have the determination to confront the slow-motion moral collapse that has taken place in parts of our country these past few generations? Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequences. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort. Crime without punishment. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without

control. Some of the worst aspects of human nature tolerated, indulged - sometimes even incentivised - by a state and its agencies that in parts have become literally demoralised (Cameron, 2011).

This passage brings to light the basic contours of a new ideological divide structuring Cameron's political discourse. On one side of this divide stands 'hard-working families', the 'responsible majority', engaged in community life and willing to embrace his plans for the Big Society; on the other, 'thugs' in street gangs and 'disruptive families' terrorising whole neighbourhoods, absentee fathers who neither parent their children nor contribute financially to their upbringing, single mothers living a life of fecklessness while the taxpayer foots the bill, the benefits system which actively encourages this behaviour, criminals taking advantage of a 'soft' law and order regime, and a school system rife with indiscipline, and which is failing our children.

Gone are the overtures described above that Cameron made to single mothers in the period immediately after becoming Conservative leader, having been replaced by an image of single mothers as the root cause of the moral breakdown which led to the riots. Gone also are Cameron's kind words to teachers and other public sector workers, now articulated as part of the problem - a failed 'second line of defence' in the fight against generalised moral decay. As part of this shift in Cameron's hegemonic politics there was also a noticeable hardening of Cameron's rhetoric in relation to preceding New Labour governments, with the left/right ideological divide that had apparently become an anachronism by the mid-2000s coming to the fore once again. Whereas previously Cameron had framed himself as the 'heir to Blair', and by various other means sought to

signal the large degree of overlap between the politics of New Labour and the politics of his 'modernised' Conservative party, by this point the Labour party had once again become anathema. In this relation, Labour leader Ed Miliband was discursively articulated, in a fashion unlike other Labour leaders of the recent past, as 'Red Ed' – that is, as a left-wing firebrand in the 'old Labour' mould – in large parts of the right-leaning news media, but this was only an extension of the way in which Miliband's politics was portrayed in Cameron's political discourse.

As was noted above, during much of his time as Leader of the Opposition Cameron based his critique of the then Labour government on the notion that the latter's major failing was that it was less well-equipped than the Conservative party to implement the set of policies that both major parties had agreed were the necessary response to globalisation, due to the fact that the Conservatives were the 'natural party of government' and that Labour's history of Fabian socialism meant that its approach to the reform of the public services inevitably proved to be too statist in nature. In Cameron's new reading, however, the choice between the Labour party and the Conservatives had become one between two almost entirely incompatible worldviews, with Cameron articulating Labour's legacy as the moral decay of the nation, widespread social breakdown (manifested most clearly in the August 2011 riots, but also in such things as a general decline in civic-mindedness), unacceptably high levels of crime, a weak economy, mass unemployment, poverty and massive government debt, and with Ed Miliband articulated as this legacy's defender.

As part of this transformation in Conservative party discourse there was a growing preoccupation with public sector workers and the trade unions. The former were articulated as agents of ‘producer capture’ in the public sector – as ‘vested interests’ holding back necessary reforms for reasons of self-interest – and as proponents of an ‘everybody wins’ culture within the education system that has served to undermine discipline in the classroom and to diminish the competitive spirit of young people at the cost of social harmony and national economic productivity (Cameron, 2012a). Meanwhile, the latter were discursively articulated in much the same way that they were in Thatcherite discourse, as ‘militants’ motivated by an outdated ideology, intent on wrecking the government’s necessary reforms to the public services at a time of great national turmoil. Education secretary Michael Gove’s attacks on the teaching unions resisting the expansion of the Free Schools policy and other changes to pay and conditions are particularly noteworthy in this regard (see for example Gove, 2012; Gove, 2013).

Perhaps the single most significant shift in Conservative party discourse subsequent to the 2010 general election was the emergence of the discursive constructs of the ‘shirker’ and the ‘striver’. These terms are most closely associated with Chancellor George Osborne, who in remarks that were widely reported at the time argued in his 2012 Conservative party conference speech that:

Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbour sleeping

off a life on benefits? When we say we're all in this together, we speak for that worker. We speak for all those who want to work hard and get on (Osborne, 2012).

Clearly evident in this kind of rhetoric is an attempt to construct an antagonistic relationship between 'working people' and the various groups who are articulated within Conservative discourse as being a drain on this 'responsible' majority. This is more clearly illustrated in a passage from later on in the same speech:

how can we justify the incomes of those out of work rising faster than the incomes of those in work? How can we justify giving flats to young people who have never worked, when working people twice their age are still living with their parents because they can't afford their first home? How can we justify a system where people in work have to consider the full financial costs of having another child, whilst those who are out of work don't? (Osborne, 2012)

The message that George Osborne was sending in this speech and others like it was that, if you are not happy with your pay or the amount of tax you are paying, blame the 'shirkers'; if you are not happy with your housing, blame the 'shirkers'; if wish you could have another child (or even a first child) but cannot afford to, blame the 'shirkers' – and if you vote for the Conservative party we will do something about them.

However, this kind of discourse was not limited to George Osborne's public appearances, with other key Conservative figures, including Cameron, also adopting this

more exclusivist strategy around the same time. At the 2012 Conservative party conference, Cameron set out his vision of the 'aspiration nation' which, much like Osborne's vision pitting the hard done-by shift worker against the shirker 'sleeping off a life of benefits', seeks to construct an antagonism between the self-reliant 'doers' and those living the easy life thanks to welfare state largesse:

What are hard-working people who travel long distances to get into work and pay their taxes meant to think when they see families – individual families – getting 40, 50, 60 thousand pounds of housing benefit to live in homes that these hard working people could never afford themselves? (Cameron, 2012c).

Although it is true that, even at his most 'modern' and 'compassionate', Cameron never did advocate a wholesale rethink of Conservative party policy on welfare – for example, there was never any suggestion that he was in favour of loosening the eligibility criteria for any of the main benefits, or of increasing the value of any of those benefits – there was nevertheless a marked shift in the *tone* of Cameron's rhetoric on welfare, and whereas prior to the 2010 general election most of his key speeches and key policy announcements were on such topics as 'community', the environment and social justice (that is, topics designed to signal the modernisation of the Conservative party), subsequent to the August 2011 riots the topic of welfare seemed to become a preoccupation of his. Cameron came to fetishise 'tough' measures in relation to welfare, making great political capital out of coalition policies such as the benefits cap, the re-assessment of all of Disability Living Allowance recipients and, more recently, plans to limit annual increases in working-age benefits to one per cent for the three years after

2013. Indeed, at times Cameron appeared to go much further on the topic of welfare than even his most right-wing forebears as Conservative leader. In one 2012 speech, Cameron (2012b) raised the possibility of, among other things: time-limiting unemployment benefits, stopping Local Housing Allowance and Housing Benefit for young people, requiring that all new claimants of Job Seekers Allowance submit a CV and demonstrate proficiency in literacy and numeracy before being granted any benefits, requiring high-earners to move out of social housing, making greater use of in-kind rather than cash benefits, requiring people work full-time for benefits, barring people who 'haven't paid into the system' from receiving any benefits whatsoever, and tightening eligibility criteria for new mothers. Meanwhile, in another instance of the hardening of the previously amorphous left/right ideological divide in Cameron's post-riots discourse, opponents of the government's welfare reforms were depicted as deluded leftists and even 'Trotskyists' (Cameron, 2012a).

Explaining the Failure of the Big Society as Hegemonic Project

With all of this being the case, we can say that the hegemonic component of the Cameron project underwent a fundamental transformation after the initial period in which Cameron set out his vision of the Big Society. However, this still leaves us without any explanation as to why this transformation took place, and it is important that we arrive at such an explanation given the fact that the Big Society was both Cameron's supposed 'guiding philosophy' and the hegemonic basis upon which the continuation of the neo-liberal governmental project was to proceed. One potentially useful way of explaining this transformation in Conservative party discourse under Cameron is provided by Bale (2012: 277). Bale argues that this transformation was part of a

strategy of 'brand decontamination' followed by 'rebalancing', and that the main problem the Conservatives faced throughout the New Labour years was not that its policies were fundamentally unpopular – because they were not – but rather that the Conservative party brand was so badly damaged that the electorate refused to even grant the party a hearing. With this being the case, the goal behind the Big Society was to clearly signal to the electorate that the Conservative party of David Cameron was not the Conservative party of Margaret Thatcher and John Major and, in so doing, to regain from the electorate 'permission to be heard', at which point it could return to the traditional Tory themes that had been the basis of the party's success throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. In practical terms, this involved carrying out the succession of 'signalling acts' described above in order to depict the Conservative party as having 'modernised', before returning to a variety of traditional Tory themes from late-2007 onwards. As Bale (2008: 278) notes, it was around this time that Cameron appeared to revert to a more traditionally Thatcherite stance, redirecting his focus towards issues of crime and immigration.

However, this line of argument – that the Conservatives under Cameron pursued a policy of 'decontamination' followed by 'rebalancing' – lacks coherence. As was shown above, the defining feature of the Big Society was that it was predicated on the expansion of a logic of difference – that it was an instance of 'the politics of *and*' (Bale, 2008: 279, my emphasis) – in the sense that it sought to discursively articulate a range of traditional Tory concerns with such things as support for the family and lightening the regulatory burden on business with the concerns of voters who had been alienated by Thatcherism in relation to such things as gay marriage and investment in public

services. That is to say, the Big Society project was from the outset simultaneously about 'decontamination' *and* 'rebalancing', and never just about the former as a means of setting the stage for the latter.

Bale's line of argument is also inconsistent in the sense that, from the perspective of Cameron *et al*, it would not have made sense to pursue a strategy of 'decontamination' followed by 'rebalancing' for the simple reason that they would have to have known that the 'decontamination' phase would be likely to alienate the Tory base and that, *vice versa* – assuming that 'decontamination' did win over some centre ground voters – the act of 'rebalancing' would cause the party to haemorrhage precisely those voters due to the fact that their initial alienation from the Conservative party was attributable to the Thatcherite strategies pursued by Cameron's predecessors. Furthermore, if all of this was simply a matter of 'rebalancing' it would not have been necessary to abandon the discourse of the Big Society – but that is exactly what has happened. The type of Conservative party discourse that emerged shortly after the formation of the coalition government cannot be considered an instance of 'the politics of *and*' because the antagonisms constructed within the latter were not part of the expansion of a logic of difference. They were part of a reorientation of Conservative discourse around a logic of equivalence which amounted to an instance of 'the politics of *or*' – that is, you can be tough on crime *or* empathetic towards criminals, you can be for economic prosperity *or* public sector workers, you can be for the family *or* single mothers.

As such, it is sensible to argue that the line of argument put forward by Bale grants too much intentionality to Cameron *et al*, and that at least part of the reason for the abandonment of Big Society discourse lay in its failure in hegemonic terms. The notion that the Big Society failed is almost taken as a given – even in the academic literature on the subject – such was the antipathy with which the concept was met by voters, as demonstrated principally by the failure of the Conservative party to win outright the 2010 general election despite 13 years of Labour rule, the incumbency of a deeply unpopular Prime Minister in the shape of Gordon Brown, and the largest economic downturn in at least a generation. But precisely why did the Big Society fail? One possible explanation is that the failure of the Big Society was due to the exhaustion of the marketisation of politics. Simply put, voters had become fatigued with the kinds of sophisticated marketing techniques, borrowed from the private sector, used by the major political parties, of which the ‘Big Society’ was the latest and most egregious instance (Albrow, 2012: 114).

A second possible explanation for the failure of the Big Society relates to the fact that the Big Society was – to a large extent – a repeat of Blair’s ‘modernisation’ project of the early-1990s. It was noted above that Cameron sought to appear in the public’s mind to be the ‘heir to Blair’, and that Cameron discursively articulated his leadership of the Conservatives – in much the same way that Blair discursively articulated his leadership of the Labour party – as a matter of modernising his party before going on to modernise the country as a whole so that it would be fit to compete in a world of intense international economic competition. However, this proved to be problematic for Cameron because the New Labour discourse he was aping was by this point already

losing its hegemonic capacity due to the loss of public trust in Blair after the Iraq War and the damage done to the reputation Brown had built-up as the 'Iron Chancellor' after the 2008 financial crash, as well as widespread public dissatisfaction with the seeming disregard for civil liberties exhibited by successive New Labour governments – best exemplified by the furore over ID cards – and the overweening, target-driven approach Labour had adopted in relation to reform of the public services. In addition, by the mid-2000s Blairite discourse on globalisation had lost some of its effectiveness thanks to a groundswell of anti-globalisation sentiment following a succession of large-scale anti-globalisation protests in the UK and elsewhere from the late-1990s onwards, as well as because of what has to be considered the failure of the Blairite globalisation project to deliver the benefits that Blair promised it would bring in terms of generalised prosperity. The fact that Cameron sought to ape much of this kind of Blairite discourse at the precise moment when the wheels were falling off the Blair project inevitably made it more difficult for him to put together a viable hegemonic 'offering' than would otherwise have been the case.

