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UK politics: the rise and fall of 'Mayism'

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Abstract

On taking office as Prime Minister, Theresa May appeared to promise a radical repositioning of British Conservatism. The seeming embrace of industrial policy, the calls for the reform of corporate governance, the plans for an audit of 'burning injustices' including inequalities, the appeals to those who were 'just about managing (JAMs) as well the promises to curb immigration and the critique of 'citizens of nowhere', all pointed to a populist reconfiguration. There was even talk of a "workers' party". It seemed that in the wake of the Leave victory in the Brexit referendum, and the apparent collapse of both UKIP and the Labour vote, there were opportunities to win a much more sizeable segment of the white working-class over into the Conservatives' electoral camp. The May project was short-lived. It was not only fatally weakened by the results of the June 2017 general election but by the strains and tensions (or processes of "intercurrence") between contending orders and logics within Conservatism. Amidst this, May and her allies could draw upon only limited political resources. The Party thus proved unable to take advantage of the electoral opportunities that opened up.

There have been very many studies of both ideational and institutional change. Some have been informed by notions of punctuated equilibria and emphasise the part played by relatively short-lived periods of ruptural crisis in bringing about dramatic, large-scale and path-departing changes in ideas in institutional structures. The crisis years of the 1970s, when successive shocks ushered in “stagflation”, have been widely cited in studies of economic policymaking. Other accounts have focused instead on processes of incremental change that cumulatively, over time, yielded transformative consequences. The use of policy “drift” and “layering” to erode the mid-century settlement between capital and labour and enact a neoliberal agenda from the 1980s onwards have served as a basis for discussion.

Having said this, the processes by and the mechanisms through which both cognitive and normative shifts “translate” into public policy as ideas and institutions interact have received less attention. Those processes and mechanisms can accelerate, impede or even halt institutional change. In some settings, both ideas and institutions may be changed as a consequence. The end-product may thus be far-removed from the goals of the principal actors. Or, in other settings, policy ideas may be embraced by well-placed actors commanding extensive political resources but efforts to “translate” such ideas into institutional reforms fail to secure traction.

In such circumstances, ideas that fail to secure adoption are likely to be abandoned. For the most part minority discourses, lacking institutional ties, do not have an extended lifespan. Where avenues are closed off for long periods and policy ideas are denied institutional recognition, ideas are likely to lose credibility and legitimacy. Ideas and institutions are therefore mutually interdependent. As has been rhetorically asked of ideas that had seemingly ‘outlived’ their associated institutions: “Can ideas or ideologies have significant political life of their own, even as the institutions or practices that once reinforced them have become weakened (Orren, 1995: 98). It follows from this that ‘unmoored’ ideas that have never had institutional linkages or ties to a constituency may well have a limited lifespan. This understanding of the relationship between institutions and ideas can be contrasted with the more modest and limited representations of the role that institutions play that is conveyed in some of the literature at what might be regarded as the intersection between historical institutionalism and discursive institutionalism but which can be found in both analytical frameworks: “.. institutional arrangements do not only shape ideas, they also shape the discourse, affecting where discourse matters, by establishing who talks to whom about what, where and when” (Schmidt, 2006: 11).

This paper considers a set of policy ideas that “failed” and the “translation” processes between ideas and institutions. It does this by considering the fate of what might be dubbed “Mayism”. This refers to the body of policy ideas, that collectively constituted an effort to secure a populist repositioning of Conservatism around

inequality, economic immobility and the white working-class, that Theresa May used to define herself and her mission for both the country and the Conservative Party at the point in 2016 when she became party leader and UK Prime Minister.

