

'The sanctions are good for some people but not for someone like me who actually genuinely does their job search.' British JSA claimant views on punitive welfare reform: hegemony in action?

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1 **'The sanctions are good for some people but not for someone like me who actually genuinely does**
2 **their job search.'** British JSA claimant views on punitive welfare reform: hegemony in action?

3 **Abstract**

4 This article shows that the unemployed are broadly supportive of welfare reforms which have led to
5 increased poverty; exacerbated ill health and led some to engage in 'survival crime' or to disengage
6 from the social security system. This support is predicated on the perceived need to discipline
7 'undeserving' groups; principally the feckless, those gaming the system and migrants. The authors
8 argue that this reflects the success of a 'two nations' hegemonic project that has sought to legitimise
9 an ongoing phase of capitalist development characterised by the removal of social protections,
10 widening inter-class inequalities, and the implementation of punitive welfare reforms to submit the
11 unemployed to insecure poverty labour. This article makes a significant original contribution to the
12 field by demonstrating that the resonance of the 'two nations' hegemonic project resides in both its
13 relatability to lived experiences of the unemployed and its tendency to cast a stigmatising threat over
14 their out-of-work status.

15 **Introduction**

16 Politicians seek to build support for their policies through the cultivation and dissemination of
17 'common sense' ideas. Since the 1980s, successive UK governments have sought to mobilise popular
18 support for punitive welfare reforms by constructing 'moralised antagonisms' between hard-working
19 taxpayers and out-of-work benefit claimants (Gallas, 2015; Lavery, 2019). This draws upon a long-
20 standing tradition of identifying the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor (see Welshman, 2013).
21 Hegemonic discourses of the undeserving poor have been bolstered in recent years; as media
22 portrayals of out-of-work claimants as lazy, feckless or immoral and emphasising the lack of effort or
23 reciprocity of claimants have proliferated (Morrison, 2019). It is in this context that the public view
24 the unemployed as less deserving than twenty years ago (Baumberg, 2012).

25 Whilst British Social Attitudes surveys capture the shifting views of the general public towards out-of-
26 work welfare provisions, few studies have examined the attitudes of those directly affected by welfare
27 reforms in Britain (Patrick, 2017; Fossati, 2018). The present article addresses this lacunae by
28 presenting evidence from the 'Welfare conditionality: sanctions, support and behaviour change'
29 project (ESRC-funded, 2013-2018), which canvassed the views and experiences of over 480 out-of-
30 work claimants in eleven locations in England and Scotland. The research explored the ethicality and
31 efficacy of welfare conditionality in principle and practice. A key finding was that British unemployed
32 claimants are broadly supportive of welfare reforms that have led to increased poverty and destitution;
33 exacerbated ill health; disengagement from the social security system and movements into 'survival
34 crime'. This support was premised on the view that this was necessary to punish/deter migrant,
35 fraudulent and feckless populations from making claims on public resources. The authors seek to
36 explain this apparent contradiction by interrogating the usefulness of Marxist theories of hegemony.

37 The article proceeds by outlining neo-Marxist concepts of hegemony and hegemonic projects. The
38 focus then turns towards the growing exploitation, impoverishment and punishment of the
39 unemployed in Britain before presenting new empirical evidence of their views towards punitive
40 welfare reforms. The contradiction between their views and experiences we maintain reflects the
41 overall success of a 'two nation's hegemonic project' which seeks to regulate the inherent
42 contradictions of capitalist societies by mobilising popular support for policies that are antithetical to
43 the interests of working class populations (Jessop et al., 1988; Gallas, 2015; Lavery, 2019). This is
44 operationalised by constructing discursive distinctions between 'productive' and 'parasitic' groups

45 and has been translated into a series of policies to marginalise the manufactured threat of 'parasitic'
46 groups. The authors argue that a 'two nation's hegemonic has been intermittently revived by
47 successive UK governments over the last 40 years. This has served to mystify and legitimise an ongoing
48 phase of capitalist development characterised by rising corporate profitability and more intensive
49 forms of exploitation, punishment and penury for working class populations.

50 **Hegemony, Hegemonic Projects and Individual Responses**

51 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the
52 ruling material force of society, is at the same time the ruling intellectual force. The class
53 which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls
54 the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental
55 production are on the whole subject to it' (Marx and Engels, 1998: 67).

56 Marx and Engels' (1998) originally conceived of ideology as a phenomenon that is generated by the
57 capitalist class system. It serves to regulate the inherent contradictions of this system by mystifying
58 and legitimising the exploitation of the working class. It does this by dominating the minds of working
59 class people, projecting within their minds an illusory relationship to their real conditions of existence
60 to perpetuate a mistaken view of the social world known as 'false consciousness'. It is a temporary
61 phenomenon only surviving as long as the class system that generates it survives. However, the
62 resilience of capitalism coupled with the underdeveloped nature of Marx and Engels' theorisation led
63 later generations of Marxists to show a greater interest in ideology.

64 Gramsci (1971) argues that capitalism is partially sustained by the 'hegemony' of ideas and theories
65 of a ruling class (or classes). More specifically, Gramsci (1971) uses 'hegemony' to capture how a ruling
66 class acquires consent to rule those it subjugates. This tends to be achieved when the ideas of the
67 ruling class sufficiently displace rivalling ideas and become the '*common sense*' assumptions and
68 beliefs held by subordinate classes (Gramsci, 1971: 323). Common sense ideas may present
69 themselves 'as the spontaneous philosophy of the man in street' but are truly 'the popular expression
70 of "higher philosophies"' (Mouffe, 1979: 186). Consequently, common sense ideas ascertain 'a validity
71 which is psychological' (Gramsci, 1971: 377). This makes them indispensable for organising
72 subordinate classes and producing levels of consent necessary to preserve the power and wealth
73 asymmetries of the capitalist class system.

74 Althusser (2014) argues that the hegemony of ruling class ideas is established through the seizure and
75 conservation of state power, and through subsequent diffusion of these ideas through 'ideological
76 state apparatuses'. While Althusser (2014: 245) acknowledges the role of the 'repressive state
77 apparatus' (e.g. police, courts, military) in pacifying groups or individuals posing a threat to the
78 established order, he stresses that the ruling class cannot hold monopoly over state power or society
79 more generally 'over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the
80 ideological state apparatuses'. Althusser's (2014:79-81;243) definition of 'ideological state
81 apparatuses' is broad, including both public and private institutions such as schools, families, churches
82 and the media. Despite the 'diversity' of their individual functions, according to Althusser (2014: 245),
83 these apparatuses are all unified 'beneath...the ideology of the ruling class', functioning collectively to
84 diffuse common sense ideas across social space around correct (pro-social, economically useful)
85 modes of living within the class system. As such, hegemony is viewed as a 'lived' process of domination,
86 where common sense ideas are 'subtly, pervasively diffused throughout habitual daily practices,
87 intimately interwoven with "culture" itself, inscribed in the very texture of our experience from
88 nursery school to funeral parlour' (Eagleton, 1991: 114). It often remains invisible, disseminated
89 throughout the texture of social life naturalized as custom, habit and practice (Eagleton, 1991).