Also significant in this relation is the fact that Cameron *et al* failed to properly 'translate' the discourse of the Big Society into an appealing popular vernacular. That is, they failed to find a way to make the Big Society *resonate* with peoples' lived experiences in the way that the more successful hegemonic projects of the recent past had done. As was argued in chapter two, one of the reasons for the success of Thatcherism was that Thatcherism – as a discourse or hegemonic project – provided its subjects with an appealing new 'way of being' in the world – a set of subject positions they could use in order to construct for themselves a new identity, a range of historical narratives they

could use in order to make sense of the present, a vision of the good society and of the steps necessary in order to achieve it. Cameronism – if it can even be considered a project worthy of such a designation – did no such thing.

From the image of the conservative trade unionist (who Thatcher counterposed to the ‘unrepresentative Communists, Trotskyists and International Socialists’ within the movement), able to spend more of their own money thanks to Thatcher’s tax cuts and striving for the chance to own their own home for the first time thanks to the *Right to Buy* (Thatcher, 1976; Thatcher, 1978b); to the image of the small business-owner hoping to climb the social ladder by growing their business in Thatcher’s deregulated capitalist utopia; to the image of what became the Gordon Gekko, ‘work hard, play hard’ city slicker, earning vast amounts of money trading stocks and shares in a glass tower somewhere in the City of London – all of this proved to be infinitely more appealing to the ordinary man or woman on the street than Cameron’s ill-defined ‘social entrepreneurialism’ or his suggestion that we prioritise the amorphous notion of ‘General Well Being’ over the GDP of economic orthodoxy (Cameron, 2006d; Cameron, 2006e).

Similarly, the discursive framing of the ‘Third Way’ by New Labour was to prove far more effective than Cameron’s elaboration of the Big Society. When Blair became leader of the Labour party the circumstances were ripe for some kind of transcendence of Thatcherism and Blair *really did* represent, in the eyes of the public, the modernisation of both the Labour party and of Britain, and what New Labour offered did seem to many

to be a feasible third way between Thatcherism and a simple return to the 'post-war consensus'. As Finlayson (1998: 23) has noted, the jargon of modernisation borrowed heavily from the language of the labour movement, Marxist political activism and New Right economic theories to bind together a variety of 'political, economic and intellectual constituencies' (see also Randall, 2009, Clarke *et al*, 2007 and Yusuf and Broussine, 2003).

Much of this kind of rhetoric featured in Cameron's plans for the Big Society but proved to be much less effective – not only because the subjects of Big Society discourse were effectively being presented with these subject positions and this view of the world for the second time in a generation, but also because this kind of discourse lacks credibility coming from a Conservative politician, given repeated failed attempts at 'decontaminating' the Conservative party brand – even if, had Cameron been a more skilful exponent of symbolic politics, there was a rich tradition of Conservative thought on the importance of community (most notably stemming from the conservatism of Edmund Burke) that Cameron could have drawn on to make his 'Big Society' take on New Labour's communitarianism a more enticing prospect (Edwards, 2011; Jennings, 2011; Dorey and Garnett, 2012). Furthermore, as an empty signifier, Cameron himself was a much less attractive proposition than either Thatcher or Blair. This is important because, in any hegemonic project of the kind Cameron undertook, political leaders like Cameron are often the most important empty signifier, and the one around which the whole project is structured (Simons, 2011: 210). Thatcher – whatever her faults – was genuinely charismatic, enjoyed the novelty of being the first female British Prime Minister (and the opprobrium she received from the left due to her failure to, in their

eyes, *act like* the first female British Prime Minister), was a highly divisive political figure, and was someone whose legend benefited enormously thanks to fortuitous military victory in the Falklands (Britain's first such victory in a generation) and the nomenclature of the 'Iron Lady' bestowed upon her by the Soviets (a badge of honour for someone like Thatcher if there ever was one) (Rose, 1988).

Blair meanwhile seemed to almost radiate 'modernisation', largely thanks to his youth at the time of becoming Prime Minister (which contrasted starkly with his Conservative contemporaries, many of whom were visibly jaded after such a long period in office), his seeming radical streak, and his vision of a future for Britain in the world beyond the imperialist nostalgia of the Thatcher years (Finlayson, 1998: 14). He also made great political capital out of his proclivity for international adventurism, staking out new territory in the field of 'liberal interventionism'. This all made him seem like a genuine statesman and he was – in his own way – almost as divisive a figure as Thatcher, thanks to his conflict with what he considered to be the unreconstructed wing of his own party during his attempts to modernise the Labour brand and, later on, half of the nation over the Iraq War. After all, a professed socialist Labour leader from Scotland allying with an ex-alcoholic, born-again Christian Texan US President and his collection of neo-conservative friends intent on remoulding the geo-political map of the world was always going to be an interesting proposition. Cameron by comparison seemed to lack charisma and intrigue, being the Eton- and Oxford-educated son of a stockbroker from Berkshire, his professional life consisting of a stint in public relations for a television company and time served as a special advisor to Norman Lamont in the early-1990s (Peele, 2012: 1207).

The image Cameron presented to the electorate was that of a nice family man (not opposed to doing the dishes or changing a nappy every once in a while); 'sensible' in the old Tory mould, but naturally kinder than the vaguely menacing Michael Howard or William Hague, who struggled from the outset as party leader to disassociate himself from Thatcher. Meanwhile, Cameron's own account of his mission in politics – namely, to 'fix Labour's mess' so that the rate of interest the British government pays on its borrowing in international bond markets does not increase by more than a few percentage points – did not compare favourably to Thatcher's great mission to turn back the tide of socialism both at home and abroad, and Blair's great efforts to drag the British economy and society into the 21st century, seeming somewhat inconsequential by comparison. It may well have been the case that, if Cameron had fully committed to the Big Society ideal as outlined in, for example, Blond (2010) and Norman (2010) – which in its most radical incarnations amounted to a critique not only of New Labour's statist approach to the reform of the public services, but also of the failings of neo-liberalism, both in economic terms (that is, in terms of ensuring that 'a rising tide lifts all boats') and in terms of freeing people from the bureaucratic burden imposed on them by the Keynesian welfare state (in the sense that, in many instances, neo-liberalism merely replaced public 'red tape' in the form of, for example, means testing of certain benefits, with private 'red tape' in the form of stricter managerial control exercised over workers by managers, and over managers by auditors) – then the Cameron project might have gained more traction among the electorate.

However, in the event, it transpired that Cameron was unable to fully commit to the Big Society ideal due to the exigencies of party management: what distinguished the context of the Conservative party's modernisation drive in the mid-2000s from Labour's in the mid-1990s was that, whereas Labour had already tried and failed to find success with a 'one last heave' strategy in the 1992 general election, this strategy seemed more feasible for the Conservatives in the mid-2000s due to the unpopularity of Brown as Prime Minister and the fact that Britain had just experienced the largest financial crisis and economic downturn in a generation. As such, Cameron encountered more resistance from within his own party than Blair did within his, and this left Cameron unable to construct an effective modernisation strategy, stuck as he was between tentative advances in such issue areas as the environment and investment in public services, and constantly having to shore up his 'core' support in the Thatcherite wing of the party (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2012: 586).

The result of this was that he was less well equipped than he otherwise would have been to do the difficult work of making the 'social entrepreneur' and other assorted subject positions associated with the Big Society project an attractive proposition. For much the same reason, these constraints can be said to have undermined the symptomatic figures of Cameronite discourse. Take for example the symptomatic figure of the 'scrounger': in Thatcherite discourse this symptomatic figure was effective because there was no equivocation – the 'scrounger' was an enemy from the outset. However, in Cameron's case, his initial modernisation drive in which he went out of his way to soften Conservative party rhetoric on single mothers and 'hoodies' muddied the waters and it was consequently much more difficult to articulate the 'scrounger' as an enemy after

doing so much to 'detoxify' the Conservative party brand. Furthermore, after the best part of three decades of the political class demonising this discursive construct and implementing policies designed to eliminate abuse of the benefits system and the culture of worklessness that supposedly goes with it, political promises to target welfare scroungers were bound to prove less effective than they were in Thatcher's – and even Blair's – day.

This also meant that the Big Society never functioned effectively as an empty signifier: it was sufficiently polysemous to perform this role, in the sense that it meant a number of different things to different political constituencies, but instead of representing the fulfilment of a broad range of social demands, the Big Society actually came to represent their frustration. For retrograde Conservatives it represented the abandonment of Thatcherism and a capitulation to a nonsensical Blairite form of politics based on 'triangulation'; for those on the left of the political spectrum it represented a veil for a savage programme of government spending cuts and a reversal of the progressive achievements of successive New Labour governments; for those in the third sector (or as Cameron likes to refer to it, the 'first sector'), who are of central strategic importance to the Big Society, it represented an attack on the professionalism of third sector workers; and for everyone else, it seemed like a vacuous political slogan devoid of any substantive content. As a result, Cameron was unable to ever really *attain* hegemony in the way that Thatcher or Blair did and this is why the Big Society was ultimately abandoned as the hegemonic basis of the Cameron project (Albrow, 2012).

The Coalition Government and Neo-Liberal Governmentality

From the preceding analysis it should be clear that the Big Society represented an attempt to forge a new hegemonic settlement within British politics – albeit one which failed and which was later replaced by a re-worked version of Thatcherite authoritarian populism. However, it is also the case that the Big Society was the banner under which a new stage in the unfolding of the neo-liberal governmental project, which was inaugurated by Thatcherism and built upon by New Labour, took shape. In what follows attention is turned to this new stage in the neo-liberal governmental project. In particular, the argument is made that, under the coalition government, we have witnessed: a further refinement of the mechanisms of ‘control at a distance’ used by the centre to manage peripheral parts of the state apparatus as part of the implementation of public policy; further efforts to ‘responsibilise’ citizens as part of a broader effort to create an ‘active society’; a transformation in the discursive articulation of citizenship away from the image of the ‘citizen-consumer’ and towards the emergent image of the citizen as ‘co-producer’ of public policy; and the increasing sophistication of the centre’s understanding of the behaviour of citizens as part of a broader effort to apply insights from behavioural economics and social psychology to public policy.

From ‘Governmentality’ Back to ‘Governance’? Making Sense of the Apparently Retrograde Nature of Coalition Government Governmentality

As was noted above, a number of journalistic and academic commentators have seen in the Big Society a thinly veiled reversion to Thatcherite type on the part of the Conservative party in government. The argument put forward by Dexter Whitfield (2012) would seem to support this view given that, for Whitfield, the defining feature of

the Cameron project thus far has been the extent to which it has sought to open-up new opportunities for capital accumulation within the public sector. In the first instance, this has taken the form of the coalition government stepping-up the privatisation programme it inherited from New Labour. This programme envisions the privatisation of a broad array of parts of the state apparatus, including the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, National Air Traffic Services, Dartford Crossing, the Tote, the student loan portfolio, parts of the UK road network, parts of the remaining social housing stock under a revamped Right to Buy, 15% of publicly owned forestry land (although these plans were later aborted due to a massive public outcry), and the Royal Mail (Whitfield, 2012: 163).

In the second, it has taken the form of the coalition government's 'Open Public Services' agenda, which commits the latter to a vast expansion in the range of 'choice' experienced by users of public services. As the White Paper of the same name makes clear, Open Public Services enshrines the right for non-public sector providers to bid to provide almost any public service (with the sole exceptions being 'natural monopolies' such as tax and benefit administration and 'security-related' services such as the courts system and the 'core' functions of the police), and explicitly asserts that the salient fact in relation to the provision of any public service is not *who* provides it (that is, the public, private or third sector), but rather that it is provided at all: 'Apart from those public services where the Government has a special reason to operate a monopoly (e.g. the military) every public service should be open so that, in line with people's demands, services can be delivered by a diverse range of providers' (Cabinet Office, 2011b: 39).

Under the auspices of Open Public Services plans have been put forward to encourage private and third sector providers to compete with public sector providers in the delivery of a range of public services. These include, in relation to local authority services, customer contact, planning, property and facilities management, back-office transactional services, family support, support for looked-after children, trading standards and environmental services, early education services and housing management; and in relation to services provided by central government, court and tribunal administration, payment processing, prevention, detection and investigation of fraud, debt management and enforcement services, land and property information services, select NHS services, community services, back-office functions for prosecutors, and immigration and visa administration (Cabinet Office, 2011b).

Whitfield (2012: 186) acknowledges that the coalition government's privatisation programme and, in particular, its open public services agenda have been discursively framed as part of the expansion of a 'Big Society', in the sense that they are ostensibly designed to 'decentralise' power, increase 'choice' and motivate people to engage in social action, but argues that the likelihood of the Big Society becoming a reality – as manifested in, for example, a significant expansion of the role played by 'social enterprises' in the delivery of public services – is doubtful, and that the real significance of Big Society discourse in this relation is the role it plays in legitimising what would likely otherwise be a deeply unpopular programme of 'corporate welfare'. As Whitfield (2012: 182) notes, for the most part, social enterprises lack the resources needed in order to be able to tender for large government contracts on a level playing field with large corporations:

Contracts may require frontloading of financial investment and, therefore, the ability to raise capital, which is refunded by the public sector later in the contract. But most social enterprises do not have the financial resources and performance record to raise capital at competitive rates.