Ideas that “fail”

The word “failure” poses challenges. Policy ideas “fail”, insofar as they are not adopted and do not thereby take an institutionalized form, for different reasons. It should certainly be said at the outset that the word “failure” has to be approached with some methodological caution. A policy idea that is proposed and circulated but never adopted and implemented cannot simply be categorized as a “failure”. Policy ideas may be put forward as part of credible strategy to seek the legislative or regulatory enactment of that idea. However, there may also be other strategic reasons. Actors engage in “kite flying” or seeking allies who might serve as potential coalition partners. Ideas can function as “branding” exercises. At an early stage, actors may be unaware or uncertain where a particular policy idea may lead. Policy ideas may furthermore be flanking mechanisms put forward so as to soften or ameliorate the impact of other ideas. It has been argued, for example, that some of the ideas circulated by “New Labour” in the 1990s were intended to ameliorate the embrace of a harsh neoliberal logic (that broke with the traditions of social democracy) and thereby make the neoliberal project more sustainable in the long run” (Jessop, n.d.: 2).

What however of the policy ideas that are put forward in the hope that they will be enacted? Many accounts of ideational change, particular those associated with historical institutionalism, are closely tied to the study of institutions but also based around notions of punctuated equilibria. The most familiar of these describes the process of “third order change” at the end of the 1970s when, amidst crisis, economic policy thinking underwent a paradigmatic shift. This took place after other policy (first and second order) changes have failed to provide solutions and there had been, as a consequence, a period of “social learning” (Hall, 1993).

Subsequent scholarship turned towards incrementalism although in many accounts the transformative capacity of crises often remained an implicit or sometimes explicit feature of studies (Widmaier, 2017: 24). For example, accounts considered the ways in which incremental ideational change processes during long-run periods of relative stability could over time “subvert” and thereby eventually displace existing paradigms. From this perspective, some policy ideas (and the advocacy of private retirement savings schemes often serves as an example) functioned as a “Trojan horse” that through cumulative effects undermined and changed existing

institutional and ideational structures. Thus, although most of the state structures and programmes bequeathed by the New Deal and Great Society reforms in the US were still intact at the end of the Reagan years neoliberal reformers succeeded in undermining them in the longer-term and changing the terms of public policy debate through processes such as “layering” and “drift” (Hacker, 2004; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). This rests upon the discretionary strategies adopted by well-placed actors. Similarly, another actor-based account focuses on the way that individuals and groupings can secure “ideational power as they exert influence over the cognitive or normative beliefs of others” thereby bringing forth change (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2017: 7). Other accounts point to changes in the distribution of power within coalitional blocs that, it is argued, may spur shifts in policy thinking (Widmaier, 2017: 26). It may also be that policy ideas shift and change because there are “... minority discourses waiting in the wings proposing alternative policy programmes” (Schmidt, 2002: 223). In certain settings, such background ideas are brought into the foreground.

For the most part, these accounts focus upon the pivotal – and discretionary – role of actors. There is an implicit or often explicit focus on the role of “norm entrepreneurs” and their capacity to undertake “persuasive struggles” so as to secure legitimacy for particular cognitive and normative claims (Baker, 2013: 37). Such an approach can however, even if done unintentionally, reduce institutions to, at most, a walk-on or ancillary role in accounts. Studies of ideational processes have a further characteristic. It can often seem that ideational shifts (such as the embrace of neoliberal economics at the end of the 1970s) necessarily and inevitably lead to institutional change.

Ideas, even if hegemonic, may or may not lead to institutional change. The processes by which ideational changes “translate” into institutional shifts are necessarily complex and often unpredictable. They may offer new or innovative policy ideas an “easy ride” or they may place countless obstacles in their path. They may enable changes to be enacted at speed or alternatively transformative ideas may be reduced to a set of weak, limited and partial reforms. Or they may put those transformative ideas into practice incrementally but in a way that, over time, facilitates their full implementation. Alternatively, they may seal off ideas from the locus of authority and thereby consign them to the sidelines. Or. Institutional circumstances (in particular, the number and character of veto points) may compel policy reformers to become “subversives” (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). And, ideas may change in character as they interact with institutions. Margaret Weir and Theda Skocpol’s path-breaking study of the US, Britain and Sweden in the 1930s pointed to the role of different state structures and party configurations in opening or closing off the recognition and acceptance of Keynesian

economic thinking as public policy (Weir and Skocpol, 1985). Others have also observed that the hegemony of the Treasury within governmental institutions, as the Treasury's ties to the Bank of England, ensured that the "classical view" was upheld and prevented the use of deficit budgets and government expenditure to alleviate the depression (Pollard, 1970). Furthermore, the logic of much of the literature written within a historical institutionalist framework suggests that path-departing forms of policy change are likely to face many more barriers, because of the institutional complementarities built around particular paths, than path-conforming or path-adapting ideas. In sum, the processes of transmission between policy idea and institution require attention and scrutiny: "what happens to ideas and the form policy programmes actually take .. cannot be read off ideational developments alone" (Baker, 2013: 51).