90 Whereas Althusser (2014: 80) argues that 'the bourgeoisie *holds* state power' and subsequently
91 establishes hegemony through the ideological state apparatuses, by sharp contrast, Poulantzas (1978:
92 30) argues that 'the state acts within an unstable equilibrium of compromises between the dominant
93 classes and the dominated' (rather than acting on behalf of one dominant class). The state possesses
94 some political autonomy from the ruling class(es) and 'therefore continually adopts material measures
95 which are of positive significance for the popular masses' (Poulantzas, 1978: 30). This has implications
96 for how Poulantzas views the exercise of hegemony through state apparatuses. Poulantzas (1978: 30)
97 criticises accounts that see the ideological state apparatuses exclusively in their 'capacity to deceive,
98 lie, obscure, hide, and lead people to believe what is false'. Rather, hegemony is also exercised through
99 state apparatuses in 'positive' ways for the subordinate classes. Specifically, ideological allurements
100 accompany material concessions which are beneficial to the interests of subordinate classes and can
101 contradict the short-term interests of the ruling class (although such concessions will not threaten the
102 overall reproduction of capitalism). This can not only work to manufacture strategically significant
103 levels of consent for the class system, but can also reinforce perceptions of the state as class neutral
104 and acting in the 'general interest' of the entire body politic.

105 Contemporary Marxists have built on Gramsci's and Poulantzas's ideas to demonstrate how political
106 leaderships, at the apex of the state, deploy 'hegemonic projects' to produce sufficient levels of
107 consent for and continually reproduce capitalism. Because hegemony is a dynamic process that has to
108 be continually renewed, recreated and defended, political leaderships typically pursue more
109 temporary 'hegemonic projects' rather than hegemony itself (Gamble, 1988). Jessop (1990: 211-12)
110 has distinguished between 'one-nation' and 'two-nation's' hegemonic projects. Several UK academics
111 have applied the concepts of one and two-nation's hegemonic projects over the last four decades to
112 make sense of how various political leaderships in Britain have continually legitimised the unstable
113 relations of exploitation and domination intrinsic to the capitalist class system (Jessop et al., 1988;
114 Gallas, 2015; Lavery, 2019). The former aims 'at an expansive hegemony in which the support of the
115 entire population is mobilised through material concessions and symbolic rewards' for all sections of
116 the body politic. Two nation's projects seek 'a more limited hegemony concerned to mobilise the
117 support of strategically significant sectors of the population and to pass the costs of the project to
118 other sectors'. Political leaderships are more likely to pursue the latter during periods characterised
119 by widening inter-class inequalities, rising capitalist profitability and fewer material concessions to
120 working class populations (Jessop, 1990; Bates, 1975). They mystify the true source(s) of class
121 inequalities and instead seek to lay the blame at the foot of deviant 'others'. Political leaderships tend
122 to do this by utilising hegemonic apparatuses to 'consciously play on' and enhance 'divisions in society';
123 discursively constructing 'moralised antagonisms' between groups of good, 'productive' citizens and
124 bad, 'parasitic' citizens (Jessop et al; 1988: 163; 88; Lavery, 2019: 60). The latter groups are
125 constructed as a threat to both public resources and the interests of 'productive' citizenry, requiring
126 urgent 'containment and even repression' (Jessop, 1990: 212).

127 At the psychosocial level, research has shown how discourses associated with hegemonic projects
128 secure consent and control through the internalisation of psychological myths concerning the 'just
129 nature' of present affairs (Prilleltensky and Gonick, 1996). Individuals may be deferential subscribing
130 to legitimising myths of personal blame and natural causes (Prilleltensky and Gonick, 1996). Learned
131 helplessness which refers to the passivity developed in response to repeated experiences of failure,
132 surplus powerlessness which pertains to feelings of personal impotence, obedience to authority and
133 the internalisation of images of authority are key psychological processes (Prilleltensky and Gonick,
134 1996). However, consent may also be secured through forms of identity management and resistance
135 to manage stigma and shame emerging from portrayals of particular groups as 'parasitic'. A key
136 development of the present article will be to show how individuals who are vulnerable to the

137 stigmatising threat of ‘two-nations’ discourses develop ways of establishing distance between
138 themselves and ‘parasitic’ others occupying similar social positioning (e.g. claimant unemployed, low-
139 income). Managing stigma, we contend, is a key but largely unrecognised process in the production of
140 consent among unemployed people for policies and practices that were openly acknowledged to
141 inflict harm upon themselves and others.

142 **The Condition of the Unemployed Working Class in 21st Century Britain**

143 Two nation’s hegemonic projects have been consistently re-deployed during an ongoing phase of
144 capitalist development featuring a rise in corporate profitability and more intensive forms of
145 exploitation, punishment and impoverishment for the most marginal fractions the working class. Since
146 the late 1970s, Britain’s working classes have borne an increasingly precarious relationship to the
147 economy. The labour market has seen a marked decline of stable middle-income jobs, a ‘very big
148 increase in the number of high-paid jobs’, and a sharp rise in low-paying, precarious forms of
149 employment (Goos and Manning, 2007: 118). These changes have been fuelled by a combination of
150 globalised techno-economic developments in production, exchange, consumption and distribution
151 (Castells, 2000; Jessop, 2002). They have also been facilitated by a series of state-led decisions to
152 abandon full employment policies, prioritise inflation control and eviscerate the ability of working
153 class populations to protect their material interests through collective means (Glyn, 2006; Coates,
154 1989). Techno-economic development and state-led efforts to prioritise business interests have also
155 facilitated an expansion of workers hired on precarious terms and conditions more directly
156 determined by market demand and increasingly via temporary work agencies (Forde and Slater, 2016;
157 ONS, 2020).