Indeed, there is already evidence to suggest that 'social enterprises' and other third sector groups (such as charities, voluntary groups, 'community' groups, and mutuals) are unlikely to be the main beneficiaries of the coalition government's reforms to the public services and that the major beneficiary has, in fact – and by a large margin – thus far been the cadre of large, often multinational private sector groups such as ATOS, A4e and G4S that specialise in the delivery of out-sourced public services. For example, 38 of the 40 DWP contracts issued as part of the introduction of the coalition government's Work Programme have gone to these groups (Whitfield, 2012: 182). Nevertheless, to suggest that this amounts to evidence that the coalition government represents a simple return to Thatcherism oversimplifies matters enormously, and it is possible to see why through a consideration of the nature of the deregulatory moment within the Cameron project.

As was noted above, one of the defining features of the Thatcher project was its desire to 'roll-back' parts of the social liberal state in order to clear the way for the subsequent 'roll-out' of advanced liberal forms of government in the late-1980s and under New Labour, and deregulating both the economy and the public services was a major part of

this (even though the extent to which the public services were actually 'deregulated' under Thatcher is commonly overstated). As Whitfield (2012: 136) notes, and as is clear from any number of coalition government policy documents, deregulating both the economy and the public services is also a major part of the coalition government's plans, which are discursively framed by an image of the public services as suffocating under the weight of New Labour's Fabian socialism. Another way of phrasing this is to say that the coalition government, like the Thatcherite variant of neo-liberalism, is an instance of 'governance'.

It was argued above that, whereas Thatcherism was a form of 'governance' in the sense that it was chiefly concerned with incorporating new providers into the delivery of public services, and with managing the complex networks of public, private and third sector groups that result, New Labour is rightfully considered a form of 'governmentality', in the sense that it acknowledged the limitations of simple 'inter-organizational collaboration' and actively sought to remould the subjectivities of the diverse array of groups involved in the delivery of public services (Ling, 2000: 95). Within this schema, the coalition government arguably ought to be considered an instance of the former – that is, of 'governance' – given that the onus in the coalition government's reforms to the public services seems very much to be on 'opening-up' public services to a range of new providers in the same way that Thatcher 'opened-up', for example, local authority services such as refuse collection, cleaning, school catering, ground maintenance and vehicle repair, which had previously been provided by local authorities on a monopoly basis. Furthermore, there seems to be a distinct lack of interest on the part of the coalition government in building upon the apparatus

constructed by New Labour for the purposes of shaping the organisational subjectivities of peripheral state agencies, described in the previous chapter. Indeed, a number of the coalition government's major reforms to the public services thus far have been characterised by a marked lack of interest in the kind of 'micro-management' practiced by New Labour.

For example, the coalition government has taken what it calls a 'black box' commissioning approach in constructing its Work Programme, which entails a much greater degree of freedom for individual providers and an even stronger focus on outcomes on the part of the centre than had previously been the case, and which is justified on the grounds that interference in the affairs of said providers is counter-productive given their superior expertise:

Previous UK welfare-to-work programmes specified in varying levels of detail what interventions providers had to deliver. The Work Programme, in contrast, gives providers far greater flexibility to design programmes that will work, using their experience and creativity. Rather than asking providers to make one-size-fits-all services work for a wide range of participants with varying needs, government is providing freedom for providers to personalise support for the individual in a way that fits the local labour market (DWP, 2011: 9).

Much the same is true in relation to the coalition government's reforms to education, which have seen the abandonment of many of the levers used by New Labour to

conduct the conduct of schools on the grounds that they tended to foster a wasteful 'compliance culture' in schools and were – besides that – largely ineffective anyway. Measures taken in this regard include scaling back the role of auditors such as OfSTED so that they are focused more on assessing the quality of teaching and less on ensuring compliance with assorted dictates of the centre; lifting many centrally- and local authority imposed targets on schools; ending 'ring-fencing' in schools' budgets; removing requirements on local authorities to assign every maintained school a 'school improvement partner'; ending the contract between the Secretary of State and each Academy school; and further reducing prescription in relation to the National Curriculum – alongside other measures such as ending the practice of requiring teachers to formulate written lesson plans – so that schools are given greater freedom to innovate in relation to teaching methods (DfE, 2010).

However, this deregulatory moment in the politics of the coalition government cannot be taken as a reversion to a more rudimentary form of neo-liberalism because, at the same time as peripheral parts of the state apparatus have been unencumbered of the 'partnership' arrangements and other means of 'micro-management' imposed upon them by New Labour, new mechanisms of control have emerged. Under the coalition government, across a range of public services the same dynamic is at play in which providers of public services are given new freedoms, but are also expected to comply with a range of new 'accountability' mechanisms which ensure that they exercise those in ways that serve broader public policy objectives. For example, in the case of the coalition government's Work Programme, accountability is delivered by paying providers almost entirely on the basis of the results they achieve. Results are measured

in terms of sustainable 'job outcomes' for participants in the programme, with providers receiving a 'start fee' for each new participant (which the government aims to eliminate entirely in future on the grounds that it is an impediment to true payment-by-results), a 'job outcome payment' after a participant enters employment, and a series of 'sustainment payments' payable at regular intervals for as long as a participant is able to stay in employment, for a period of up to two years.

Furthermore, this system of payment-by-results is weighted in order to incentivise Work Programme providers to support those participants who are furthest away from the labour market, such as the long-term unemployed, people with a disability and 'vulnerable' groups such as recent prison leavers. For example, the maximum overall amount payable to Work Programme providers for helping JSA claimants between the ages of 18-24 into sustained work is £3,700, but providers can earn up to £13,700 for helping participants found to have 'a limited capability for work' and who have been receiving benefits for a number of years to achieve the same outcomes (DWP, 2011). Within this system, as long as providers are able to demonstrate success against the criteria established by the DWP they are granted more or less complete freedom to support participants as they see fit. This ensures that the same objectives are met as in the old system – that is, that levels of unemployment are reduced – but in a more efficient manner.

Similarly, a range of new accountability mechanisms have been introduced, and a number of existing ones strengthened, in relation to the coalition government's reforms

to education. Following on from New Labour, GCSE pass rates are to be the 'principal accountability mechanism for... schools' under the coalition government's plans for education (DfE, 2010: 42), but in a radicalisation of New Labour's policy of 'intervention in inverse proportion to success', the coalition government envisions a system in which high-performing schools are almost entirely unencumbered of any responsibilities to submit to audit and inspection, while low-performing schools failing to meet 'minimum performance levels' will be served with 'appropriate intervention and support for improvement' (DfE, 2010: 70). More specifically, a new 'floor' standard will be set of 35 per cent of pupils achieving five A*-C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics in secondary schools, and 60 per cent of pupils achieving level four in English and mathematics in primary schools, and failure to meet these standards will trigger intervention by the centre. The form taken by this intervention will be tailored to the particular needs of each individual 'failing' school, but will also be guided by the principle that schools taking on Academy status is the quickest route to success (DfE, 2010: 71). In this relation, schools are primarily accountable to the centre, but there has also been a conscious effort to increase the role of parents and communities in holding schools to account.

This is to be achieved primarily by means of empowering parents as *consumers* of education services – including providing them with the information necessary in order to make informed 'purchasing' decisions – but also by means of giving parents a greater say in the day-to-day running of schools. It was noted above that league tables have been a feature of neo-liberal education policy since the first Thatcher government, and that their purpose is to create a quasi-market in education. However, under the

coalition government the range of information made available to parents in relation to schools has been expanded massively and, whereas in the past parents were expected to choose a school for their children based on information on GCSE pass rates and good 'word of mouth' in the local area, they now have access to, among other things, information on attainment in specific subjects, effectiveness in teaching high-, average- and low-attaining pupils, trends in attainment over time, the 'educational destinations' of pupils, class sizes, attendance levels, composition of the student body, financial information, spending per pupil, admissions information, information on how each individual school has tailored the National Curriculum to its own needs, information on the teaching methods used at each individual school, setting information, the behaviour policy of each individual school and the full text of OfSTED reports. Furthermore, there has been a conscious effort on the part of the coalition government to present all of this information in the most easily accessible format possible so as to make it as easy as possible for parents to carry out their duty as informed consumers of educational services (DfE, 2010; Cabinet Office, 2011b; Cabinet Office, 2012b).

Meanwhile, parents have also been given a greater say in the day-to-day running of schools through changes to the structure of school governing bodies designed to 'clarify governing body accountabilities and responsibilities to focus more strongly on strategic direction'; ensure that governing bodies operate in a more professional manner by encouraging schools to 'appoint trained clerks who can offer expert advice and guidance', and to include more people with 'business or management experience' as governing body members; reduce the size of school governing bodies so that they are able to be more 'decisive' in arriving at important decisions; and ensure a minimum of

two parent governors on each school governing body (DfE, 2010: 71). The thinking behind these reforms – considered as a whole – is that competition between educational providers (adjudicated by informed parents as consumers of educational services) will push up school standards and school failure will be prevented due to the activism of parents on school governing bodies, with the ideal end-point being a situation in which educators feel both ‘highly trusted to do what they believe is right and highly *responsible* for the progress of every child’ (DfE, 2010: 18, my emphasis).

Within this new system the role of the centre, rather than being to remould the organisational subjectivities of groups at the periphery of the state apparatus by such means as targets and ‘partnership’ arrangements, is to ensure that mechanisms of accountability are functioning to produce good public policy outcomes, thereby obviating the need for the centre to concern itself with the internal workings of these groups. In the case of the Work Programme, this means calibrating the system of payment-by-results under which Work Programme providers are paid so that it incentivises the desired outcomes in terms of findings clients work and minimises the ability of providers to ‘game’ the system by, for example, ‘cherry picking’ the easiest case work – something which is no easy task given the vast opportunities for such gaming in a round of contracting-out worth billions of pounds. Meanwhile, in the case of the coalition government’s reforms to education, this means constantly working to ensure that parents are equipped with the information they need in order to make sensible ‘purchasing’ decisions in relation to their children’s schooling – which is also no easy task given the difficulties inherent in gathering such a vast amount of information and presenting in such a way that it is able to be interpreted by as many parents as

possible, including those least well-equipped for the task (for example, older parents unfamiliar with the internet) and those least interested in the task. As such, the coalition government's reforms to the public services ought to be considered a *refinement* of New Labour's take on neo-liberalism, rather than a straightforward reversion to Thatcherite type on the part of the Conservative party.

Another reason why it is arguably a mistake to view the coalition government as a rehashed version of Thatcherite 'governance', is due to the ethopolitical strategies identified by Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, described above, which form an important part of the coalition government's take on neo-liberalism. In short, as Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley note, the 'small government' components of the Big Society identified by Whitfield to do with privatisation, contracting-out and public spending cuts are accompanied by a number of 'big government' ethopolitical strategies oriented towards remoulding the ethical outlook of citizens so as to make them more willing to engage in the kind of 'social action' which serves broader Big Society objectives. However, the problem with the argument put forward by Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley is that they overstate the significance of these ethopolitical strategies within the broader neo-liberal project of the coalition government.

Governmental and Ethical Self-Formation in Advanced Neo-Liberalism

The key to understanding why Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley's argument is flawed lies not just in grasping that many of the ethopolitical strategies pursued under the auspices of the Big Society are likely to fail (which implies that the real significance of the Big Society as

a governmental project lies elsewhere), but also in properly differentiating between what Dean (1995: 563) calls 'ethical self-formation' and 'governmental self-formation'. According to Dean, ethical self-formation 'concerns practices, techniques and rationalities concerning the regulation of the self by the self, and by means of which individuals seek to question, form, know, decipher and act on themselves.' As such, ethical self-formation – as an 'autonomous' regulatory mechanism grounded in the ethical outlook of the citizen – can be said to relate closely to the 'ethopolitics' that Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley refer to. Meanwhile, governmental self-formation concerns the various ways through which governmental authorities attempt to 'shape the conduct, aspirations, needs, desires and capacities' of individuals as part of achieving some kind of broader governmental objective.

The crucial difference between these two kinds self-formation lies in the self-regulatory aspect of ethical self-formation and the 'other'-regulatory aspect of governmental self-formation, which entails a much more overt and direct exercise of power. This difference can be better illustrated with an example: an instance of ethical self-formation in contemporary society would be any attempt at self-improvement on the part of the citizen (for example, in relation to improving physical health through exercise and diet) stemming from an interest in the 'self-help' genre of books, given that in this instance the 'governing' injunction is both formulated by and directed towards the self – the citizen engages in behaviours which have a beneficial effect on physical health – such as going to the gym, eating less red meat, and abstaining from the consumption of alcohol – after thoughtfully reflecting on a piece of literature and arriving at the conclusion that these behaviours are the key to a greater sense of self-

confidence, faster career progression, and a healthier love life, among other things. Meanwhile, an instance of governmental self-formation in contemporary society would be the *Change4Life* 'Sports Clubs' introduced into schools by the coalition government, which also aim to improve the physical health of citizens, but do so without the need for any kind of ethical self-reflection – that is, by means of fostering in school children a habit of regular participation in sports so that they are more likely to maintain a healthier lifestyle in later life (DfE, 2010: 35).