At this stage, in considering the institutional and ideational obstacles that policy ideas encounter, it is valuable to draw upon theoretical propositions associated with the study of American Political Development (APD). Their associations with APD and processes of state-building in the US have isolated them from the dialogue that has taken place between historical institutionalism and discursive institutionalism about the place of ideas in reinforcing policy continuities and the bringing forth of change.

Much APD scholarship begins with the assertion, noted above, that ideas that lack institutional connections are unlikely to secure widespread legitimacy. It then introduces the concept of "multiple orders". Institutional orders and the ideas associated with them invariably emerge at different points in time, in different settings, for different purposes and amidst different configurations of political forces. They therefore have different tempos and follow different, at times very different, logics. Within each order there is a measure, but only a measure, of path dependence insofar as each was shaped by, and continues to reflect, the initial circumstances within which it emerged. Put another way, ".. institutions congeal time ... within their sphere .." (Orren and Skowronek, 1994: 319).

Although there will be periodic compatibilities or "fits" between orders, the concept of *intercurrence* which has been widely used in APD and refers to the processes of interaction and the inevitable friction, "chafing" and "abrasion" between different institutional orders presumes that there will just as probably be disorder and incongruity: ".. any realistic depiction of politics in time will include multiple orders, as well as the conflict and irresolution built into their reciprocal interactions" (Orren and Skowronek, 2004:17). In other words, and this often places those who explore intercurrence apart from those employing other scholarly approaches, there are no ".. a priori presumptions of order" (Orren, 1995: 97). Indeed, taken together, events and processes constitute ".. a kind of patterned anarchy" (Orren and Skowronek, 1994: 324). Within this context, friction and

abrasion between orders are amongst the most significant drivers of change: “.. change proceeds through the push and pull of differently constituted elements simultaneously engaged” (Orren and Skowronek, 2005: 736).

Having said this, intercurrency suggests that despite the tensions and stresses between orders there may be periodic “fits” and complementarities and processes of ordering. Such “fits” may be circumstantial or contingent. For the most part, however, when they emerge they are dependent upon the imagination, creativity, innovations and skill of well-placed actors or coalitions of actors and their ability to construct ordering mechanisms:

“.. political order is circumstantial, something that officials within government institutions will create or not, sustain or not, depending on their own interests, on the available resources, and on the obstacles to change” (Orren and Skowronek, 2004: 92).

The remainder of this paper draws upon these concepts, considers UK politics during 2016 – 2017, and then draws conclusions about the policy ideas that were put forward by, most notably, the Prime Minister, but were subsequently abandoned. It argues that ideas without institutional moorings are likely to be time-limited and will be relegated to the ideational sidelines. It also considers the role of “multiple orders” within the Conservative Party and the inability of the leadership to navigate between them.

“Mayism”

On taking office as Prime Minister in mid-July 2016 Theresa May sought a populist repositioning of British Conservatism around inequalities and the white working-class. Her accession to the premiership appeared to mark a decisive break with the policies pursued by both her immediate Conservative predecessor and those who went before him. Indeed, there were semi-humorous suggestions that much in the speech that she delivered outside 10 Downing Street just after she became Prime Minister seemed more akin to the sentiments of Ed Miliband, who had been Labour leader before his defeat in the May 2015 General Election and subsequent resignation, than to a Conservative. Indeed, it was also described as the most left-wing statement by a Prime Minister since the days of Labour’s Clement Attlee, (1945 - 1951). Just a few sentences into the speech, May initiated an attack on social injustices. She committed herself to:

“.. fighting against the burning injustice that, if you’re born poor, you will die on average 9 years earlier than others. If you’re black, you’re treated more harshly by

the criminal justice system than if you're white. If you're a white, working-class boy, you're less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university. If you're at a state school, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you're educated privately. If you're a woman, you will earn less than a man. If you suffer from mental health problems, there's not enough help to hand" (Gov.uk, 2016).