158 It is in this context that the social security system has been transformed into a lever for expanding the
159 supply of precarious labour (Grover and Stewart, 2002). This has included efforts to incentivise the
160 uptake of low-paying jobs by reducing the real value of unemployment benefits and ‘depriving
161 unemployed people of necessary income’; which has most notably taken shape in numerous benefit
162 freezes, benefit caps and the more recent two-child limit (Author , 2018: 337). Intensified work-related
163 behavioural conditionality policies (e.g. the introduction of jobseekers agreements, diaries and
164 directions) to establish closer supervision of claimant behaviour and ensure they are actively seeking
165 work have been instrumental (Author, 2018). Legislation requiring claimants to take jobs at greater
166 geographical distances and the corresponding abolition of legislation which formerly enabled
167 claimants to refuse work outside their normal occupation and pay have also been introduced (Price,
168 2000). This has been enforced with a more severe benefit sanctioning regime for claimants and more
169 stringent formal and informal job outcome, sanctioning and off-benefit flow target regimes for
170 frontline staff (Author 2021a). Since the 1990s, aggregate annual sanctioning rates have increased
171 over 100%; reaching crescendo in 2013 with over one million sanctions sometimes for trivial reasons
172 (Adler, 2018; Price, 2000). These reforms created ‘a “flexible” pool of employees’ who not only ‘have
173 no alternative but to accept what is on offer’ but, through increasing the competition for precarious
174 jobs, exert a broader disciplinary effect on workers by ‘further erod[ing] pay levels and working
175 conditions at the bottom of the labour market’ (Peck, 2001: 349; 350; Umney, 2018).

176 This has benefitted business to the detriment of the working classes in Britain. On the one hand,
177 aggregate profits have increased (Roberts, 2009; Glyn, 2006). This is partly because employers have
178 managed to increase the rate of exploitation over the last 40 years, with the working classes producing
179 more and getting less in return. This has been facilitated by major advances in information
180 technologies (Castells, 2000), state abandonment of full employment policies (Glyn, 2006) and an
181 expansion of the unemployed labour supply (Wiggan, 2015) in order to simultaneously eschew basic

182 employment securities, reduce hiring costs to the bare minimum and finely calibrate labour supplies
183 with the vagaries of market demand (cf. Briken and Taylor, 2018).

184 On the other hand, hardship has increasingly defined the experience of unemployment. The Welfare
185 Conditionality (2018) project found that sanctions frequently increased poverty and destitution;
186 exacerbated ill health and facilitated movements out of the social security system. Garthwaite (2016:
187 8) documents ‘an explosion in the numbers of people turning to foodbanks’, with ‘almost half of the
188 reasons people cite using foodbanks’ being attributable to welfare reforms. There are clear racial and
189 gendered dimensions to the enhanced hardship endured by the poor and out-of-work fractions of the
190 working class. Dwyer et al., (2019: 145) have demonstrated how contemporary welfare reforms place
191 further restrictions on European migrants’ access to fiscal support, ‘triggering severe financial and
192 emotional hardship’. Meanwhile, Speake (2020: 193-199) has shown how the implementation of
193 contemporary welfare reforms can mirror the abuse previously experienced by female
194 victims/survivors of rape and sexual abuse, exacerbating health conditions and pushing them further
195 away from recovery.

196 This connects with a wider body of research, which has shown how reforms to the managerial
197 framework governing frontline behaviour have made Jobcentres more dangerous places, as
198 contemporary service delivery has been found to inflict a range of material and symbolic harms which
199 sometimes have life-threatening or fatal consequences (Author 2020; Author, 2021a). Punitive
200 welfare reforms have been identified by family and friends of the deceased as a key determinant of a
201 number of penury induced suicides and deaths; although policy makers continue ‘to deny a direct
202 “causal” link between government policy and benefit deaths’ (Clifford, 2020: 158; 162). Moreover,
203 evidence suggests that those who leave unemployment to enter work are more likely to remain in
204 poverty and/or cycle in and out of low-paid, precarious employment (White and Forth, 1998; Adams
205 et al., 2012; Welfare Conditionality, 2018). Quantitative research has shown how precarious work
206 ‘tends to reduce one’s subjective wellbeing’ (Kalleberg, 2018: 163), while ethnographic research has
207 shown how those who enter such jobs frequently endure overwork; abusive managerial practices; an
208 income insufficient to meet basic needs; and, correspondingly, poor mental and physical health (Angry
209 Workers, 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). Consequently, Grover (2019) conceptualises UK welfare reforms
210 as ‘violent proletarianisation’. They force the unemployed into jobs in a way that is injurious to mental
211 and physical health while ‘socially murdering’ some of its most vulnerable members.

212 **Securing Consent through Mystification and Division**

213 Some argue that the hegemony of ruling ideas have mystified and legitimised the expansion of these
214 inter-class inequalities in the minds of working class populations (Jessop et al., 1988; Lavery, 2019).
215 From the late 1970s the Thatcher administrations set out to restore conditions favourable to
216 profitable investment by mobilising popular support for a radical programme of political-economic
217 restructuring. This partially entailed the dismantling of post-war Keynesian welfare policies that had
218 helped to significantly reduce absolute poverty, reduce class inequalities and enhance the material
219 conditions of working class populations (Glyn and Harrison, 1980). Thatcher successfully garnered
220 support among the working classes by discursively constructing Britain as embroiled in an economic
221 and moral crisis fuelled by a number of ‘parasitic’ populations (e.g. benefit scroungers; recalcitrant
222 workers) who had leached off the wealth creating, ‘productive’ citizenry (Jessop et al., 1988; cf.
223 Golding and Middleton, 1982). In doing so, strategically significant groups were pitted against one
224 another. This strengthened ‘intra-class division whilst covering up inter-class antagonism’ and
225 obscured the true beneficiaries of their radical restructuring programme (Gallas, 2015: 146).