This distinction between ethical and governmental self-formation is, to a large extent, arbitrary given that in the real world they often bleed into one another. For example, it is difficult to maintain that the kind of ethical self-formation described above, to do with discourses of self-improvement, does not overlap with the efforts of public health agencies to promote public health given that, in recent decades, politicians and policy-makers have shown a growing awareness of both the limitations of 'Whitehall diktat', and the effectiveness of public health strategies which harness the transformative power of such discourses of self-improvement, in combating public health problems (see, for example, DoH, 2010: 15). Similarly, the kind of governmental self-formation described above, to do with *Change4Life* Sports Clubs in schools, will inevitably transform into a kind of ethical self-formation once the participants leave school given that, at that point, the only thing keeping them participating in sport on a regular basis will be an ethical outlook which values sport as an important part of a healthy lifestyle. However, this distinction between practices of ethical and governmental self-formation is useful for present purposes due to the fact that it serves to bring to light the limitations of Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley's account of the Big Society, because the Big Society

project incorporates not only the kinds of 'ethopolitical' strategies identified by Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, but also practices of governmental self-formation as part of hybrid formations of practices of governmental-ethical self-formation, or as part of what Henrik Bang (2004) has referred to as 'culture governance'. That is, 'a new steering situation in reflexive modernity where the expansion of self- and co-governance is becoming a prerequisite' in the performance of many state functions (Bang, 2004: 159).

Numerous coalition government policies can be said to incorporate practices of governmental-ethical self-formation – and none more so than the coalition government's welfare reforms. In making sense of these reforms it is useful to consider Dean's (1995: 567) arguments regarding the emergence of the 'active society' in thinking about support for the unemployed. According to Dean there has been a shift in recent decades in the discursive framing of support for the unemployed in the industrialised West, from a rights-based discourse which takes the provision of 'income security' as its primary objective to a contractarian discourse in which the state agrees to provide the unemployed person with an income, but only in return for the latter's agreement to undertake any activities which the state deems necessary in order to boost their 'employability'. Underlying this shift is an image of the post-war welfare state as a provider of 'passive' support for the unemployed – that is, support provided on an unconditional basis and which, as a result, tends to foster 'welfare dependency'.

The range of activities typically deemed necessary for the unemployed person to undertake in this new formulation will include not only 'job-seeking', but also training

of various kinds – from full-blown training courses to ‘short courses on particular skills’ and ‘linguistic and numeracy competency courses’ – and ‘job-preparation’ activities designed to improve the job-seeker’s physical and mental health, as well as their familiarity with the routines of the world of work, such as counselling and work experience, and participation in such things as ‘Job Clubs’ as a way of integrating the unemployed into social networks that have the potential to furnish job opportunities in the future (Dean, 1995: 574). Crucially for Dean (1995: 567), these practices of governmental-ethical self-formation are designed to work not only on the various capacities, attributes and dispositions of the unemployed person so as to better equip them for the world of work, but also to enlist the unemployed person *themselves* in the project of the creation of an ‘active subject’:

To be an active subject is to take an active role in the management and presentation of the self, to undertake a systematic approach to the search for a job, and, ultimately, if possible, to participate in the labour-force. If the latter is not possible, the job-seeker as active subject participates in activities that enhance his or her prospects of entering or returning to paid work, while at the same time remaining bound to social networks and engaging in practices that overcome those attributes (fatalism, boredom, loss of self-esteem) which constitute the ‘risk of dependency’ (Dean, 1995: 576).

In other words, the objective is to create an unemployed person who is not only willing to meet the conditions attached to their receipt of benefits and to be guided by the state in improving their employability, but also to internalise this discourse of the active subject and to govern *themselves* accordingly, becoming an ‘entrepreneur of the self’,

always seeking to build on the stock of human capital they holds in their quest to find employment. Within this discursive framing of support for the unemployed, the unemployed person is *responsibilised*, in the sense that they are seen to be responsible for their own unemployment. Wider structural factors which have a bearing on the rate of unemployment are left unacknowledged and unemployment is discursively articulated as a choice, with finding employment seen to be a simple matter of looking for work or, at most, taking advantage of the opportunities for self-capitalisation offered by systems of 'active' support for the unemployed.

'Responsibilisation' and the Creation of the 'Active Society' Under the Coalition Government

The coalition government's welfare reforms seek to responsabilise the unemployed and to create 'active' job-seekers in precisely this manner, and are justified in much the same terms, with reforms to welfare being discursively articulated as a shift from a 'passive' system of support to an 'active' one. In this sense, they represent the continuation of trends established under New Labour but, as should be clear from what follows, the coalition government has gone further in this direction than any previous government, with a much more comprehensive approach to 'activating' job-seekers tied to a much stricter conditionality regime than any previous government. The centrepiece of the coalition government's reforms to welfare is the Work Programme – a major new welfare-to-work scheme set-up to replace the array of existing welfare-to-work schemes established under New Labour. All JSA claimants as well as all Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants in the 'Work Related Activity Group' (that is, disabled people with a minor or short-term health problem that affects their ability to

work) are required to take part in the Work Programme after being in receipt of benefits for a specified period of time, with vulnerable claimants, such as NEETs (that is, those not in employment, education or training) under the age of 18, being 'fast-tracked' into the Work Programme, and with the programme being administered principally by a range of private and third sector 'providers' paid on the basis of the results they achieve in terms of securing sustained 'job outcomes' for their clients (DWP, 2011).

The range of participants' abilities and attributes the Work Programme seeks to act upon as a means of improving their 'employability' is very broad. As was noted above, the Work Programme has been constructed in such a way as to grant providers a large degree of freedom in developing their programmes of support for participants and, as such, the types of support given to participants varies from provider to provider. However, most Work Programme providers use 'Action Plans' to mandate activities to new participants. From a Foucauldian governmentality perspective these can be seen as instruments of governmental-ethical self-formation given that they specify, often in minute detail, the range of activities participants are expected to undertake in order to continue to receive their benefits, with the overarching objective being to improve the employability of participants. Mandated activities will typically include activities designed to improve participants' motivation, job-seeking skills and 'work-preparedness'. For example, the following three items are taken from an Action Plan issued by one of the largest Work Programme providers, A4e:

- ‘To complete an in work benefits calculation to establish the wages and hours that you can work for to be better off [sic] in work than on benefits.’
- ‘To attend introduction to money advice training session to learn about the support and services that are on offer to you.’
- ‘To attend the structured job search sessions to develop job search skills and networks [and, in those sessions, to] find 3 companies that you would like to work for and currently have vacancies and to research those companies.’

The objective behind the first of these is to motivate participants to seek work by highlighting for them the financial rewards of paid employment. The objective behind the second is to equip participants with better money-management skills in order to make the transition into paid work – and all of the careful budgeting that goes with it – seem less daunting. Meanwhile, the objective of the third is both to overcome the isolation of participants by integrating them into social networks and to familiarise participants with ‘best practice’ in relation to conducting an effective job search.

Another Work Programme provider, EOS, takes what it calls a ‘whole family approach’ to participant motivation and work-preparedness through its Support for Families programme. Support for Families represents a broadening in the scope of welfare-to-work programmes and the neo-liberal governmentality underpinning them in the sense that it views the family as a potential source of the problems which prevent individual Work Programme participants from finding work – such as a lack of motivation, educational underachievement, isolation from social networks, family breakdown, and criminality – and seeks to counteract these effects by offering whole families courses on

such things as 'Improving Relationships between Family Members', 'Raising Aspirations', 'Addressing Debt and Money Issues', and 'Reducing Isolation and Improving Participants Networks'. Underlying the Support for Families programme is the image of the 'problem family' afflicted with 'worklessness across generations' (eosworks.co.uk).

Action Plans also typically prescribe some kind of training and work experience to participants. The approach of EOS to prescribing training and work experience – which is typical of the approach taken by other Work Programme providers – is to rigorously assess the 'job aspirations', work experience and qualifications of each individual participant upon entry into the programme as part of an 'Initial Employability Assessment', before formulating a course of training for each individual participant designed to deal with any deficiencies in the participant's basic literacy and numeracy skills, and to equip the participant with particular skills which are found to be 'in-demand' in the local labour market based on EOS's own assessment. The training provided typically takes the form of short, low-cost, undemanding courses in such in-demand areas as office administration, construction, security, warehousing, retailing, casino work and catering, and can be provided 'in-house' by Work Programme providers themselves or by 'partner' organisations with specialist expertise (eosworks.co.uk).

Meanwhile, in relation to work experience, this typically takes the form of either a placement with a company in the private sector in order to expose participants to the

kind of work they can expect to find in the local labour market or a 'community benefit placement', which serves much the same purpose as far as the participant is concerned, but also has some kind of additional value to the local community. In this relation it is not unusual for Work Programme providers to emulate private sector recruitment agencies, actively soliciting requests from potential 'Host Employers' for specific types of work experience candidates, whether that be in relation to past work experience, the possession of certain necessary qualifications or the ability to work unusual shift patterns. The EOS website, for example, claims that:

Our highly skilled and dedicated teams have a wealth of experience and specialist knowledge within their own fields of account management. We will work with you to identify your recruitment needs, short-list high calibre candidates and provide them with the essential support and job-readiness skills to specifically match your requirements. Your tailor-made training programme will ensure that jobseekers are fully re-integrated into the pattern of working life and job-ready for their new role in your organisation (eosworks.co.uk).

Furthermore, in an effort to encourage more employers to engage with the work experience component of the Work Programme, providers will even go as far as to allow such employers to make use of providers' own premises for the purposes of staging work experience (which is, of course, doubly advantageous for employers given that they not only receive free labour, but also save on the cost of renting or buying work premises). EOS, for example, offers up space in their network of Employment Centres for Host Employers to use to set up makeshift work environments, which 'replicate real

business activities', so that Work Programme participants can be given the chance to demonstrate their aptitude for, and willingness to, work at minimal cost to potential employers (eosworks.co.uk).

In the thinking behind the Work Programme, the value of work experience is, in a general sense, that it improves both the participant's *employability* (from the perspective of potential employers) and their *suitability* for work. It does this by allowing participants to see first-hand 'the skills and behaviours employers want'; to allow them to see how the skills they possess 'can be adapted to the workplace'; to allow them to gain 'real life work experience'; and 'to add to their CV, including a work related reference/referee' (DWP, 2012). So not only is work experience as part of the Work Programme designed to satiate the need of potential future employers to see that participants are *capable* of work (as demonstrated by the collection of a reference and the 'real life' work experience), but also to work on the *disposition* of participants towards work (that is, to build participants' confidence by actually demonstrating to them that they have skills that can reap rewards in the labour market and that, by extension, it is no longer necessary for them to be 'dependent' upon welfare).

Meanwhile, the conditionality and sanctions regime underpinning the Action Plan each participant is required to sign up to is not only harsher, but also more sophisticated than anything instituted under New Labour, which is reflective of the increasing sophistication of systems of neo-liberal governmentality under the coalition government in general. Work Programme providers are able to sanction participants for

refusing to undertake *any* mandated activity, with the length of sanction being calibrated to meet the gravity of the 'offence', ranging from a 'lower level' sanction of four weeks for a first minor offence (rising to 13 weeks for any subsequent similar offences within a 52 week period), such as failure to attend an adviser interview or refusal to participate in a work experience placement, to 'higher level' sanctions lasting an initial 13 weeks (rising to 26 weeks for any subsequent similar offences within a 52 week period) for the most serious offences, such as refusal to accept a suitable job offer without good reason (DWP, 2012). The purpose of such a harsh sanctions regime (which is also now in place outside the Work Programme as well, in the form of such things as the new 'claimant commitment' for all new JSA claimants) is to confront head-on the deeply entrenched 'welfare dependency' exhibited by some participants and is something that can be seen as part of a new welfare contract between the British state and British people – or, more precisely, the 'underclass' in British society that has chosen to forego a life of 'self-sufficiency' in favour of one of dependency – in which the former agrees to provide the members of this class with an income (albeit one which is increasingly insufficient to meet the recipient's basic needs), but only for as long as it takes the latter to find work, after having – voluntarily or by compulsion – ceased to be 'welfare dependent' (that is, because there is no question that work is available to those who decide to forego welfare dependency in favour of self-sufficiency).

Another part of the coalition government's reforms to welfare that is of interest from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective is Universal Credit. Universal Credit is 'an integrated working-age credit' currently being introduced by the coalition government which is designed to replace a range of existing benefits, including Working Tax Credit,

Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based JSA and income-related ESA (DWP, 2010: 3). Like the Work Programme, Universal Credit can be seen as an instrument of governmental-ethical self-formation in that it aims to work on the abilities and attributes of the unemployed so as to enable them to transition into the world of work, but whereas in the case of the Work Programme improving the 'employability' of participants through training and work experience is very much at the forefront, in the case of Universal Credit the key objective is to address the range of *psychological* barriers which prevent the unemployed from entering the world of work.