She directed her appeal, in particular, to those who were "just managing" (later referred to as JAMs – just about managing) and again used terms and phrases redolent of the Labour Party during the period after 2010 as it sought to distance itself from the legacy of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown:

"We will do everything we can to give you more control over your lives. When we take the big calls, we'll think not of the powerful, but you. When we pass new laws, we'll listen not to the mighty but to you. When it comes to taxes, we'll prioritise not the wealthy, but you" (Gov.uk, 2016).

This was followed up in the months to come. At the Conservative Party annual conference at the beginning of October, May again talked of putting "... the power of government squarely at the service of ordinary working-class people". However the hints of social-democracy that her Downing Street had included gave way to a more openly right-wing populist stance. She considered life for the "just about managing" in the years after the financial crisis:

"And if you're one of those people who lost their job, who stayed in work but on reduced hours, took a pay cut as household bills rocketed, or - and I know a lot of people don't like to admit this - someone who finds themselves out of work or on lower wages because of low-skilled immigration, life simply doesn't seem fair" (The Independent, 2016).

The implied criticisms of immigration (framed in terms of the way in which it was seen) were tied to a critique of "international elites" and rootlessness. In widely-cited words she announced: "But if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere" (*The Independent*, 2016). In a parallel speech at the conference, Amber Rudd, the Home Secretary, stated that British firms were hiring too many immigrants and according to *The Times* was preparing plans requiring companies to publish the number of foreign employees

in their workforce. She announced: “.. this Government will not waver in its commitment to put the interests of the British people first” (quoted in Moshinsky, 2016).

The new industrial strategy announced at the beginning of 2017 included the promise of “sector deals” that offered government assistance for, for example, low-carbon-emission vehicles and industrial digitalization, a new system of technical education and improved infrastructure. In sum, it held out the promise of a more proactive state. May called for “.. a new approach to government, not just stepping back but stepping up to a new, active role that backs business and ensures more people in all corners of the country share in the benefits of its success (Gov.uk, 2017).

The turn towards right populism stood in sharp contrast to “Cameronism”. During David Cameron’s premiership (2010 – 2016) and despite the constraints imposed by coalition government, the narrative within which the commitment to “austerity” (the curbing of public spending growth) changed in character. It was initially framed as a pragmatic response to the burgeoning budget deficit and tied to representations of Greece and other countries facing profound debt levels. By 2013 however, Cameron felt he had sufficient political capital to move beyond pragmatism and turn towards a reconfiguration of the state’s relationship with civil society. Macroeconomic policy, he asserted, should no longer be concentrated on undoing the damage that, through the prism of the austerity narrative, Labour had wrought. Instead, Cameron committed himself and the Conservative Party to a permanent shrinkage of the state:

“We can’t simply try and rebuild the same type of economy that we had before the crash. We can’t just go back to how things used to be. We need to build something better ... that doesn’t just mean making difficult decisions on public spending. It also means something more profound. It means building a leaner, more efficient state. We need to do more with less. Not just now, but permanently” (Gov.uk, 2013).

There is also a marked contrast between “Mayism” and earlier, as well as contemporaneous, commitments to the “social market economy”. For its proponents this rested upon the harnessing of the market so that it could be directed, when necessitated by circumstances, to the breaking of cycles of poverty, addressing ingrained deprivation and improving life chances. This form of thinking has been associated with for example Iain Duncan Smith and the reform of state social provision but it has also been represented as a defining strand within contemporary conservative thought (Letwin, 2017).