226 The New Labour administrations adopted a different approach. Substantial material concessions were
227 made to working class populations to secure broad-based support, as public expenditure increases
228 were implemented alongside some significant redistributive social policies (Lavery, 2019: 93-7). This
229 notably included the introduction of a national minimum wage and in-work tax credits for low-income
230 groups. Lavery (2019) suggests that these concessions signified the presence of a ‘one-nation’
231 hegemonic project, whereby New Labour sought to consolidate power by ceding to low-income
232 groups a greater portion of the total wealth than under previous administrations and incorporating
233 them into a period of considerable economic growth. Although, the ‘one-nation’ project
234 interpretation is complicated by several other occurrences. Notably, real-wage growth stagnated for
235 low and middle-income populations during a period where business was afforded a number of
236 lucrative tax reductions to shore up confidence and enhance profitability. The political leadership
237 advanced punitive workfare regimes to increase competition for low-wage, precarious jobs while
238 committing to labour market policies which undermined stable, middle-income job creation by
239 ensuring labour process control remained firmly in the hands of employers. Meanwhile, the political
240 leadership were somewhat consistent with previous administrations in laying the blame for poverty
241 and unemployment on the behavioural dysfunctions of a new ‘parasitic’ group which existed outside
242 mainstream British values—specifically, the emergence of a ‘workless class’ which was ostensibly
243 ‘playing no role in the formal economy, dependent on benefits and the black economy’ (Blair, 1997 in
244 Tyler, 2013: 159). Thus, while some different policy approaches were certainly adopted, whether the
245 New Labour administrations are best characterised by a ‘one nation’ or ‘two nation’s’ hegemonic
246 project remains contentious.

247 More recently, the Coalition government once again sought to improve conditions favourable to
248 profitable investment by constructing Britain as in crisis with ‘hardworking British taxpayers’ under
249 threat from migrant and unemployed populations—whose supposed predilection for a better life in
250 Britain and/or on out-of-work benefits were ‘a parasitical drain and a threat to scarce national
251 resources’ (Tyler, 2013: 9). This was reflected in declarations that migrant groups were robbing British
252 people of jobs, as well as an intensification of negative portrayals of migrant groups as a threat to
253 public resources and national security (Blinder and Allen, 2016). Britain was also portrayed as socially
254 broken; beset by an inter-generationally workless ‘underclass, where life is characterised by [welfare]
255 dependency, addiction, debt and family breakdown’ (Duncan-Smith, 2007: 5). These stigmatising
256 hegemonic discourses were ‘co-produced’ by multiple ideological state apparatuses and weaved into
257 the texture of everyday experiences and common sense assumptions (Pattison, 2021). Most notably,
258 an explosion of “poverty porn” television purporting to expose entire communities of inter-
259 generational worklessness was accompanied by ‘an extraordinary spike in the use of stigmatising
260 terminology’ describing claimants as scroungers, frauds, cheats (etc.) in British newspaper articles
261 (Morrison, 2019: 20-1). This legitimised the introduction of a whole battery of welfare reforms that
262 punished these ‘parasitic’ populations and severed their dependency on hard-working taxpayers’
263 money:

264 ‘fraudsters from around the world targeted [UK benefits] for personal gain ... it is not
265 cruel to expect people to work; getting people into work is vital not just for them, but for
266 all of us. ... this Government is on the side of hard-working taxpayers... [who] have
267 watched those on tax credits or benefits see their income rise, outstripping their
268 earnings ... [welfare reform] will benefit hardworking people across the country.’
269 (Duncan-Smith, 2012)

270 The cumulative effect was to both obscure the true beneficiaries of the Coalition’s subsequent
271 austerity programme and galvanise popular support for punitive reforms by fuelling ‘anti-welfare

272 common sense' among the British citizenry; further exacerbating intra-class divisions and hostilities
273 (Jensen and Tyler, 2015). This was visible in both rising levels of inter-personal violence and the
274 reproduction of hegemonic discourses on social media sites against migrant and out-of-work groups
275 (Burnett, 2017; Morrison, 2019). It was also evident in a longstanding hardening of public attitudes
276 towards welfare provisions in Britain (Hills, 2017), with the British public expressing declining support
277 for spending more on benefits for a range of out-of-work groups.

278 **Methods**

279 This article presents evidence from the 'Welfare conditionality: sanctions, support and behaviour
280 change' study. The research sought to explore both the efficacy and ethicality of welfare conditionality
281 in principle and practice and involved research teams at six UK universities. It comprised semi-
282 structured interviews with policy stakeholders, focus groups with front-line welfare practitioners and
283 three rounds of repeat qualitative longitudinal interviews with welfare recipients subject to welfare
284 conditionality. Individuals were interviewed on three separate occasions over a two-year period,
285 focusing on their experiences of support and sanctions within the welfare system. Purposive non-
286 random sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. This article draws upon empirical data
287 from policy stakeholder interviews and the first wave of interviews with 64 Jobseeker's Allowance
288 claimants (65% men and 35% women) in Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Manchester,
289 Peterborough and Sheffield. Nearly half were aged between 25 and 49 years with a further third aged
290 50-64 years. Almost all (95%) were unemployed. A quarter were disabled or had long-term health
291 conditions, including some who had been transferred to JSA after failing a Work Capability Assessment
292 for Employment and Support Allowance. Over half (53%) had been subject to a benefit sanction with
293 two thirds being sanctioned once and the remainder between 2-5 times.

294 Claimants were asked a series of questions about their experiences and views of welfare conditionality.
295 All were probed about claiming benefits; the support provided by Jobcentre Plus and their views about
296 the balance between sanctions and support. Another set of questions explored participant views
297 regarding the tying of benefit entitlement to claimant behaviour. Similarly, their views regarding the
298 fairness and efficacy of mandatory work activity requirements were canvassed as well as their
299 opinions on the causes of unemployment. A key line of enquiry focused on the purpose of sanctions;
300 personal experiences of benefit sanctions; and the impact on their subsequent behaviour. The
301 research team also asked a series of normative questions about whether it was fair to use benefit
302 sanctions. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. A vast amount of data was produced
303 necessitating a highly systematic and structured approach to data management and analysis (Saldana,
304 2003). The complex multi-site and multi-team research design offered further challenges.
305 Consequently, a framework matrix-based method (Corden and Nice, 2007; Lewis, 2007) with the aid
306 of QSR NVivo 10 was employed. All researchers who conducted interviews assigned attributes for
307 those transcripts. Then a two-tier approach to coding was used, with a team of coding officers applying
308 the first tier of framework matrix coding across the sample. The matrix coding was assembled
309 inductively by a working group of the project PI, a Co-I and researchers drawn from a range of the
310 institutional teams involved. The second tier of coding was conducted by the authors of the
311 Jobseeker's Allowance sub-set. Key themes were identified from a close reading of a selection of
312 transcripts, which were then coded across the sample. This was supplemented by text searches to
313 verify the representativeness of findings and to identify data that did not fit the main trends.

