Governing Through Austerity in a Small Island Developing State: Neoliberal (Il)logics and IMF Structural Adjustment

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Abstract

This article examines the political, institutional and social dynamics of governing through austerity in Barbados since the implementation of the Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation (BERT) programme in 2018. Framing austerity as a neoliberal strategy, the study analyses how fiscal consolidation reorganises the institutional matrix of the state, undermines redistributive capacity and entrenches market logics across governance structures. Drawing on state theory, critical political economy and empirical data from national reports and civil society research, the article explores the regressive effects of austerity on welfare provision, income inequality, gender relations and labour market conditions. It argues that BERT represents not only a moment of fiscal adjustment but also a deeper neoliberal restructuring of the state, characterised by technocratic governance, depoliticisation and social risk displacement. While the programme has stabilised macroeconomic indicators, it has done so at significant social cost, amplifying hardship among already vulnerable populations. The article contributes to the literature on post-crisis neoliberalism by offering a grounded, Caribbean-focused case study that highlights both the specificities and broader logics of austerity governance in the Global South.

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