May's populism stands furthermore, in contrast to earlier efforts to court the working-class vote. It was certainly far removed from the "deferential voter" identified in the mid-century years who was drawn in on the basis of a naturalized class order (McKenzie and Silver, 1968). And "Mayism" was distinct from Thatcherism. The authoritarian populism of the 1980s was structured in large part around the assertion of British military might in the Falklands and the promise of law and order. It was shaped by preceding "moral panics" structured around issues as law-and-order, race and permissiveness (Hall, 1985: 116). Unlike Mayite populism, it was bound to the market and the vision of a property-owning democracy (through the sale of council housing and then shares in the formerly nationalized utilities). It eschewed the more social-democratic edges that were a core, defining feature of Mayism.

Political reconfiguration

Mayism was tied to, and structured around, the seeming promise of a political reconfiguration and the prospect of a coming electoral realignment. By the time the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union was held in June 2016 processes had already been set in motion that appeared to be reshaping the UK's domestic politics and the character of the party system. The system has already been under profound strain as Scottish and to a lesser extent Welsh nationalism assumed much greater salience and as voters sought a refuge from the two principal parties. At the same time, the structural character of the principal parties had changed as they sought to address processes of decline and the consequences of professionalization (which increasingly detached the party elites from their traditional bases) through the introduction of quasi primaries for the selection of party leaders.

The Brexit referendum was however a turning point. The votes in the cut across established political and partisan cleavages. Education, class, age and race were pivotal. 57 per cent of those with a university degree and 81 per cent of those still in full time education voted for Remain. 64 per cent of those with only secondary education voted to Leave while 64 per cent of those degree higher than bachelor level voted for Remain. Whites voted to Leave by 53 per cent whilst majorities in the minority communities backed Remain. 57 per cent drawn from social classes AB supported Remain whilst 64 per cent of C2/ DEs voted to Leave. 73 per cent of 18 – 24 year-olds supported Remain whilst 65 per cent of those aged 65 or older voted to Leave (Lord Ashcroft, 2016).

There was a further reason why a reconfiguration of Conservatism and the potential for realignment appeared to be a rational strategy. Labour had already lost significant swathes of voters over the period preceding the

referendum many of whom (about two-thirds) backed Leave in the referendum (SurrIDGE, 2017a). Furthermore, those in this camp were much more likely to have the lowest levels of educational qualifications and be older (SurrIDGE, 2017b). The Labour Party was thus becoming yet more detached from its original roots and ties. As Bridget Phillipson MP noted in the wake of the 2017 result: "Labour is becoming, slowly but unmistakably, a party of the larger towns and cities, a party of graduates and young people, a party of the socially liberal" (Phillipson, 2017).

The referendum also brought certain "wedge" issues to the forefront of political discourses. They were not of course ideational departures but they were issues that secured increased salience. In particular, immigration (which sometimes merged with, or was obscured by, concerns about the country's "sovereignty") became pivotal.

There were material reasons why immigration moved towards the centre of the stage. Although the causal links are imprecise there were widely-perceived connections with the rise in immigration from the EU accession countries. First, real wages fell after 2008. Second, by 2015, Britain had the least living space per inhabitant of any EU-15 country (Tilford, 2015 – 2016: 3). Third, much of the migration from Eastern Europe after 2004 was predominantly low skilled and did not settle in London but instead in areas where there had formerly been relatively little EU migration. These were areas where incomes at the lower end of the earnings distribution grew disproportionately less (Royal Economic Society, 2017). Fourth, there is a correlation between white working-class areas where large numbers of migrants arrived and support for UKIP in the years that preceded the referendum. They had thus to some degree already broken with established political allegiances and attachments in a way that weakened any cues given by mainstream party leaders and allowed issues such as immigration to secure increased legitimacy (Royal Economic Society, 2017)..

Given the centrality of issues such as immigration and the numbers who had broken with their parties' declared position on EU membership, (although Labour had expressed its position very tepidly and there were continuous doubts about Corbyn's personal convictions) there appeared to be a moment of political opportunity that might allow the Conservatives to make very substantial inroads into Labour's traditional base. Furthermore, the Labour Party appeared to be in an ongoing crisis that stretched well beyond EU issues. Its defeat in 2015 (when, at the least, a "hung Parliament" appeared to be the likely outcome) and the election of Jeremy Corbyn as party leader seemed to suggest that it faced terminal decline. The UKIP vote provided further testimony as to the opportunities open to the Conservatives if they could re-orientate their politics and restructure their message.