314 **Findings: Hegemony in Action?**

315 A key strength of the present research is that it considered the views and experiences of both policy
316 makers and the unemployed towards a battery of welfare reforms. In terms of the former, policy

317 makers seek to build support for their policies through the dissemination of (anti-welfare-) 'common
318 sense' ideas. An insight into this process was gained through interviews with policy makers involved
319 in the implementation of welfare reform. This included two Members of Parliament and two senior
320 civil servants in the Department for Work & Pensions. The findings begin with a brief exploration of
321 policy makers views on welfare reform, before shifting towards a more detailed analysis of the views
322 and experiences of unemployed people.

323 **Policy makers**

324 The growing intensification of welfare conditionality has drawn heavily upon narratives of 'inter-
325 generational worklessness', 'welfare dependency' and the perceived need to activate the unemployed.
326 A senior civil servant in the DWP opined: 'There's this feeling that there is a group in society that has
327 become dependent on welfare and it's a way to nudge them to make that behavioural change' (K148).
328 Similarly, a Labour MP drew our attention to the problem of inter-generational unemployment: 'I
329 mean you're talking about inter-generational unemployment. I mean some of them will be on their
330 third or fourth generation. I think there were people who frankly got out of the way of being
331 participating members of society, of a community through work. And yes, to a certain extent, they
332 have to accept their own responsibility for that' (K116). Consequently, a senior civil servant argued:
333 'That sort of hassle factor that has the most impact on getting people back into work'. He went on:
334 'Part of that is around hassle, a small part of it is around deterrent effects, but actually it's also about
335 motivation as well' (K180). Policy makers frequently justify punitive welfare policies with reference to
336 support garnered from the general public. This downplays the ideological nature of the enterprise. A
337 Labour MP explicitly justified growing welfare conditionality by citing the public's increasingly hostile
338 views towards benefit claimants: 'And I hear again and again on the doorstep where "She never does
339 a stroke of work. There's nothing matter with her, but she gets £500 a week"'. Similarly, whilst
340 highlighting the Work & Pensions Committee Report on Jobcentre Plus (HoC WPC, 2014) which had a
341 section on sanctions, a senior civil servant concluded: 'So they're interested, clearly politically people
342 are interested, and the more we have programmes like Benefit street, the more it will become popular
343 with the population' (K180).

344 **The unemployed**

345 Since the creation of the labour exchange in the early twentieth century there has been an expectation
346 that unemployed people should seek work when claiming benefits and this principle was accepted by
347 virtually all interviewees. Most felt that: 'it is better to be working to being unemployed' (ED-SJ-010)
348 and employment was the key to living a 'normal life' free of poverty and the daily privations associated
349 with benefit claiming. An Edinburgh man spoke for many when he noted that 'you don't feel that
350 you're having a normal life when you're unemployed on the social' (ED-AS012). Furthermore, many
351 viewed job search as 'earning our benefit', an Edinburgh woman related this to her values instilled
352 during childhood: 'because of the way I've been brought up. If you want a sweetie, do the dishes. If
353 you want money [benefits] do the dishes' (ED-BW-016). Nevertheless, some disquiet was expressed
354 about being pushed into any job. There were contrasting views among jobseekers regarding the
355 ethicality of *mandatory work activity* and *benefit sanctions*.

356 Views were mixed regarding whether it was fair to require the unemployed to undertake unpaid
357 *mandatory work activity*. Those that felt it was fair pointed to its perceived utility in providing work
358 experience and improving employment prospects. 'I think it is fair because they've got to get back into
359 the work scene' (ED-BW-026). Another individual indicated: 'Yes, if it's going to help them get a job'
360 (ED-SJ-029). However, many doubted its effectiveness and highlighted its punitive function, some
361 likening it to slave labour. 'I'm not sure how effective that is in helping anybody to get back to

362 employment. It's just like community service' (ED-SJ-010). A Sheffield man reported: 'I don't like it,
363 working for nothing' (SH-JM-014). Another interviewee noted: 'You don't want to be treated like a
364 slave' (ED-AS-012).

365 Many interviewees explicitly rejected mandatory work activity but expressed strong support for
366 *benefit sanctions*. A single Edinburgh female reported that she 'felt horrible going and taking the
367 taxpayers money because that's what jobseekers is' (ED-BW-022). Nevertheless, she felt that the
368 unemployed should not be compelled to undertake mandatory work activity: 'I think that's slave
369 labour. I hate that'. Despite being sanctioned and put on daily signing she expressed support for
370 benefit sanctions arguing that they were necessary to deter those dependent on benefits and gaming
371 the system. 'It's just too easy to stay on it [Jobseekers Allowance] and not look for work....there are
372 plenty of people that can work their way around the system'. She cited individuals forgetting their job
373 search booklets (in which activity is recorded) and making false claims regarding job applications.
374 Nevertheless, she blamed the Government for making the benefits system too lax and maintained
375 that the authorities should root out undeserving groups.

376 Nevertheless, a small minority of interviewees indicated that benefit sanctions were ethically
377 illegitimate. An Edinburgh man reported: 'you shouldn't get sanctioned for anything' (ED-BW-046).
378 Some argued that sanctions worsened poverty and insecurity. A young London woman reported: 'I'm
379 fairly lucky. If anything goes wrong.....I've got my mum and dad, I've got a room there. The majority
380 of these people haven't.....they're physically trying to do everything they can to find work, and they
381 get sanctioned for something so minute then excuse my language, but they're bugged' (LO-BW-013).
382 A few individuals argued that sanctions were unfair because of the lack of good quality local jobs.
383 'There's nothing about in Sheffield, love, there's only part-time jobs and they are no good to me' (SH-
384 JM-014). From this perspective unemployment was due to economic restructuring, new technology
385 and globalisation rather than personal failings. 'The steelworks went and the rest followed....it's all
386 going to China....Get the steelworks back from China, then you'll get people back into work' (SH-JM-
387 014). A Bristol man reported: 'I know technology is good.....but all it's doing is cutting back on the
388 workforce' (BR-AS-013).

389 There was, in addition, widespread discontent at the way in which sanctioning worked in practice.
390 Many indicated that they were an 'everyday occurrence' rather than targeted at 'extreme cases'.
391 There was a widespread suspicion, which is not unfounded (cf. Author, 2021a), that this was due to
392 the existence of covert sanctioning targets. A Bristol man, for example, thought that sanctions were
393 unfair 'when you've got an agenda like a quota to fill' (BR-AS-011). A few indicated that they were a
394 disproportionate response to relatively trivial occurrences such as a lack of punctuality. 'But the
395 sanction is a massive sword that has been brought down on people's heads and backs, and it is totally
396 unfair' (SH-JM-004). The threat of sanctions also encouraged a culture of counter-productive
397 compliance: 'I'm going for jobs that I know I won't get, just to cover myself' (LO-BW-008).