From the perspective of the coalition government, the major problem with the existing benefits system is the fact that it has 'shaped the decisions of the poorest in a way that has trapped generation after generation in a spiral of dependency and poverty', by rewarding people for not working and by punishing those who 'do the right thing', and much is made in the policy documents which led to the creation of the Universal Credit of the 'poor work incentives' built into the current system (DWP, 2010a: 1). As such, Universal Credit aims to guarantee that 'work pays' by reducing the rate at which benefits are withdrawn as people move into work. However, the objective in this relation is not only to incentivise work, but also to *make it clear* to the unemployed that they have an incentive to work. This is to be achieved principally by means of the 65 per cent taper rate at which Universal Credit is to be withdrawn as claimants move into work – which represents a major simplification of matters relative to the existing system, in which each of the major benefits has a different taper rate – but also by such means as presenting Universal Credit claimants with an easy-to-understand online

summary of how working a specified number of hours each week could benefit them financially based on their own personal circumstances (DWP, 2010b: 34).

Also pursuant to this goal of tackling the psychological barriers preventing the unemployed from finding work, Universal Credit seeks to reduce the administrative burden associated with moving into work and to reduce the risks associated with unsuccessful attempts at entering work. As the *Universal Credit White Paper* (DWP, 2010b: 33) notes:

The existing benefit system is characterised by overlaps and duplication. It can be cumbersome and inefficient to administer and confusing and onerous for individuals to navigate. Many recipients have to deal with several different national and local government bodies, providing the same information multiple times.

Universal Credit aims to overcome the inertia-producing effects of this kind of complexity by ensuring that benefits claimants will in future be able to access all of the support they need through a single agency (namely the DWP) and online, through DWP web pages modelled after online banking services. Furthermore, Universal Credit aims to overcome the barrier to entering work represented by the perception held by the unemployed that it is too 'risky' to enter work – in case they are later fired or made redundant, and therefore forced to go through the laborious process of once again applying for a range of benefits, some or all of which could be subject to delays or even

outright refusal – by ensuring that Universal Credit entitlements can be adjusted in close to real time, through the Pay As You Earn system (DWP, 2010b: 35).

Another notable feature of Universal Credit from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective is the fact that one of the stated aims behind Universal Credit is to expand the reach of the conditionality regime currently only imposed on those in receipt of JSA to anyone in receipt of any kind of state support, including part-time workers and those working full-time but who are on low pay and, therefore, eligible for a range of benefits, including Housing Benefit, Local Housing Allowance, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. Universal Credit makes this possible by centralising the administration of all of the major benefits and, in practical terms, it involves raising the ‘conditionality threshold’ – which currently stands at working 17 hours per week for JSA claimants – to a higher level so that, for example, anyone working over 17 hours per week, but not earning enough to be able to cover reasonable living costs can have their future entitlement to the additional elements of Universal Credit tied to their complying with the conditionality regime those on JSA are subjected to, or a modified version of that which takes into account the personal circumstances of each Universal Credit recipient (DWP, 2010a: 29; DWP, 2010b: 31).

The underlying rationale behind this aspect of the Universal Credit reforms is that any kind of state support is necessarily an instance of benefits ‘dependency’, and from this perspective not only is unemployment a matter of personal choice, but so too is underemployment, or even full-time employment in a low-paying job. This is why the

folding of the Working Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit into Universal Credit is so significant: the naming of these benefits under New Labour was intended to signify that they were for working people and families, not 'scroungers', but under the coalition government anyone in receipt of any kind of state support has made the personal choice to shirk responsibility for their own self-sufficiency and is, by implication, a scrounger (although this kind of evocative language is typically reserved only for those who refuse to work at all). The ultimate objective behind all of this is to 'condition' out of existence any kind of 'welfare dependency' or, in the words of the DWP (2010b: 31), to help people 'along a journey toward financial independence from the state'.

From the New Public Management to 'Citizen Co-Production'

While the coalition government's above-described efforts at responsabilising the unemployed as a means of promoting a more efficient form of government fits within the broad trajectory established within the New Labour years (and arguably before, towards the end of the last Thatcher government), there is a larger degree of discontinuity in relation to what Dennis Linders (2012) refers to as 'citizen co-production'. According to Linders, the dominant public administration paradigm had, up until recent years, been the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, geared towards emulating in the public sector the supposedly beneficial arrangements existing between consumers and producers in the private sector. As was noted above, the NPM can be said to have been inaugurated in British politics by Thatcherism, with its pre-occupation with introducing a private sector management style into the public sector through such initiatives as the FMI and MINNIS, and with its attempt to fashion a new 'citizen-consumer' through such policies as the Community Charge, the overriding objective of

which was to establish a clearer connection in the minds of voters between spending on public services and associated 'costs' in terms of higher rates of tax at the local level. These tentative steps towards NPM formed the basis of New Labour's own reforms to the public services, which went a long way towards realising the NPM goal of creating citizen-consumers by drastically expanding the range of 'choice' available to the users of public services.

However, according to Linders (2012: 453), the NPM paradigm has been destabilised by the emergence of new discourses of citizenship which view the citizen as a 'co-producer' of public services, rather than as a straightforward *consumer* of public services. Within the 'citizen co-production' paradigm, the emphasis is very much on 'active citizen participation' rather than the 'market-driven, transaction-oriented approach to the management of public services,' characteristic of both the succession of Conservative governments throughout the 1980s and New Labour governments after 1997 (Linders, 2012: 451). Linders (2012: 447) identifies three main types of 'citizen co-production' operational in the formulation, delivery and monitoring of government policy in contemporary society. The first of these is 'citizen-sourcing', in which resources held by the public are mobilised in order to make government more efficient or to help the government achieve a specified policy objective. Citizen-sourcing can be a feature of any stage in the policy-making process, from 'ideation' and service design – as manifested in, for example, 'e-petitions' of various kinds – to service delivery in the form of government soliciting public solutions to problems encountered in course of 'rolling-out' specific policies, to service monitoring in the form of government opening-up new

channels of communication with users of public services so that instances of poor quality provision are quickly brought to light (Linders, 2012: 448).

The second type of citizen co-production identified by Linders (2012: 447) is 'government as platform', which involves government providing resources – typically of the information and communications technology kind – that can help citizens better govern themselves and others. The underlying rationale of 'government as platform' is as follows:

The near zero marginal cost of digital data dissemination and computer-based services enables government to make its knowledge and IT infrastructure available to the public that paid for their development. In so doing, the state can help citizens improve their day-to-day productivity, decision-making, and well-being.

Meanwhile, the third kind of citizen co-production is what Linders (2012: 447) has termed 'Do It Yourself government' and what, in a similar vein, Eriksson and Vogt (2012) have termed 'self-service government', which refers to any kind of ostensibly 'public' service provided on a 'citizen-to-citizen' basis, and in which government plays at most a 'facilitating' role. This broad shift from the image of the citizen-consumer to the citizen co-producer is significant from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective, not only because it amounts to an attempt to economise on the cost of government by 'automating' the functioning of power in the sense that functions that were previously undertaken by the state are now often undertaken by 'autonomous' citizens, but also

because effecting this shift and maintaining systems of citizen co-production requires by necessity a highly interventionist central state, in ways which should become clearer in the following examples.

Each of the types of citizen co-production identified by Linders form part of the coalition government's variant of neo-liberalism. In particular, the reforms outlined in the *Open Public Services White Paper*, along with the supplementary *Open Data White Paper*, provide an insight into the form taken by citizen co-production in the politics of the coalition government. Judging from these documents, sourcing new policies – and new ways of making existing policies work better – from citizens is clearly a preoccupation of the coalition government. One of the most noteworthy instances of citizen-sourcing under the coalition government takes the form of the 'Red Tape Challenge.' According to the government's website of the same name the Red Tape Challenge is a mechanism designed to 'free up business and society from the burden of excessive regulation', and works by encouraging businesses, civil society groups and members of the public to submit their thoughts on which regulations affecting them in their daily lives should be removed, before they are collated and subjected to analysis by the relevant government departments, who then attempt to decide which instances of deregulation would be both desirable and feasible. After this, the proposals put forward by government departments are subjected to internal challenge by the Red Tape Challenge Team and external challenge by 'sector champions' and other concerned stakeholders, before being passed on to a Ministerial 'Star Chamber' for final adjudication, with the presumption being that all 'burdensome regulations will go unless they can be strongly justified' (redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

Another instance of citizen-sourcing under the coalition government has taken the form of the Open Data User Group (ODUG). The ODUG is a quango set up by the coalition government whose membership consists of volunteers from the business world, academia, and civil society groups with an interest in open data. The purpose of the ODUG is to consult with interested parties (mainly businesses with a financial interest in open data) in order to source ideas for the release of new information; to undertake 'appropriate research and evidence gathering to inform the business case' for releasing said data; and to advise the government's Data Strategy Board as to which data should be released by the government as a priority, partly on the basis of the aforementioned business case for the release of said data. On this basis, the ODUG is described in the *Open Data White Paper* as 'a strong mechanism for driving *demand-led* transparency in the public interest' (Cabinet Office, 2012b: 21, my emphasis).

In a similar vein, the coalition government has actively solicited requests for the release of publicly-held datasets through its data.gov.uk website. The site contains information on the government's 'data inventory' (that is, the vast store of information which it holds) and allows users to request the release of new datasets as an alternative to the more laborious process of requesting data through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (Cabinet Office, 2012b: 26). Also worth noting in this relation is the way in which data.gov.uk has been used in order to 'crowdsource' changes to key pieces of regulation, such as the FOIA Code of Practice, which gives 'guidance to applicants and public authorities on how to deal with [FOIA] requests' (Cabinet Office, 2012b: 19). A proposed new FOIA Code of Practice was placed in the data.gov.uk wiki and users were able to

amend the Code as they saw fit in order to propose changes which would ensure that the new Code would best serve those who make the most use of FOIA requests, and the best suggestions were taken forward in the drafting of the final updated Code.

The coalition government has also sought to apply these principles to the public sector, with attempts being made to ‘citizen-source’ ideas from public sector workers as to how to improve ‘service delivery’ within the sector. Two initiatives that are particularly significant in this regard are the Tell Us How challenge and the Tell Us How ‘Better Use of Data’ challenge. The Tell Us How challenge functions in much the same way as the Red Tape Challenge, but rather than focusing on soliciting ideas for deregulation primarily from members of the public, is geared towards improving public services by capitalising on the insights of those at the ‘frontline’ of public service delivery. In the words of the *Open Data White Paper*: ‘Tell Us How is based on the idea that those people working hard to deliver public services every day are best placed to provide invaluable insights into innovative ways to improve how we can better design and deliver those services’ (Cabinet Office, 2012b: 42). The Tell Us How ‘Better Use of Data’ challenge functions in much the same way, but is oriented specifically towards soliciting ideas relating to the potential uses open data can be put within the public sector, such as in relation to enabling ‘joined-up government’ in order to improve user experience of public services and to combat fraud and error (Cabinet Office, 2012b: 38).

The second form of citizen co-production identified by Linders – ‘government-as-platform’ – has arguably played a more important part in the politics of the coalition

government than 'citizen-sourcing'. The most notable instance of government-as-platform in the politics of the coalition government has been the creation of the data.gov.uk website which, besides acting as a mechanism of citizen-sourcing in the ways described above, has also acted to apply downward pressure on public spending by furnishing citizens – discursively articulated by the coalition government as 'armchair auditors' – with the information they need in order to be able to identify any 'wasteful' instances of government spending, and to hold their elected representatives to account accordingly. The thinking behind data.gov.uk in this respect is neatly illustrated in the following quote, taken from the video introduction to the site by David Cameron:

It is our ambition to be one of the most transparent governments in the world. Open about what we do and, crucially, about what we spend... Each government department will publish every item of spending over £25,000 online. Just think about what this could mean. People will be able to look at millions of items of government spending, flagging up waste when they see it, and that scrutiny is going to act as a powerful straightjacket on spending, saving us a lot of money (data.gov.uk).

The range of information held on data.gov.uk in this regard is very broad and includes not only, as Cameron mentions, information on all items of departmental spending over £25,000, but also all items of local authority spending over £500 and information on the salaries of public sector workers. This can be expected to lead to reductions in public spending whether or not members of the public prove willing to play the role of 'armchair auditors' for the simple reason that the fact this information is available

means that those in charge of spending in the public sector will have to assume that they are being audited in this way. Furthermore, the availability of this information, alongside other coalition government reforms designed to make it easier for private and third sector providers to bid to take over select public services as part of increasing 'choice' for public service users, will also exert downward pressure on public spending thanks to the inevitable attempts of private and third sector providers to undercut public sector providers, and private and third sector providers already in receipt of government contracts (Cabinet Office, 2011b: 36).