There had been some earlier suggestions that the party could and should move in this direction. The Renewal group was formed in 2013 around a call to make the Conservatives the 'workers' party'. Although it distanced itself from the defining features of the Cameron government it hailed both the commitment to the "Northern Powerhouse" and the National Living Wage (Skelton, 2016). However, these sentiments were on the edges of party discourses. Theresa May brought them into the mainstream.

Nonetheless, despite the centrality of these themes during May's first months as Prime Minister, relatively little was heard of them in the period between the party conference in October 2016 and the point (April 18th 2017) when she called a snap general election to be held after a relatively long period of campaigning in June. The references were fleeting. In her statement to the House of Commons following the triggering of Article 50 she included assurances that despite the hopes of some free market advocates there would not be an extensive deregulation of labour markets: "We will ensure that workers' rights are fully protected and maintained. Indeed, under my leadership, not only will the government protect the rights of workers, we will build on them" (Gov.uk, 2017b). However, this was a very minor theme if the statement as a whole is considered.

There were also still a few traces of "Mayism" in the Conservatives' general election campaign. She referred (albeit in the Financial Times) to "hardworking employees" and declared "the Conservative party has always been the true party of those workers". More significantly, she committed the party to guaranteeing further rights at work and introducing requirements ensuring that employees were represented on company boards (May, 2017). The Conservative manifesto promised to extend rights for those working in the "gig economy", introduce more rigorous rules to protect employees' pensions, the right to take leave work for training or to care for a family member and increase the National Living Wage in line with earnings (Mance, 2017).

Demise

The general election campaign was however dominated by other issues. YouGov polling suggests that whereas the manifesto and the policies it included were pivotal for Labour voters they did not feature very highly in the concerns that Conservative voters identified. Instead, Brexit was the principal issue closely followed by hostility to Labour and Jeremy Corbyn in particular. Just ten per cent picked "policies" whilst others selected "Theresa May", the economy, or security (YouGov, 2017). Campaign discourses focused on the Conservatives' promise of "strong and stable" government which implicitly rested upon representations of May

as a resolute and decisive leader and the drawing of a contrast with the prospect of a minority government led by Corbyn.

The general election result provided some, albeit limited, vindication for Mayism. The Conservatives did make advances in pro-Brexit, Labour-held areas. If the 140 Labour constituencies in England that had given majority support to Brexit are considered the Conservative vote increased on average by 8.3 per cent compared to an average of 4.6 per cent across England (Goodwin and Heath, 2017: 1). Nonetheless, this was insufficient and Labour's electoral gains included constituencies that had backed the Leave campaign. More importantly, not only crushed the Prime Minister's credibility and diverted attention towards the challenge of maintaining a parliamentary majority as Brexit negotiations got underway. It also showed that despite its long-run difficulties and claims that Corbyn was a vote-loser Labour had the capacity to hold on to important sections of the white working-class. If low-income voters are considered in aggregate (although there will have been very large racial and ethnic differences) 42 per cent voted Labour compared to 37 per cent who voted Conservative (Goodwin and Heath, 2017: 1).

The collapse of Mayism was openly acknowledged at the beginning of December 2017 when Alan Milburn, who had served as Health Secretary when Labour was in government, and other members of the Conservative government's Social Mobility Commission resigned in protest against the lack of progress towards a "fairer Britain". In his resignation letter to the Prime Minister Milburn stated that May's government:

".. does not seem to have the necessary bandwidth to ensure that the rhetoric of healing social division is matched with the reality. I do not doubt your personal belief in social justice, but I see little evidence of that being translated into meaningful action" (Milburn, 2017).