398 Sanctions led to a range of adverse impacts including forcing individuals into chronically insecure
399 labour, food bank usage and movements into 'survival crime' and 'survival sex'. A Glasgow man
400 concluded: 'I think it [sanction] harms people more than anything' (GL-SW-001). A Peterborough man
401 recounted the story of a friend that had been sanctioned for a year which led to his eviction and forced
402 him into zero hours work secured through a recruitment agency. The uncertainty of not knowing from
403 one week to the next what his pay would be led to a £1,400 debt. 'Agencies are the worst people for
404 getting you into debt. They should abolish them' (PE-KJ-010). An Edinburgh man indicated 'they're
405 going to be getting no money, no food or anything and that's going to end up going to crime and
406 things' (ED-BW-026).

407 Despite the near universal support for the principle of benefit sanctions many questioned whether
408 their purpose was to instil agency or change the behaviour of claimants. They were often viewed as
409 part of a disentanglement strategy linked to austerity. 'This is basically to boot as many people off as
410 possible so more people will think it's a pain to go in every week, more people will stop going on
411 jobseekers' (ED-BW-022). 'I think that what they're doing is trying to cut down on the benefit being
412 paid out' (BR-AS-013). A related concern was that sanctions were ineffective at changing the behaviour
413 of those alleged to be 'gaming the system'. A Sheffield woman opined: 'There's a whole section of
414 society that I don't see until I come to places like this [Jobcentre]....there's a certain section that won't
415 even be perturbed by sanctions' (SH-EB-015). Nevertheless, sanctioning was also justified with
416 reference to the perceived need to discipline 'undeserving' claimants, principally:

417 • *the feckless;*

418 • *those gaming the system;*

419 • *and migrants.*

420 *The feckless workshy 'other'*

421 The most common stereotype was of the feckless, workshy claimant content to live life on benefits.
422 'There's a lot of people that just stay in bed all day. They just go in once a fortnight and they can't be
423 bothered to do anything' (BR-KJ-023). 'All they're interested in is just getting the money and spending
424 it on beer' (PE-JM-023). Young men were frequently demonised. A Bristol man indicated: 'I'm too old
425 but the younger ones no, there's nothing stopping them for looking for work' (BR-AS-013). Sanctions
426 were justifiable because in their absence: 'There would be people who would happily sit there, not
427 looking for work and take the money' (LO-BW-007). Consequently, the primary purpose of benefit
428 sanctions was to discipline 'those that don't want to do anything.....it will give people a fright' (GL-SW-
429 001). This stereotype was so pervasive it was held by those that were opposed to benefit sanctions.
430 These views were often buttressed by subscription to pervasive (anti-welfare) 'common sense' ideals
431 of economic individualism, which have long maintained that each individual is responsible for their
432 own welfare and that unemployment is predominantly a consequence of personal deficiencies: 'I think
433 it is up to the individual person....their lifestyle' (BR-KJ-023).

434 A 28 year old London male had joined the British Transport Police as a Police Community Support
435 Officer after completing his 'A' levels. He had then been made redundant following an extended period
436 of poor physical health. 'I basically had a stomach ulcer that exploded. So I was off for a year and in
437 the end they got rid of me because they couldn't afford to keep paying me.' He was made
438 homeless but had then managed to get accommodation at the YMCA. At the time of interview he
439 had been unemployed for nearly five years apart from a couple of temporary jobs and some
440 undeclared cash-in-hand work. His long-term career aspiration was to become a teacher but he was
441 prepared to 'do anything' in the meantime.

442 He had been sanctioned for one month for failing to attend a Work Programme appointment. More
443 recently, he had been threatened with a three-month sanction when illness prevented him attending
444 a Jobcentre appointment. 'I managed to blag my way through it and arrange it for the next day.' During
445 the interview he expressed the view that Jobcentre Plus had sanctioning targets and that the social
446 security system was heavily weighted in favour of sanctions rather than support. Furthermore, he
447 acknowledged that sanctions had not improved his personal situation and: 'it seems like a lot of people
448 are disciplined [by sanctions] when they genuinely are trying.' Despite this they were deemed to be
449 necessary to discipline the feckless workshy 'other'. 'I think people should be punished if they're just

450 happy to claim for so long and not to do anything [to seek work]. Unemployment was caused by a
451 deficient work ethic: 'Some people don't want to work anymore. Like that Benefits Street programme.'

452 Contradictions between experiences of and perspectives on punitive policies were not uncommon.
453 Respondents would frequently relay *negative* experiences, reporting a range of harms endured from
454 sanctions, poor treatment from frontline staff and existing on a low-income more generally. Yet these
455 experiences were often accompanied with *positive* support for punitive policies in the case of
456 undeserving 'others'. Interaction with the ideological state apparatuses was important in shaping
457 positive support for welfare reforms. Respondents would sometimes draw directly on content
458 consumed from popular media to regurgitate and conjure up a cast of 'phantom others' (Shildrick and
459 MacDonald, 2013: 299) who, unlike themselves, did not conform to mainstream behavioural norms
460 and values and were thus in need of discipline and punishment.

461 *The gamer of the system*

462 There was a pervasive view that many benefit claimants were cynically manipulating the benefit
463 system and this justified sanctioning. A Sheffield man referenced 'certain people who are deliberately
464 wrongfully claiming benefits' (SH-JM-004). Some particular groups were singled out: 'Self-employed
465 people doing cash-in-hand building' (BR-AS-011). A Peterborough man also reported that former work
466 colleagues in construction simultaneously claimed benefits. However, interviewees distanced
467 themselves from stigmatising discourses of gaming the system. Personal admissions of guilt were
468 extremely rare and this undermines the notion of an underclass with distinct social norms.

469 A 27 year old single male was living in a homeless shelter following the break-up of his relationship.
470 He had worked as a commercial cleaner undertaking 14 hour shifts in large supermarkets and a
471 playground assistant. He was now looking for 'anything' but was prioritising resolving his housing
472 situation. Previously imprisoned he had also received a benefit sanction for insufficient job search
473 activity. Nevertheless, sanctions were deemed necessary to force individuals to work: 'There is no such
474 thing as a free lunch'. Although some disquiet was expressed about the length of sanctions they were
475 justified with reference to the poor behaviour of some claimants: 'because there's people that just do
476 take the mick.....they get paid and then they say the next day I lost my money, and they spend it on
477 some drugs'.