Another instance of government-as-platform under the coalition government, and one which mirrors closely the functioning of data.gov.uk, relates to the police.uk website, the changed role of local police and elected local Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). In much the same way that data.gov.uk aims to apply downwards pressure on public spending by making available to members of the public information on specific items of public spending which they can use to identify 'wasteful' instances of government spending and hold their elected representatives to account accordingly, police.uk aims to apply downwards pressure on crime rates by making information on crime publicly available on an area-by-area basis so that local residents can hold their local police to account at regular 'beat meetings', and Police and Crime Commissioners to account at periodic elections (Conservative party, 2009: 19). The main function of police.uk is to provide members of the public with 'crime maps' of their local area which allow them to identify, among other things, the prevalence of each type of crime in their local area, precisely where these crimes are happening locally (that is, crimes are literally 'mapped' throughout the local area), trends in the prevalence of certain crimes

in their local area over time, differential rates of crimes between areas, and the success (or lack thereof) of the police in the local area in apprehending suspects, as well as the punishments meted out to those convicted of specific crimes. The website also provides members of the public with information on where and when local 'beat meetings' with representatives of their local police take place, so that they can attend and hold the latter to account if they are unhappy with their performance. These kinds of mechanisms for achieving public policy objectives using 'people power' (whether it be in the form of people as 'armchair auditors' in the case of data.gov.uk, or people holding their local police to account in the case of police.uk) are discursively framed in terms of a shift from bureaucratic accountability to 'democratic accountability' and are significant from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective due to the fact that they serve to 'responsibilise' citizens in the sense that, if the desired policy objectives – which are still determined by the centre – are not met, then the responsibility for this failure is no longer seen to lie with the centre, but with citizens themselves who, by implication, have failed in their duty to properly hold their local police to account, (Kerr *et al*, 2011: 200).

In relation to the third kind of citizen co-production identified by Linders – 'Do It Yourself government' – the 'community ownership' strand of the coalition government's OPS agenda is particularly significant. At the heart of the coalition government's OPS agenda is the stated desire to devolve power down to the lowest level possible. Wherever possible, this means devolving power to individuals so that they enjoy the maximum amount of freedom of choice possible in their use of public services. However, where this is not possible, the coalition government's intention is to devolve

power to local communities, which means giving local people ‘direct control over neighbourhood services, either by transferring the ownership of those services directly to communities, or by giving neighbourhood groups democratic control over them’ (Cabinet Office, 2011b: 26).

In order to enable this, the coalition government has proposed a range of new rights for local people. These include the *Community Right to Buy*, which gives local authorities the power to list public and private land and buildings as ‘assets of community value’, which will in turn enable local people ‘to have a fair chance to bid to take over land and buildings that are important to them’; *transforming community assets*, which involves the transfer of local authority assets to community management or ownership; *Community Right to Build*, which gives community groups the right to develop land for the purposes of community services without the need for a formal planning application; and the *Community Right to Challenge*, which gives community groups the right to bid to provide local authority services themselves; and *notice of funding changes*, designed to ensure that local authorities give communities ample notice when it intends to ‘reduce or end funding or other support to a voluntary and community organisation’ so that said organisations are able to make alternative arrangements for the continued provision of those services (Cabinet Office, 2011b: 26). Using these new rights, local people will be able to take over and run a range of services at the local level, including not only such ‘public’ services as community centres, childcare facilities and libraries, but also private services of special public interest, such as shops, post offices and pubs (Cabinet Office, 2011b: 26).

From Rational Choice Understandings of Citizen Behaviour to 'Nudge'

Another novel feature of the coalition government's take on neo-liberal governmentality relates to what is commonly referred to as 'nudge'. Nudge is an approach to public policy which draws heavily on insights garnered from behavioural economics and social psychology and, in particular, the work of Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, and which takes as its primary object the 'choice architecture' encountered by citizens. The objective behind nudge is 'the creation of environments' – that is 'choice architectures' – that encourage people to make better decisions without elements of coercion' (Richardson, 2012: 140; see also Leggett, forthcoming). As such, nudge can be considered a form of 'liberal paternalism', in that it seeks to guide the behaviour of citizens, but without violating the principle of individual freedom of choice (Jones *et al*, 2010: 85).

Nudge has been a feature of approaches to public policy in Britain for the best part of a decade. For example, the 2004 document produced by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit titled *Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour* sought to question the effectiveness of approaches to public policy based on traditional methods such as the passing of laws, the implementation of regulations and punishments for non-compliance, and to promote in their place 'behavioural interventions' as an efficacious and cost-effective alternative (Jones *et al*, 2010: 85). However, there has been a step-change in attempts to bring to bear on public policy insights from behavioural economics and social psychology under the coalition government, which established the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) (also known as the 'Nudge Unit') within the Cabinet Office – which served to further legitimise nudge as an approach to public policy – and

which has granted nudge a much more prominent role in the discursive framing of its public policy agenda than was ever the case under New Labour. In fact, nudge has at times appeared to be something of a 'silver bullet' for Cameron and other key coalition government figures, largely thanks to the fact that support for it signifies not only the coalition government's intent to develop 'evidence-based' – that is, non-'ideological' – policy, rooted in rigorous academic analysis, but also the idea that the coalition government and Cameron's Big Society in particular represents 'a third way between moral indifference and statism' (McAnulla, 2012: 171).

Nudge is significant from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective because it represents an attempt to economise on the cost of government while ensuring that the same governmental objectives – whether that be in relation to efforts to tackle crime, to promote healthier lifestyles, or something else besides – are met. Across the broad range of policy documents produced by the BIT, there are constant references to the potential savings to be made through nudge as an approach to public policy, and the point is repeatedly made that the application of insights taken from behavioural economics and social psychology to problems of public policy promises to be able to reduce their costs, both in a short time-frame and without the need to invest large sums of money 'up front'. As the *Applying behavioural insight to health* discussion paper notes, nudge is 'an important part of the Coalition Government's commitment to reducing regulatory burdens on business and society, and achieving its policy goals as cheaply and effectively as possible' (Cabinet Office, 2011a).

Nudge as an approach to public policy is also significant from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective because it demonstrates the highly *interventionist* nature of neo-liberalism. The fact that nudge aims to economise on the cost of government does not mean that it entails *less* government. In actual fact, nudge entails a major *expansion* in both the scope of objects that are governed and the range of techniques used to govern them. As an approach to public policy, it is only viable if the state is able to piece together a detailed picture of the behaviour of citizens – crucially, not just in the formal ‘public’ sphere, but also in the most mundane of scenarios, from citizens’ eating habits to their daily routines, to patterns of energy use in the home – as well as the mental processes which inform that behaviour. It also entails the state constructing a vision of what would constitute ‘good behaviour’ on the part of citizens at a societal level, as well as a set of policy instruments capable of promoting such behaviour, and this in turn requires that the state develop means of leveraging the resources of private and third sector groups as a way of achieving these objectives, given the fact that many of the instruments of behavioural economics and social psychology – as set out in, for example, the MINDSPACE framework formulated by the BIT, detailed below – are dependent upon the active participation of these groups for their success.

MINDSPACE is a heuristic device formulated by the BIT in order to translate esoteric behavioural economics and social psychology theories into a useable form for ‘decision makers’ in the public, private and third sectors, and comprises of the following insights:

- *Messenger*: ‘We are heavily influenced by who communicates information’.

- *Incentives*: 'Our responses to incentives are shaped by predictable mental shortcuts such as strongly avoiding losses.'
- *Norms*: 'We are strongly influenced by what others do.'
- *Defaults*: 'We 'go with the flow' of pre-set options.'
- *Salience*: 'Our attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant to us.'
- *Priming*: 'Our acts are often influenced by sub-conscious cues.'
- *Affect*: 'Our emotional associations can powerfully shape our actions.'
- *Commitment*: 'We seek to be consistent with our public promises, and reciprocate acts.'
- *Ego*: 'We act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves (Cabinet Office, 2010: 6).'

The insights taken from behavioural economics and social psychology which make up the MINDSPACE framework have been applied to public policy in a variety of ways under the coalition government. One policy initiative that has been identified as a potentially very fruitful testing ground for nudge as an approach to public policy is the coalition government's 'Green Deal', which aims to encourage homeowners to take advantage of new green technologies so that their homes become more energy efficient. The Green Deal is itself an instance of 'nudge', in the sense that it incentivises the installation of energy efficiency technology through a financial mechanism which allows private companies, charities and local authorities to finance these kinds of home improvements and to be paid back exclusively through the savings made on homeowners' energy bills while ensuring that the amount of monthly repayments never

exceeds the amount of monthly savings for any given homeowner (Cabinet Office, 2010: 10).

A common theme running through the policy documents produced by the BIT is that the existing models used to understand the behaviour of citizens as part of the public policy-making process have been flawed, and that this has often led to ineffective public policy and wasteful government spending. It is further argued in the literature produced by the BIT that these outcomes can be avoided if the government pays closer attention to the range of factors which prevent citizens from acting as rational utility maximisers. This includes the literature produced by the BIT in relation to the Green Deal. In the words of the *Behaviour Change and Energy Use* discussion paper:

[The] evidence shows that the behaviours of individuals can deviate greatly from a standard rational choice model, in which people objectively weigh up the costs and benefits of investing time and money into 'greening' their homes and being more energy efficient. Research indicates that social, cognitive and behavioural factors are important in explaining why many people have not – yet – introduced changes that could help them to enjoy cosier homes and lower energy bills (Cabinet Office, 2011a: 6).

One of the insights stemming from this new approach, and which has a bearing on levels of take-up of the Green Deal, is that people tend to heavily discount future rewards and to make decisions based on factors that come into play more or less immediately:

The human tendency to heavily discount future energy savings, coupled with a natural predisposition to focus on the short term, and an aversion to the hassle of installing energy efficiency measures, could limit people's readiness to take action – even when the cost barrier is removed (Cabinet Office, 2011a: 10).

In recognition of this fact, the coalition government has sought to overcome these barriers to greater take-up of the Green Deal by providing 'eye-catching' additional up-front incentives to participate and by removing as many of the immediate *disincentives* to action as possible. In practical terms this taken the form of a one-month Council Tax holiday and vouchers redeemable for products and services at major high street retailers for new Green Deal participants. Furthermore, in a move which betrays the highly sophisticated way in which these incentives have been constructed, they are to be strictly time limited so as to 'tap into people's aversion to anticipated regret' (Cabinet Office, 2011a: 11).

In a similar vein, the coalition government has also attempted to bring to bear on the Green Deal initiative behavioural insights related to the importance of 'commitment' as something capable of strongly influencing people's behaviour. As the BIT note, 'evidence from a range of studies suggests that people are more likely to respond in a positive way when they have entered into some kind of commitment with another individual or group', and especially in cases where that individual or group is bound to the person in question by bonds of trust (Cabinet Office, 2010: 8). On this basis, elements of the incentive system built into the Green Deal have been constructed in such a way as to encourage homeowners within the same local community to make a commitment to one

another by, for example, offering homeowners discounts on the cost of any work done on their homes as part of the Green Deal in proportion to the number of households in their local area they are able to get to commit to participating in the Green Deal concurrently (Cabinet Office, 2011a: 12).

Meanwhile, another idea that the BIT literature on the Green Deal proposes, and one which also seeks to draw on the power of social networks in conditioning citizen behaviour, is to give people greater information on rates of participation in the Green Deal within their local community (at least in instances where take-up is relatively high). The underlying rationale in this instance is, as noted above, that 'people are heavily influenced by what others around them are doing', even if they have no personal connection to those people, and will be more willing to participate in the Green Deal if they believe that this is something large numbers of other people like them are doing (Cabinet Office, 2011a: 11). This is an instance of policy-makers seeking to capitalise on the power of social *norms*.

The Green Deal has not been the only policy initiative that has been subjected to these kinds of 'nudge' strategies. In fact, the BIT is quite clear in stating that it conceives of its role as one of popularising nudge as an approach to public policy *throughout* the public services (Cabinet Office, 2012a: 34). Indeed, another area which has come to be seen as a potentially fertile testing ground for nudge is health. In particular, the insight taken from behavioural economics and social psychology that people have a tendency to go with whatever the 'default' option is within any given 'choice architecture' has been

identified as a means of solving problems faced by the NHS such as a chronic shortage of Organ Donors. However, weary of being seen to be overly-prescriptive and ‘nannying’ – and in an effort to avoid the potential pitfall of undermining the concept of organ donation as a gift and, therefore, eroding trust in NHS professionals (Cabinet Office, 2010: 10) – the coalition government has typically preferred to use a milder form of default-setting known as ‘prompted choice’, which involves requiring individuals to make an active choice about engaging or not engaging in a desired behaviour at a crucial juncture in their lives, in its efforts to increase organ donation using nudge. This has manifested itself in changes to the process of applying for or renewing a driving licence with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) which mean that anyone using the DVLA’s website for these purposes is prompted to choose whether or not they would like to sign-up to the NHS Organ Donor Register (Cabinet Office, 2010: 11).