Explanations

It is initially tempting to regard "Mayism" as little more than political branding comparable with David Cameron's commitment to the "Big Society" from which he had begun to retreat even before the 2010 General Election. Nonetheless, in contrast with the "Big Society", which rarely translated itself into legislative and regulatory proposals, and for which very few had a political appetite, there were perfectly credible opportunities for the Conservatives to capitalize on the Brexit vote and make substantial political inroads into the white working-class. Indeed, by the end of 2016, the US presidential election result had illustrated that the right

could, with a particular message and messenger, win across a tranche of voters who had formerly supported a left-of-centre party.

Why then did Mayism fail to secure traction? An actor-centred approach would stress what was understood, at least after the general election, as Theresa May's indecisiveness and lack of resolution. Arguably she failed to exploit the political opportunity structure that had opened up. Or, it might be said that she allowed herself to be engulfed by the mechanics of Brexit and the cleavages it engendered. Party strategies are however rarely owe very much to the whims or personality characteristics of actors. It might also be argued that there was a misreading of white working-class politics. Survey data suggest that those voters who abandoned Labour between the 2005 general election and 2017 (by either supporting the Conservatives or by not voting) were significantly more socially conservative in terms of their values than those who remained loyal to Labour (SurrIDGE, 2017). It may be therefore that a socially conservative agenda or a populist agenda allied to social conservatism might have secured greater traction but this had been precluded by David Cameron's championing of social liberalism through for example the introduction of same-sex marriage. Nonetheless, whilst this might contribute to an explanation of the election outcome it does not explain the steady abandonment of Mayism in the preceding months.

Instead, as argued above, there is a case for drawing upon the theoretical approaches associated with American Political Development (APD). First, the policy ideas collectively constituting Mayism lacked institutional roots or ties to an organized interest. They were in that sense "unmoored". Indeed, they lacked a visible relationship with ideas that had an institutional basis. Proposals for worker representation on corporate boards, legally-protected leave, curbs upon capitalism, government drives to promote social mobility, or for that matter requiring firms to issue publicly available lists of foreign employees were far-removed from the role assigned to the state in a liberal market economy (LME). LMEs are, by definition, structured around competitive processes of inter-firm coordination and the institutional complementarities that derive from this (Hall and Soskice, 2001). The state and peak business organizations necessarily play a weaker role than in coordinated market economies. Policy ideas so far removed from the dominant institutional structures had relatively little credibility.

Second, APD's insistence on multiple orders serves as a reminder that political parties are not unitary actors. Indeed, there are different "orders" within the party each with its own perceived logic and interests. These "orders" include both the grassroots membership and the parliamentary party (the MPs). Survey data suggest that if the grassroots party membership is considered the average age was (in 2013) 59, 83 per cent of whom

were drawn from social classes A, B and C, (compared with just under 60 per cent of the general population). They were predominantly male (68.9 per cent) and overwhelmingly white (95.6 per cent) (Bale and Webb, 2016: 126). Grassroots opinion was shaped by demography. There was only minority support (between a fifth and a quarter of respondents) for populist statements such as “government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off”, “big business benefits owners at the expense of workers” and “ordinary people do not get their fair share of the nation’s wealth” and “management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance” (Bale and Webb, n.d.). In sum, there was little basis amongst the party’s grassroots for a reconfiguration.

Similarly, there has been little evidence of a “market” for populism amongst the MPs in the parliamentary party. Certainly there was significant opposition to “uncontrolled” immigration from other EU countries. A 2017 survey found that 55 per cent of Conservative MPs regarded the control of immigration as more important than the UK’s access to the European single market (Ipsos MORI, 2017: 14). A 2014 poll did not however indicate backing for the other issues associated with “Mayism”. Just eleven per cent identified employment and job security as principal issues facing the country whilst just four per cent referred to poverty and inequality. (In contrast, 55 per cent cited the economy and 25 per cent referred to defence and foreign policy (including international terrorism) (2014).