478 *The migrant 'other'*

479 Some saw benefit sanctions as a means of deterring the claims made by migrants who, it was alleged,
480 were putting intolerable strains on the benefits system. More commonly, migration was viewed as a
481 source of unfair competition for poor jobs. A London woman related: 'We had a load of Polish and
482 Romanians come over and they took jobs. ...Don't give it to foreigners. Give us a chance' (LO-BW-007).
483 Another Londoner highlighted increased competition from migrants: 'It just seems some of the
484 interviews I go for there's a massive amount of non-British people going for the jobs' (LO-BW-010).
485 Consequently migration was often cited as a key cause of unemployment: 'I would say one reason, it
486 may not sound right, but there's a lot of foreigners in the country. They've took over the workforce
487 and they're taking over the jobs and employers are happy to take them on. And it doesn't help people
488 that come from here' (ED-BW-036). 'The causes of unemployment and social decline in this country is
489 caused by being in the EU, open borders letting too many unskilled labourers in.....This government
490 what they're doing they're encouraging big companies to employ migrant workers' (BR-AS-014).

491 A 23 year old single Peterborough woman had left school at 16 years without any qualifications: 'So
492 all I've ever had is cleaning jobs.' She had also completed a Hospitality and Catering course. At the
493 time of interview she was living in private rented accommodation and had just secured a full-time care

494 assistant job: 'I'm really lucky to have got accepted for this job.' A sanction for failing to attend a Work
495 Programme appointment through ill-health had: 'made me really depressed.' The primary purpose of
496 Jobcentre Plus was to force people off benefits with her work coach explaining: 'Basically, our aim is
497 to try and get you to not claim Jobseeker's or any benefit, so we're going to make it as hard as possible
498 for you.' Nevertheless, she justified benefit sanctions with reference to the need to deter the
499 illegitimate claims of migrants. 'There's so many people out there claiming benefits and coming into
500 our country to claim benefits and I understand why they're doing it [sanctioning], because it's just
501 crippling the system.' When asked about the causes of unemployment she highlighted the passivity of
502 the poor and an 'entitlement mentality'. 'Some people just don't want to go out and work because
503 they know they can get money [benefits] for free'.

504 As has been shown, respondents sometimes summoned the language of social injustice when
505 assessing punitive welfare reforms and particularly when reflecting on the prospect of enduring them
506 personally (e.g. mandatory work activity as 'slave labour', sanctions as 'unfair', 'harmful'). However,
507 when explicitly factoring in 'parasitic' others in their assessments of the same policies, such language
508 was remarkably absent. In its place was the language of ruling ideas—with participants instead
509 drawing, almost verbatim, on the content of 'two-nations' hegemonic discourses to justify support for
510 policies known to inflict harm upon themselves and others.

511 Nevertheless, while oppositional, structural perspectives on the causes of poverty and unemployment
512 were scarce, personal experiences of coping with the privations caused by sanctions led a minority to
513 reappraise their views. These tended to be older men aged in their fifties, some of which had lived
514 through the increasingly punitive transformation of the benefits system and expressed a deep sense
515 of personal injustice at the imposition of a sanction. A Bristol man had claimed JSA since 2006 and
516 reported that Jobcentre Plus had become much less supportive. 'They've got computers up there, but
517 that's about it, they don't help you that much' (BR-KJ-022). 'I was sanctioned because I didn't put the
518 job I applied for onto their Universal Jobmatch.....I thought it was petty'. He had resorted to using a
519 food bank and had borrowed money from his sister to cope. There were no circumstances where the
520 use of sanctions was justified because: 'they're stopping people from eating'. Similarly, an Edinburgh
521 man had been sanctioned for a lack of job search activity which he ascribed to sanctioning targets: 'I
522 just think they want people in and out and see how many people they can sanction' (ED-SJ-018). The
523 adverse consequences of sanctioning were a major factor in his opposition to them: 'I think the
524 consequences of the sanctions are not fair. People get into a lot more debt, it can lead to a whole
525 chain of events, and their lives can be difficult'.

526 **Discussion and Conclusion**

527 This article has shown how the unemployed are broadly supportive of punitive welfare reforms which
528 have led to increased poverty and destitution; exacerbated ill health; disengagement with the benefits
529 system and movements into 'survival crime' (Welfare Conditionality, 2018). This has taken place in a
530 context of concerted attempts by numerous UK governments to mobilise popular support for
531 contentious reforms through a 'two-nation's hegemonic project' that constructs 'moralised
532 antagonisms' between 'productive' and 'parasitic' populations (Lavery, 2019). In light of this, we have
533 sought to interrogate the usefulness of Marxist theories of hegemony to explain this apparent
534 contradiction between claimants' (mostly) positive support for, and (mostly) negative experiences of,
535 welfare reform.

536 The 'two nation's hegemonic project' which seeks to legitimise an ongoing phase of capitalist
537 development featuring widening inter-class inequalities has had some success with the unemployed.
538 This has been sought by constructing a range of 'parasitic' groups—i.e. the feckless, the fraudulent,

539 the migrant—as a threat to public resources who require immediate action in order to protect and
540 advance the interests of ‘productive’, hardworking British taxpayers. It is salient to note that harmful
541 experiences of punitive welfare reform did lead some individuals into a more oppositional stance as
542 evidenced by frequent hostility towards mandatory work activity and the reaction of some of those
543 receiving benefit sanctions. Nevertheless, the present research has highlighted the important role
544 played by the media as a hegemonic apparatus that binds the unemployed to particular ideas through
545 their consent rather than coercion. Both policy makers and the unemployed, for example, referenced
546 TV programmes such as 'Benefits Street' to conjure up ‘phantom others’ in aid of justifying benefit
547 sanctions. The research has also underlined the notion that hegemony is a 'lived' process of political
548 domination, with respondents frequently drawing upon their personal experiences to legitimate
549 'moralised antagonisms' and sanctions (see later). Consequently, we contend that there are two key
550 reasons why the content of ‘two-nations’ hegemonic projects have resonated with unemployed
551 people:

- 552 • the stigmatising threat posed by hegemonic discourses to the identities of unemployed people
- 553 • their relatability to their lived experiences

554 *First*, two-nations hegemonic project’s explicitly produce and disseminate a ‘stigma power’ which is
555 distinctively seductive and threatening to unemployed populations (Tyler, 2020; 16-8). This is because
556 discourses associated with two nation’s projects specifically target and devalue out-of-work groups as
557 a burden on public resources; thus posing a specific symbolic ‘threat to claimants own identities’ and
558 their membership to the valued, ‘productive’ citizenry (cf. Patrick, 2017: 161). Unemployed people
559 frequently respond through classic forms of stigma management; dis-identifying with such discourses
560 in their own case but concurring with and perpetuating them to censure ‘other’ groups. Interviewees
561 frequently contrasted their own behaviour with 'undeserving' groups: 'Because, well I mean for me I'd
562 rather be out there working, doing something, rather than sitting about doing nothing all day.. You'll
563 get some people that can't be bothered to work and stuff like that, but I'm just not one like that' (ED-
564 SJ-010).

