1   What is Citizenship?

Introduction

This book is about citizenship in contemporary Britain. It addresses the question: 'what does it mean to be a British citizen in the early part of the twenty-first century?' Answering this question leads to a number of subsidiary questions like 'what does it mean to say that someone is a good citizen?'; 'what determines the values and behaviours which constitute citizenship?'; and 'what does citizenship mean for the wider society and the effectiveness of the political system?'

Important changes are taking place in Britain in the relationship between the citizen and the state. The meaning of citizenship, the relationship between citizens and government and problems of representation and accountability in the modern state have all become the focus of research in recent years (Andrews, 1995; Brubaker, 1992; Etzioni, 1995; Spinner, 1994; van Gunsteren, 1998). In Britain there are general questions to be asked about the effectiveness of democracy and the role of the citizen in government in the twenty-first century (Parry, Moyser and Day, 1992; Beetham, 1994). Similarly, there are changing conceptions about the role of citizenship in promoting effective policy-making and the effects of a strong civic tradition on the performance of the political system as a whole (Putnam, 1993; Van Deth et al., 1999; Weir and Beetham, 1999).

Against this background there are increasing concerns about changes in society which are undermining the effectiveness of democracy and weakening traditional conceptions of citizenship. These changes include a decline in feelings of community and solidarity in the public (Bellah et al., 1985); growing public cynicism about politics and a widespread disaffection with political institutions (Knight and Stokes, 1996; Nye, Zelikow and King, 1997); a decline in the institutions which underpin civil society and democracy such as political parties (Whiteley and Seyd, 2002); and a long-term decline in electoral turnout in the great majority of democratic states (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). In the light of these concerns

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citizenship as a topic for research has undergone something of a renaissance in recent years. Writing a generation ago Van Gunsteren argued that 'the concept of citizenship has gone out of fashion among political thinkers' (1978: 9). This is certainly no longer true since there has been an upsurge in research into citizenship which is now examined from a variety of alternative disciplinary perspectives (Heater, 1990; Clarke 1996; Van Gunsteren, 1998).

In addition to academic debates, citizenship has become a central concern to politicians and policy-makers, faced with difficult social and economic problems arising from changes in society and in politics. Government ministers have been preoccupied with a civic renewal agenda as a means of raising participation, reducing crime and promoting voluntary activity (Blunkett, 2001, 2003). Citizenship studies have been introduced into the schools curriculum for the first time as a compulsory subject. The curriculum focuses on topics such as developing political knowledge, promoting the skills of enquiry and communication and stimulating participation (Department for Education and Employment, 1999; Crick, 2002).

There are a number of reasons why the topic of citizenship has come back into vogue. The first is that for the normative theorists citizenship raises basic questions about the relationship between the individual and the state, issues debated since classical times which are central to the concerns of political philosophers such as Locke and Hobbes. As the relationship between the individual and the state changes and is influenced by issues like new nationalisms, globalisation, mass immigration, multiculturalism and environmental stress, the nature of citizenship is explored by normative theorists who are trying to understand the ethical problems raised by these changes.

Such issues are of great concern to empirical political theorists as well and provides a second reason why citizenship is a topic of such contemporary interest. Since the earliest comparative work on the civic culture by Almond and Verba (1963), political scientists have been trying to understand the nature of the values, attitudes and forms of participation which underpin civil society. The concept of civil society takes centre stage in the analysis of citizenship and refers to the formal and informal relationships between people which can be broadly defined as political but which operate outside the institutions of the state. When party members campaign in local elections, when individuals join an interest group, when concerned citizens go on a protest march, or when volunteers help out in their local hospital, all of these constitute support for civil society. Without this, democracy could not function effectively.

There is a paradox at work here; on the one hand, democracy is triumphant throughout the world with new waves of democratisation

occurring in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia (Huntington, 1991; Vanhanen, 1997). But on the other hand, fewer citizens are willing to turn out and vote in many of these democracies, when electoral participation is essential for the operation of democratic politics (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Norris 2002). We see this decline in voting rather clearly in Britain where the turnout in the 2001 general election of 59 per cent was the lowest in modern British history. Clearly, there is something happening to contemporary citizenship which is bringing this about.

A third source of interest in the concept of citizenship comes from students of policy-making, particularly social welfare policy-making. With welfare systems under stress in all advanced industrial societies, arising from demographic changes such as an ageing population together with growing demands for state support for various groups, there is a potential 'fiscal crisis of the state'(O'Connor 1973). On the one hand, there are growing demands for spending on health, transport, education and pensions. On the other hand, there is a declining ability to deliver these benefits in the face of tax resistance by electorates. At the heart of welfare policy is a social contract binding citizens to each other both contemporaneously and across the generations. This contract involves a willingness of some individuals and groups to make sacrifices in order to support others. If citizenship is weak then this social contract will be weak, and governments will not be able to deliver on their promises.