A further “order” has been in play. While orders can be seen as formally constituted and structured hierarchies they can also be understand as looser constellations of institutional and ideational elements (Smith, 2007: 92). Understood in this way, contemporary Conservative politics have been shaped by a further “order”. It is structured around the logic set in motion by the Brexit referendum vote. It threw individual and collective actors who had formerly been secondary or marginal into the forefront of processes. Jacob Rees-Mogg MP and the European Research Group are readily evident examples. Although there was a handful of dissidents, the logic of Brexit, the determination to end freedom of movement, resolute opposition to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, and the commitment to strike independent trade deals, all of which were understood as the essential trappings of national sovereignty, necessarily took the government, parliamentary party and grassroots from a vote to leave the EU so as to embrace a parallel departure from the single market and customs union. The Norway option was quickly forgotten. There were calls for the UK to withdraw from negotiations, reject a transition period, “drop out” of the EU and fall back on WTO trading terms at the end of March 2019. The logic thus created pointed the way, inexorably, towards a very “hard” Brexit. Although this was delayed and partially obscured in the British government’s negotiating position which, in February 2018, appeared to rest upon “managed divergence” and three “baskets” based upon dividing the UK economy into

three distinct sectors each of which would have its own form of regulation. Whilst by the beginning of March there was some recognition that trade-offs would be necessary, the search for a “deep and ambitious partnership” between the UK and the EU still seemed to rest upon the belief that there could be very substantial market access without the sacrifice of the political “red lines” that the logic of Brexit had drawn. This type of “cherry picking” ran directly counter to the EU’s declared position, and the position it was compelled to adopt if the integrity of the EU was to be maintained, from the outset.

Although it would be a logic that would take years, perhaps decades, to unfold and come to fruition a hard Brexit would in lead towards pressure for a heavily deregulated economy that competes and seeks to gain competitive advantage very largely on the basis of production costs. There would for example be significantly increased transportation costs when supplying faraway markets. It is thus a model that precludes the expansion of workers’ rights and increased state social provision. It cuts across the populist vision that constituted “Mayism”. In its place there were vocal calls for a post-Brexit UK to embrace the Singapore or Hong Kong model. There should be “.. comprehensive reforms to reduce the burden of government. That includes obvious choices like lower tax rates and less red tape. And it also means taking advantage of Brexit to implement other pro-market reforms” (Mitchell, 2017).

The course of events can be understood in terms of *reactive* sequences whereby “.. each event in the sequence is both a reaction to antecedent events and a cause of subsequent events” (Mahoney, 2000: 526). In the form that it most usually represented, this is more than a simple causal chain of events or the reproduction of set arrangements. Instead, early events set “.. in motion a chain of tightly linked reactions and counter-reactions” (Mahoney, 2000: 527). The likelihood of counter-reactions is an important feature of path dependence when understood in this form because they might well take the path in a new and different direction rather than bolstering or extending the initial stage in the process.

The concept of “intercurrence” suggests that actors navigate between orders as they abrade with each other. However, in navigating between cabinet factions, MPs, the grassroots and the logic of sovereignty which led to the hardest of Brexit outcomes, Theresa May had few resources upon which she could draw. In particular, the character of her “mandate” should be considered. A leader’s “mandate” is not a given reality but instead an inter-subjective construction. Nonetheless, the securing of a mandate enables a well-placed actor to navigate between and within orders. Conversely, the absence of a mandate severely impedes his or her ability to do just that.

Although acclaimed by Conservatives for the first eleven months of her premiership Theresa May she had not secured a mandate. She won the party leadership by default in 2016 when her remaining leadership rival, Andrea Leadsom, Minister of State for Energy under David Cameron and championed by some committed Leavers and social conservatives, abandoned the race just four days after the second round of the contest had taken place. The grassroots membership was thereby unable to participate in the process and there was no debate amongst either MPs or the membership about policy or direction. "Mayism" thus emerged on July 13th as May assumed the premiership without any form of political prologue.

Conclusion

The paper has argued that "Mayism" had a depth that was absent in for example David Cameron's abortive efforts at the time of the 2010 general election to commit the Conservatives to, and win the election through, the to "Big Society". "Mayism" took a much more defined form and was tied to particular legislative plans. Nonetheless, it had an early demise. Policy ideas fail unless actors have the capacities and resources to navigate effectively as contending orders and logics abrade against each other. Theresa May has had neither.

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