Another way in which behavioural insights from the MINDSPACE framework have been brought to bear on health problems relates to teenage pregnancy. As was noted above, the major challenges for policy-makers in relation to public health in contemporary society are thought to be ‘illnesses of lifestyle’: a poor diet leading to obesity, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes, overconsumption of alcohol leading to depression, cirrhosis of the liver and alcoholic dementia, smoking leading to lung, throat and mouth cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. According to the BIT’s *Applying behavioural insight to health* discussion paper (Cabinet Office, 2010: 12), so too is teenage pregnancy a ‘lifestyle choice’ which affects the health outcomes of citizens: ‘Evidence shows that being pregnant young can lead to adverse effects in young people’s lives – including low self-esteem, depression, poor relationships, reduced

educational achievement and increased risk of social deprivation and adopting risky behaviours.’

In order to counter-act the negative effects of teenage pregnancy, the BIT proposes the expansion of the existing partnership between local authorities and the Teens and Toddlers charity in which ‘vulnerable’ teenagers are encouraged to take part in a 20-week programme of toddler ‘mentoring’, which involves teenagers spending an extended period of time with someone else’s toddler each week in order to find out what life as a teenage parent might be like. The behavioural insights being brought to bear on public policy through this programme are two-fold: firstly, that people are ‘heavily influenced by who communicates information’, in the sense that some ‘messengers’ are more effective than others; and secondly, that ‘We act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves’ (this corresponds to the ‘ego’ component of the MINDSPACE framework) (Cabinet Office, 2010: 6). The partnership between local authorities and Teens and Toddlers works, firstly, by not only giving participants a disincentive to become pregnant by seeing first-hand the broad range of responsibilities that come with having a child, but also by having this message conveyed by an effective messenger – that is, by teen parents themselves – and, secondly, by capitalising on the supposed behavioural insight that young people ‘actively react against being told what to do’ (Cabinet Office, 2010: 12). In other words, the programme is more effective than other, more traditional means of reducing teen pregnancy due to the fact that it avoids ‘nannying’ the young people in question when delivering its message.

This above instance of nudge as an approach to public policy is particularly significant because it illuminates some of the ways in which the state is required to leverage private and third sector resources in order to achieve certain public policy objectives: the state as ‘messenger’ is acknowledged to be ineffective, given the cynicism of young people towards figures of authority, so it is seen to be necessary to mobilise a more effective third sector actor – namely, the Teens and Toddlers charity – in a partnership arrangement founded on both parties sharing a common cause (that is, a reduction in rates of teenage pregnancy) and the charity in question being willing to co-operate with local authorities in the ways described above thanks to having a financial incentive for doing so.

Another instance in which the coalition government has sought to bring to bear insights taken from behavioural economics and social psychology on public policy relates to the interlinked issues of fraud, error and debt in people’s interactions with the tax and benefits system. In this relation, the behavioural insight that has seemed to the BIT to be particularly promising is the insight that people’s ‘attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant’ (this corresponds to the ‘Salience’ component of the MINDSPACE framework) (Cabinet Office, 2010: 6). In this relation, the BIT has sought to apply this behavioural insight to such things as the types of letters sent to people suspected of having failed to declare taxable income. However, in a move which is reflective of the self-reflexive moment in the thinking of the BIT – and its willingness to borrow the *methods*, as well as the insights, of behavioural economics and social psychology – rather than attempting to simply redesign these letters so that recipients’ attention is drawn to the most salient information, the BIT has sought to trial a number of different

ways of applying this insight, by drafting several different letters for the same target group and seeing which one works the best in terms of leading to greater compliance with the demands of tax and benefits authorities.

In one 2011 scheme – which is reflective of a number of others – letters were sent to all doctors with outstanding tax returns from within the preceding four years. There were four types of letters used: firstly, the ‘generic’ HMRC letter sent as standard to individuals with outstanding tax returns; secondly, a ‘traditional’ letter, similar to the standard HMRC letter, but drafted using the language of the new Medics Tax Health Plan; thirdly, a ‘simplified’ letter, drafted using simplified language, with the most crucial information located at the start of the letter, and with an emphasis on the risk of fraud detection through the use of third party information, and a note that failure to respond to the letter would not be treated as a mere oversight; and, lastly, a ‘simplified + social norms’ letter, similar to the ‘simplified’ letter, but with an additional note stating that 97 per cent of all doctors have filled in a tax return for each of the last four years (Cabinet Office, 2012a: 24). These letters were distributed to the doctors with outstanding tax returns on a random basis, so that each doctor received one or another of the letters. The result was that those doctors who received one of the ‘simplified’ or ‘simplified + social norms’ letters tended to respond to the letters at a much higher rate than those receiving either the ‘generic’ or ‘traditional’ letters, and this was seen to be a successful application of a nudge approach to a particular public policy problem.

Conclusion

As should be clear from the preceding argument, the significance of the Big Society in relation to the broader neo-liberal project inaugurated within British politics by Thatcherism is two-fold. On the one hand, it represented an attempt to furnish neo-liberalism with a new legitimising discourse structured around the nodal point of the 'Big Society' and the symptomatic figure of 'Fabian socialism' – albeit one which failed and was later replaced by a more exclusionary discourse similar in structure to Thatcherite authoritarian populism. Meanwhile, on the other, it inaugurated a number of new developments in systems of neo-liberal governmentality. More specifically, it sought to refine the mechanisms of 'control at a distance' used by the centre to manage peripheral parts of the state apparatus as part of the implementation of public policy; further 'responsibilise' citizens as part of a broader effort to create an 'active society'; transform the discursive articulation of citizenship away from the image of the 'citizen-consumer' and towards the image of the citizen as 'co-producer'; and increase the degree of sophistication characteristic of the centre's understanding of the behaviour of citizens as part of a broader effort to apply insights from behavioural economics and social psychology to the formulation and implementation of public policy.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

'Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul'

-Margaret Thatcher, 1981

As should be clear from the preceding analysis, over the past several decades we have witnessed the unfolding of a neo-liberal governmental project within British politics which can be periodised thusly. It began with Thatcherism, which – as was argued in chapter two – can be considered a form of 'roll-back' neo-liberalism in the sense that it took as its primary task the destruction of the institutions of what it considered to be the 'post-war consensus' – the welfare state, the trade unions, the militant wing of the labour party, and leftist local authorities intent on practicing 'municipal socialism'. However – as is hinted at in the quote at the top of this page – this 'roll-back' moment within Thatcherism was never intended to be the ultimate object of the project because, despite posing as a reprise of classical liberalism, Thatcherism was cognisant all along of the need to effect a widespread transformation of the state apparatus and broader culture as part of installing a neo-liberal market order. This interventionism manifested itself in such things as the incipient marketisation of the public services (which, from the perspective of Thatcherism, was seen to be largely coterminous with restoring management's 'right to manage' within the public services) and the 'depoliticisation' of a range of policy areas as a way of dealing with the problem of 'governmental overload' – partially by means of privatisation, which in many instances necessitated the creation of large 'quasi-'public bureaucracies geared towards fabricating market pressures in what were essentially monopoly industries, but also by such means as imposing new restrictions on the activities of trade unions. It also manifested itself in the promotion of a range of new subjectivities conducive to the market order envisioned by Thatcherism

(it was under Thatcher that the first moves were made towards the re-articulation of users of public services as 'consumers' of those services, through reforms to local authority funding and the introduction of greater 'choice' into the school admissions process).

The next stage in the unfolding of this project arrived in the form of New Labour. New Labour can be seen as having inaugurated the 'roll-out' phase of neo-liberalism in the sense that, by the time the first New Labour government came to power, the project of dismantling the apparatus of social liberalism was more or less complete and the stage was set for a form of neo-liberalism able to dedicate more of its energies to developing the precise technical means of constructing the above-mentioned neo-liberal paradigm shift. New Labour sought to continue on with many of the reforms inaugurated by Thatcherism, but whereas Thatcherism's reforms were often implemented in a haphazard and piecemeal way – and whereas in the case of Thatcherism the contours of a distinct neo-liberal project only became discernible after a number of years of false starts and reversals – New Labour came to power ready to implement a neo-liberal blueprint that it had formulated in opposition. The difference between Thatcherism and New Labour in this regard was evident in such things as the differing approaches taken by each in relation to the management of the public services: whereas Thatcherism was mainly concerned with incorporating new providers into the delivery of public services and with managing the networks of public, private and third sector groups that resulted, New Labour implicitly acknowledged the limitations of such a strategy in situations in which there was a possible divergence of interests among these groups and actively sought to remould their subjectivities – through 'partnership' arrangements based on financial incentives and a vastly expanded system of audit – so as to produce a *de facto*

unity of purpose among a diverse array of groups with differing backgrounds, priorities and ambitions. Similarly, although it is possible to identify the beginnings of a shift towards the image of the 'citizen-consumer' in the Thatcher years, it was not until New Labour came to power that there was a wholesale effort to prioritise 'choice' across a wide range of public services. Similarly, although Thatcherism can be seen to have inaugurated a 'workfare' approach to the provision of unemployment support, it was not until the New Labour years that this morphed into the kind of large-scale programme for the creation of 'active subjects' of unemployment support we know today, with a focus on improving the 'financial literacy' of the poor through such policies as the Child Trust Fund and fostering social capital among the 'socially excluded' through such policies as Education Action Zones.

The most recent stage in the unfolding of this neo-liberal project we can associate with the coming to power of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. The coalition government represents an advance on the neo-liberalism of New Labour in that it has used such neo-liberal technologies of government as payment-by-results for the providers of public services (which can be partially explained by reference to a more straightened financial climate in a post-financial crash world, which has meant that some of the partnership arrangements pursued by New Labour were no longer financially feasible), along with a range of new 'accountability' mechanisms (such as greater access to information for parents and greater parental 'voice' on school governing bodies in the case of education), in order to economise on the cost of government while still maintaining sufficient 'control at a distance' over peripheral parts of the state apparatus. We have also witnessed under the coalition government significant changes to the discursive articulation of citizenship – away from the image of

the citizen-consumer and towards the image of the 'citizen co-producer' of public services – and an effort on the part of the centre to develop a more well-rounded understanding of citizen behaviour as part of an attempt to apply insights from behavioural economics and social psychology to the formulation and implementation of public policy. In addition, the coalition government has sought to continue the long march towards the creation of an 'active society', especially in relation to the provision of support for the unemployed, which under the coalition government has been augmented by an even more strenuous conditionality regime, and one which has sought to delve even further into the minutiae of the everyday lives of the unemployed in order to find new ways of boosting their 'employability'.

However, it is impossible to separate the history of the unfolding of this neo-liberal governmental project from the series of hegemonic projects which ran alongside and legitimised it. A useful shorthand for describing the first of these hegemonic projects is provided by Hall: Thatcherism can be described as a form of 'authoritarian populism' and was based the expansion of a logic of equivalence on the terrain of British politics, which pitted the British people against the arrayed threats of trade union and Labour party 'wreckers', an underclass of benefits cheats, immigrants, the Soviet Union and Irish republican terrorists. This authoritarian populist discourse had lost much of its hegemonic capacity by the early-1990s and was replaced as the basis of neo-liberalism's popular support towards the end of the century by New Labour's discourse of the 'Third Way' which, in contrast to Thatcherite authoritarian populism, was predicated on the expansion of a logic of difference and sought to discursively frame 'modernisation' as a necessary response to globalisation as part of a broader re-orientation of political discourse around a front/back orientational metaphor which pitted modernisers

against the 'forces of conservatism' in both main political parties. As New Labour's hegemony broke down in the mid-2000s following a succession of scandals and – most importantly – the financial crisis of 2008, the Conservative party under Cameron attempted to furnish neo-liberalism with a new legitimising discourse structured around the nodal point of the 'Big Society' and the symptomatic figure of 'Fabian socialism'. However, this attempt failed and, once in government, Cameron quickly reverted to a more exclusionary political discourse which bore many of the hallmarks of Thatcherite authoritarian populism.

In setting out this line of argument it is important to include the caveat that the trends identified above represent a partial simplification of a complex historical reality, and that it is possible to point to empirical evidence which contradicts some of the assertions made in this thesis. For example, although it clearly is the case that the image of the 'citizen co-producer' forms a crucially important part of the governmental rationality characteristic of the coalition government, particularly in relation to its Open Public Services and Open Data agendas, it is also the case that in other policy areas the image of the citizen-consumer is still dominant, such as in recent reforms to higher education funding which have sought to bring market pressures to bear on higher education providers by means of empowering undergraduate students as consumers of educational services, or in relation to the coalition government's welfare reforms, as a result of which many Work Programme providers have adopted the posture of 'service providers' striving to satisfy participants discursively articulated as 'clients'. Similarly, although the coalition government's 'nudge' agenda betrays a desire to move beyond the simplistic rational choice model of human behaviour which informed Thatcherism, it is also the case that in some areas of policy this model still predominates, such as in

relation to the Universal Credit, which aims to achieve its policy objective of a reduction in unemployment by means of straightforwardly doing more to incentivise work and disincentivise 'dependency'.

