Editorial

British Politics (2009) 4, 419–420. doi:10.1057/bp.2009.23

Welcome to the first Special Issue of *British Politics*. In this, the final issue of Volume 4, all of our contributors focus their attention on the theme of ‘Britain in Crisis’. Each discuss different aspects of the recent political and economic crises that have, in various ways, shaped the British political landscape over the past 12–18 months, and are likely to shape it into the foreseeable future.

Our first article is from David Coates. This examines the reasons for New Labour’s precarious standing in the opinion polls throughout 2009, and argues that their poor performance cannot be explained solely by reference to leadership deficiencies or internal divisions. Rather, it is claimed that the party’s poor position is the result of weaknesses in the entire New Labour project, and that these weaknesses will have to be resolved if the party is to revive its electoral fortunes. Our second article, from Colin Thain, addresses the theme of the economic crisis, and, in particular, the government’s response to the credit crunch. The central argument here is that while the government have deployed a mixture of rapid and innovative measures to mitigate the real economic impact of the financial crisis, the crisis has nonetheless exposed the weaknesses of a policymaking model based on constrained discretion, and a policymaking culture based on the personalisation of power. Remaining on this topic, our third contribution is from Andrew Gamble. Placing the current economic and financial crisis in its international and historical context, this considers the likely consequences of the crash for British politics in terms of economic policymaking, debates over the future of the City, the handling of the crisis and the impending phase of fiscal tightening.

Moving away from economic affairs, our fourth article, from Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, turns the spotlight on the political crisis. Examining the local and European elections that took place in the wake of the ‘Expenses Scandal’ in the summer of 2009, this article considers the impact that the scandal had on the performance of the main political parties. While noting the continuation of a trend for voters to turn away from the political mainstream at second-order elections, the authors conclude that the effect in the forthcoming general election is likely to be a limited one. Following this, our penultimate contribution comes from Ivor Gaber. Here, the focus is on the fallout of the expenses scandal for the Westminster lobby. The central argument is that the crisis has exposed the lobby for having become too close

to politicians, and that it marks a terminal moment in the lobby's long and progressive slide into irrelevance and decline. The final article in this Special Issue is from Michael Foley, who addresses the issue of political leadership. The article examines the various types of crisis that have bedevilled the Premiership of Gordon Brown, and analyses the way in which these crises have impacted upon Brown's own personal crisis of adaptation to the demands of contemporary leadership politics.

Our final note, as ever, is to place on record our thanks to all our contributors and reviewers who have given us their time over the past year, as well as to all those at Palgrave who continue to make *British Politics* possible.

Steven Kettell

University of Warwick

E-mail: s.kettell@warwick.ac.uk

Peter Kerr

University of Birmingham

E-mail: p.kerr@bham.ac.uk