565 Thus, by managing the threat of stigma and attempting to establish distance from de-valued
566 populations, the ‘stigma power’ produced within and disseminated through two-nation’s hegemonic
567 projects manufactures consent for its agenda through forms of identity management and resistance.
568 It does this by encouraging even those who are vulnerable to portrayals as ‘parasitic’ to affirm their
569 own membership to the productive citizenry by dis-identifying with stigmatising discourses and
570 deflecting them onto ‘parasitic’ others; which in turn works to establish, preserve and enhance
571 divisions within groups that share common interests and common problems (Tyler, 2020). The
572 interviewees sometimes included former drug addicts, for example, who felt that 'junkies' should not
573 be allowed to claim benefits. The stigma power typical of two nation’s projects therefore focuses the
574 hostilities/discontents of unemployed populations towards socially and physically proximate ‘others’
575 and away from the political leadership.

576 *Second*, the power of the two-nation’s project also resides in its relatability to the lived experiences
577 of the unemployed. Successful hegemonic projects largely depend on their ability to link 'common
578 sense' ideas with real daily experiences and, compared to any other social group, the unemployed are
579 perhaps most likely to relate to the discursive content of the two-nation’s project. This is not only
580 because unemployed people are more likely to experience the harshest and most impoverishing
581 conditions, but more importantly, they tend to occupy closer physical and social proximity to ‘parasitic’
582 groups; who are thus more likely to be active and visible within the social milieu of unemployed
583 populations. Moreover, two-nation’s projects have been successively deployed during a period where

584 there has been a gradual 'withering away' (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013: 300) of the cultural
585 resources necessary for working-class communities to develop more politicised forms of class
586 consciousness and establish counter-hegemonies around poverty, unemployment and their causes
587 (see Bagguley, 1991). It is in this context that ruling ideas are more able to provide unemployed people
588 with a *misleading* and *mis-recognisable* set of proximate scapegoats through which they can make
589 sense of, and lay the blame for, legitimate concerns about growing poverty and insecurity.

590 There is some evidence to support this claim. While immigration has been found to have an overall
591 positive effect on jobs, wages and public finances (Oxford Economics, 2018), it may have a negative
592 effect on groups who are most likely to claim unemployment benefits. Dustmann et al. (2013) found
593 that increases in the ratio of immigrants to natives among the working age population has positive
594 effects on native wages overall, but exerts downward pressure on the wages of workers occupying
595 the lowest paid percentiles of the UK's wage distribution. Furthermore, a review of 12 studies
596 conducted between 2003 and 2018 concluded that immigration is likely to have a negative effect on
597 employment opportunities for those with an intermediate (O-level, GCSE, secondary school)
598 education (Ruhs and Vargas-Silva, 2020). When considering that increasing competition for jobs and
599 downward pressure on wages for the poorest fractions of the working class has taken place alongside
600 the promulgation of hegemonic discourses portraying migrating groups as a central threat; its perhaps
601 stands to reason that such discourses are likely to hold greatest currency among those most likely to
602 see and feel its negative effects in their everyday life. Personal narratives, for example, often
603 referenced recruitment exercises where interviewees had lost job opportunities to migrants. A London
604 man reported: 'they gave me the job but then withdrew it because an Eastern European was going to
605 do it for less money' (LO-BW-010).

606 Moreover, while benefit fraud has remained consistently low, it does exist. From 2005 to 2018, fraud
607 has fluctuated between 0.6% and 1.2% of total unemployment benefit expenditure; reaching a peak
608 of around £2.1bn (DWP, 2018: 3). Several studies have consistently found that various claimant groups
609 engage in informal and/or illicit activities alongside claiming benefits to meet essential needs (Jordan
610 et al., 1992; MacDonald, 1994; Author, 2021b). These studies conclude that the monetary gains of
611 fraud are often very minor and more accurately reflect survival strategies developed in response to
612 the increasingly punitive and impoverishing nature of welfare reform (Author, 2021b). Nevertheless,
613 they show that fraudulent activity is not uncommon in the spaces typically inhabited by unemployed
614 people. Consequently, hegemonic discourses portraying fecklessness and benefit fraud as a central
615 threat to public resources are likely to be most persuasive and/or subject to direct verification with
616 those exposed to such activity. Familiarity with behavioural adaptations to poverty can generate
617 narrative power just as much as ignorance can.

618 While immigration and benefit fraud may have some negative economic effects on working class
619 populations, these effects are comparatively minor when compared to those posed by political
620 economic restructuring in Britain. Since 1980, the share of national wealth apportioned to
621 unemployment benefits and wages have undergone significant declines in spite of significant increases
622 in average labour productivity and gross domestic product per head (OECD, 2020; ONS, 2015;
623 Lapavitsas, 2013; Onaran, 2014). At the same time, the share of national wealth going towards
624 business in the form of profits has increased (Glyn, 2006; Roberts, 2009); with the top 1% of income
625 earners now commanding almost double the share of total income than they did in 1980 (Onaran,
626 2014; Harvey, 2007). Moreover, the revenue lost in corporate tax avoidance to offshore tax havens
627 alone, a growth industry since the 1980s, is roughly six times more than revenue lost in benefit fraud
628 (Zucman, 2017; DWP, 2018).

629 It is on the basis of such evidence that we believe the participants in this study were justified in feeling
630 and articulating a legitimate threat to the material conditions of their lives and their communities.
631 However, the real threat to both unemployed people and the working class more generally lies not in
632 socially proximate 'others'. Rather, it lies in the governments that not only continually fail to represent
633 their material interests, but actively dismantle social protections to bolster corporate profitability and
634 deploy punitive welfare reforms to submit the unemployed to chronically insecure poverty labour. It
635 is, of course, the complexity and ambiguity of these processes that disguises and mystifies transfers
636 of wealth and strengthens the power and effectiveness of hegemonic projects.

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