Much the same is true in relation to the hegemonic politics of each of the variants of neo-liberalism described above. For example, it was argued above that the New Labour hegemonic project was predicated on the expansion of a logic of difference by means of the signifying element of 'globalisation'. However, despite the fact that this meant that the central divide in Blairite discourse was that between modernisers and the 'forces of conservatism', it is also the case that vestigial elements of exclusionary Thatcherite discourse carried over into New Labour discourse, as was most clearly demonstrated by New Labour's acceptance of such notions as 'welfare dependency' and the electoral business cycle. Likewise, as noted above, even though Thatcherite authoritarian populism was predicated on the expansion of a logic of equivalence, even such apparently emblematic statements of Thatcherite individualism as Thatcher's famous 'there is no such thing as society' were in reality often tempered by more conciliatory language (in this case, Thatcher's admission that there *is* still a society of sorts, in the form of the family). The important point in this relation is that the unfolding of neo-liberalism has, in practice, been a messy business, and that this fact should not disallow the possibility of making sense of neo-liberalism using the kind of parsimonious descriptions set out above.

Contribution to Knowledge

The contribution to knowledge made by this thesis is three-fold. Firstly, it has contributed to our understanding of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism has been viewed in

this thesis as a distinct governmental rationality which replaced the 'social liberal' rationality characteristic of British politics in the immediate post-war period, but one which has been dependent upon a series of distinct hegemonic projects for its survival. This is a novel conceptualisation and one which differs markedly from the conceptualisations of neo-liberalism put forward by such authors as Jessop (2002), Harvey (2007), Hall (2011), Peck (2010) and Couldry (2010). Not only that, but it is a *worthwhile* novel conceptualisation because, unlike the conceptualisations put forward by these authors, it is able to properly account for the lines of continuity and discontinuity linking the successive stages in the broader neo-liberal project. Furthermore, in this relation this thesis has also provided a novel three-part periodization of the neo-liberal project, the basic contours of which have been outlined above.

Secondly, in a broader sense, this thesis has contributed to our understanding of the functioning of power in contemporary society by bringing to light the interrelationship between governmental and hegemonic politics in the functioning of 'state projects' such as Thatcherism and New Labour. In this sense, this thesis has also contributed to the positive development of the theoretical frameworks put forward by Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe, respectively. This thesis has shown that Foucault's power analytical approach and Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist discourse theoretical approach are not only compatible with one another in basic ontological and epistemological terms (that is, in the sense that both can form part of a broadly post-structuralist approach to political analysis), but also that the two bodies of theory are *complementary* of one another given that, whereas Foucault brings to light the operation of distinct governing rationalities in contemporary capitalist societies, he nevertheless fails to account for the

important role played by hegemonic strategies in stabilising particular discursive formations and in legitimising these rationalities, and the governmental technologies associated with them, in a context of liberal democratic politics, and that although Laclau is able to explain the popular appeal of specific ideologies he is unable to explain the precise functioning of the governmental technologies associated with them.

To illustrate this point, as was noted above, certain governing objectives for those involved in formulating and implementing social policy are met more easily if recipients of unemployment support become 'active' in their quest to find employment in terms of being diligent in carrying out job searches, gaining work experience and upgrading their skills and competences, but unless these subjects internalise the discourse of the 'job-seeker' – that is, unless they come to accept that they are responsible for their own plight and that the only route out of the immiseration that flows from a life on benefits is their becoming active – they will pay only lip service to the dictates stemming from policies such as the coalition government's Work Programme, doing the bare minimum necessary in order to avoid falling foul of the aforementioned conditionality regime. Similarly, although the 'social entrepreneur' clearly functions in Cameronite discourse as a subject position designed to interpellate subjects to Cameron's vision of the Big Society – and which is effective because it fits within a view of the world which pitches 'modernisers' capable of delivering Britain to the 'post-bureaucratic age' against conservatives seeking a return to either the socially negligent Thatcherism of the 1980s or the statism of New Labour post-1997, and because of the valorisation of a range of real-life 'social entrepreneurs' such as Nat Wei (now Baron Wei), head of the Shaftsbury Group social enterprise, and John Bird, founder of *The Big Issue* – it also functions as a technology of government or a way of encouraging certain behaviours desired by

governors. Social entrepreneurs are subjects who are both economically productive – in the sense that they work for a living, contribute to rates of economic growth, and create jobs – and willing to help ensure that public services are provided in the most cost-efficient manner possible (that is, because social enterprises by definition provide some kind of public good).

As was noted above, from the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 110), all social experience is necessarily discursive in nature and this seemingly places them at odds with Foucault (2002: 51), who insists on maintaining a distinction between what he calls ‘*real or primary*’ relations and ‘*secondary... [or] discursive*’ ones. However, this apparent disjuncture between Laclau and Mouffe and Foucault can be overcome if we place to one side this problematic distinction of Foucault’s and focus instead on the definition of discourse he provides (2002: 41), which is much closer to Laclau and Mouffe’s own understanding of the term:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements... a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*.

From this perspective, a discourse is simply a collection of statements unified by a particular regularity in dispersion – which is not very far removed from Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001: 143) definition of a discourse as a relatively stable set of differences. However, more importantly for present purposes, this definition also allows us to

conceive of governmentalities as moments internal to discourse, for the simple reason that a governmentality is something that specifies objects, formulates concepts in order to establish relations between these objects and, linked to that, furnishes bodies of knowledge which flesh out those concepts, whether they be academic disciplines, policy-making discourses, or more nebulous bodies of 'common sense' thinking; it is something that specifies and empowers a range of different 'enunciative modalities', such as the speech of the expert or the speech of the ordinary man or woman on the street, and even incorporates a range of 'authorities of delimitation' which regulate the production of new objects and concepts (Foucault, 2002: 49). For example, neo-liberal governmentality specifies as objects the economy, the job-seeker and the taxpayer, and puts forward the concepts of 'welfare dependency' and 'financial literacy'; these objects and concepts are deployed in various themes and theories, such as policy documents prepared in advance of the introduction of the Work Programme, academic texts on the future direction of social policy, and speculations on current social policy in newspaper editorials; and within these themes and theories, certain subjects are authorised to speak and to produce new statements, such as the academic, the policy-maker, the politician, the newspaper editor, the social commentator, and even the celebrity.

Thirdly, this thesis has contributed to our understanding of the historical significance of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government by conceiving of the latter as the latest stage in the unfolding of the neo-liberal governmental project and as a state project similar in kind to the state projects of Thatcherism and New Labour that came before it. Also, closely related to this, this thesis has helped to shed light on the real meaning of Cameron's 'Big Society', by conceiving of it primarily as the aegis under

which an attempt was made to furnish the neo-liberal governmental project with a new hegemonic basis – although this attempt ultimately proved a failure due to Cameron’s inadequacy as an exponent of symbolic politics and the exhaustion of the hegemonic capacity of the type of globalisation discourse the Big Society was predicated on. Furthermore, another modest accomplishment of this thesis has been to help identify some of the specific salient features of the coalition government’s take on neo-liberal governmentality, particularly in relation to the latter’s attempts at ‘responsibilising’ the unemployed and other social groups as part of the creation of an ‘active society’, changes in the discursive articulation of citizenship away from the image of the citizen-consumer and towards the image of the ‘citizen co-producer’, and the increasing sophistication of the centre’s understanding of citizen behaviour, in its problematisation of simplistic rational choice understandings of the latter.

Potential Avenues of Future Research

The analysis set out in this thesis points towards a number of potentially fruitful avenues of future research. The first of these relates to the Foucauldian notion of ‘counter-conducts’. Foucault (2009: 268) defines these as any form of ‘struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others’ – which is to say, any form of resistance against the dominant governmental rationality. This thesis has not considered the existence of such counter-conducts to neo-liberal governmentality, but that should not be taken to imply that they do not exist. Indeed, it may well be the case that many of the neo-liberal technologies of government described above have encountered significant resistance and have, as a result, failed to achieve the outcomes desired of them by governmental authorities. In this relation, useful research could take the form of, for example, an in-depth analysis of the attitudes of Work Programme

participants in order to determine whether or not the Work Programme has succeeded in creating self-governing, 'active' subjects of unemployment support – that is, whether or not they have come to see *themselves* as responsible for their lack of employment, and whether or not they see 'self-capitalisation' as the only viable route out of unemployment. Similar research may also be worthwhile in relation to the coalition government's public health strategy, in order to determine whether or not efforts to promote 'active ageing' have been successful, and its Open Data agenda, in order to determine whether or not Open Data has brought into being Cameron's much-vaunted army of 'armchair auditors', busying themselves trying to identify wasteful instances of public spending.

A second potential avenue of future research relates to the distinction between neo-liberalism as a national-level project and neo-liberalism as a global phenomenon. Dean (2010: 10) has cautioned against treating neo-liberalism or 'advanced liberalism' (or any such categories) as 'ideal types' which are 'readily applicable to a host of situations or reducible to the principles of an ideology.' This insight has guided this thesis from the outset and – as its name implies – it has been concerned to treat the different configurations of neo-liberal governmental rationalities, programmes and concepts that have existed within British politics as neo-liberalisms – that is, as singularities which cannot be said to be inevitable 'next steps' in the unfolding of a broader neo-liberal project structured around some kind of invariable nucleus. In keeping with this line of thinking, productive future research would include analyses of how neo-liberalism has manifested itself in a variety of different national contexts, given that the institutional make-up, histories of government and vagaries of hegemonic politics differ from one national context to the other and can be expected to set limits to the types of neo-liberal

governmentality practicable in each. Also in this relation, it may in future prove fruitful to conduct research on the *interrelationship* between each of these distinct national variants of neo-liberal governmentality, as well as the interrelationship between each of them and global neo-liberalising processes. Relevant research questions in this regard would, for example, include whether or not national variants of workfare regimes have been influenced by the experience of the implementation of similar projects in other national contexts, and whether or not some national variants of neo-liberal governmentality have encountered greater resistance in the form of counter-conducts than others.

A third potential avenue of future research stemming from this thesis relates to the issue of what comes after neo-liberalism. Dean (2010: 261) has suggested that the financial crisis, and the 'consequent social and economic crisis', may have brought about a 'crisis of neo-liberal governmentality', one of the consequences of which has been that elites have of late become increasingly concerned, not with the problem of 'too much' government (which was a pre-occupation for figures such as Thatcher and Reagan), but with the problem of the *right amount* of government. If this is the case, then it may prove worthwhile to conduct research into what it is that replaces neo-liberalism as the dominant governmental rationality, whether that be a something which bears many of the hallmarks of Keynesian social liberalism, or something entirely new altogether. However, it is important to temper this kind of speculation with the recognition that any such 'crisis of neo-liberal governmentality' will only become a reality if it can be *discursively articulated* as such. Indeed, a number of authors have done just this, with Lingard & Sellar (2012: 46) pointing to the *durability* of neo-liberal hegemony, based on the functioning of the market narrative as a parable, the disconnect between governing

elites and the 'victims' of neo-liberalism, and the absence of a viable hegemonic rival to neo-liberalism. In a similar vein, a number of authors associated with the *Soundings* journal, whose approaches to the analysis of the politics of the coalition government were set out above, have sought to make sense of neo-liberalism's somewhat surprising ability to have weathered the storm of the 2008 financial crisis by reference to the success of Thatcherism in neutralising any potential future sources of resistance to neo-liberal hegemony by decimating the institutions of working-class political activism, and by the effective *nationalisation* of explanations for the crisis (Rustin, 2009; Clarke, 2009). In this relation, it is clear that more needs to be done to explain the durability of neo-liberal hegemony, especially given the seeming public apathy towards both main parties' most recent hegemonic offerings (that is, Cameron's 'Big Society' and Miliband's 'One Nation Labour').

However, whether or not the neo-liberal governmental project is able to maintain a workable hegemonic basis in future, it is important to remember why neo-liberalism is a subject worthy of study in the first place. As was noted in chapter three and elsewhere throughout this thesis, one of the consequences of neo-liberalism has been a severe closing down of political space, not only through processes of depoliticisation – which have served to reverse many of the gains made by the working class in the post-war period in terms of guaranteeing full employment and access to basic necessities such as housing and education – but also in terms of the dialogic aspect of democracy, which for most neo-liberals is seen to be an anachronism or, at best, a rubber-stamping exercise. This is because, from Thatcher's 'no alternative' defence of monetarism, to Blairite discourse on globalisation and Cameron's own spin on the latter, framed in terms of 'the global race', the validity of the left/right orientational metaphor – which, as was noted

above, serves the crucial purpose of legitimising opposing views of the good society – has time and again come under attack. As such, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this kind of closing down of political space is going to be with us for as long as neo-liberalism is, and this is a dangerous thing given that, as Mouffe (2005: 5) has noted, when rival political projects are unable to confront one another as adversaries in an ‘agonistic’ political space, the nature of their confrontations has a tendency to slip into the ‘antagonistic’ mode in which political rivals are seen as enemies to be destroyed.

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