A fourth source of interest in citizenship comes from the growth in immigration and in the growth of multiculturalism which that produces. As society becomes more heterogeneous then citizenship potentially becomes more problematic. When nearly all the citizens of a given country share the same ethnic, historical and cultural backgrounds, that makes the task of building the social contract relatively straightforward, though this does not of course eliminate political conflicts. In contrast, when citizens of a country have very heterogeneous identities deriving from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, particularly if these identities involve fundamental disagreements about values, then the task of building a social contract is much harder.

A fifth factor in the debates about citizenship is the weakening of state power brought about by globalisation, and for Britain the growing consolidation of policy-making in the European Union. If the state is circumscribed in its policy actions by supra-national authorities, even when those relationships bring concrete benefits to its citizens, this creates a democratic deficit and problems of accountability. Citizens unable to hold their governments to account in the long run may withdraw their allegiance from those governments. The problem can be eased if the new supra-national authorities can be made accountable, but as is well known this is highly problematic. Moreover, it is made even more problematic

by the role of multinational corporations in the contemporary world. In recent years these corporations have often succeeded in obtaining benefits from government in the form of tax concessions and subsidies while at the same time avoiding tax contributions (Steinmo, 1993). The real problem here is the weakening of state authority which means that the social contract cannot be enforced effectively.

Another aspect of the same issue is the growth of sub-national political movements seeking autonomy and in some cases independence from national governments. In Britain the Labour government has already embarked on devolution for Scotland and Wales and is currently grappling with the problems of managing devolution to the regions. But this is just one aspect of an issue of growing importance across Europe, whether it is Flemish autonomy in Belgium, Catalan autonomy in Spain, Basque autonomy in France and Spain, or northern regional autonomy in Italy. The growth in demands for such regional autonomy may enhance democratic accountability in some respects, but it makes the task of building a national social contract harder. It can also produce a politics dominated by issues of identity, where there is fundamental disagreement about the locus of state authority, as is true in the case of Canada for example. In this situation it becomes ever more difficult to enforce the social contract.

Taken together these factors amount to a formidable array of reasons why citizenship should be taken seriously as a topic for contemporary research. In this book we aim to examine these questions empirically, with the aid of a series of surveys of the population of Great Britain carried out in 2000 and in 2001. We approach the issue of citizenship from an empirical perspective, since we believe that many of the contemporary philosophical debates about the nature of citizenship have lost touch with the political reality of societies and governments trying to grapple with these problems.

To illustrate this point, we cite Rawls' highly acclaimed book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). As is well known Rawls argues that if people chose a set of principles for determining the kind of society they wish to live in from behind a 'veil of ignorance', that is ignorance about their own position in the social hierarchy, they would choose two founding principles. Firstly, they would favour liberty for all, and secondly redistribution which would advantage the least well-off at the expense of the most affluent. These ideas have received an enormous amount of attention in the literature and they are very interesting, but their relevance for addressing actual issues of inter-generational redistribution, multiculturalism, tax resistance and declining participation is debatable. The 'veil of ignorance' neither exists nor could it exist, thus the utility of these ideas for policy-makers faced with the task of grappling with these problems is highly questionable. We

believe that it is much better to address these questions with the help of a firm understanding of what people think and how they behave, rather than with an abstract normative thought experiment.

In the rest of this chapter we review the history of the concept of citizenship with the aim of arriving at a definition of citizenship which can be used to illuminate the analysis in subsequent chapters. This leads into a section which discusses contemporary debates about the problems of citizenship, and this is followed by a section setting out the model of citizenship which will inform the rest of the book. Finally, we finish off by summarising the argument in the various chapters of the book. We begin with a review of the concept of citizenship as it has developed since ancient times.

A history of the concept of citizenship

The word citizen has its origins in the Latin word *civitas*, but the modern conception of citizenship has its origins in ancient Greek civilisation which pre-dates the Roman empire. The idea first emerged in the Greek city states between about 700–600 BC and was a logical consequence of the development of the *polis*, or the political system of the Greek city state (Clarke, 1994: 4–6). The Greeks relied on slaves to free them from the drudgery of day-to-day toil and this allowed them the time to address issues of general concern to the whole society and thereby to become active citizens. Solon, the ruler of Athens in 594 BC, was the first to give legal expression to the emerging ideas of citizenship. His laws do not survive in detail, but it is known that he classified citizens into four categories, depending on their wealth and status, and their influence on government depended on their position in this classification scheme. The lowest class, called *Thetes*, for example, were allowed to serve as jurors although not to hold public office. This was a crucially important historical development since it meant that even the most humble of citizens participated in the administration of justice. It was said that Solon made laws that were deliberately vague, so that cases had to be settled on their merit by the jurors. This served to give all citizens substantial influence over the government of the city state (Clarke, 1994: 40).

Aristotle codified the idea of citizenship in his *Politics*, a text written some time after Solon's rule. Aristotle defines the citizen as a person who both rules and is ruled. He writes: 'There is nothing more that characterises a complete citizen than having a share in the judicial and executive part of the government' (quoted in Clarke, 1994: 44). What makes the citizen distinctive is that he joins with others to make decisions and then subsequently respects the authority of these mutually agreed decisions.

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Participation legitimates decision-making which is a key requirement of active citizenship. This system required that participants should be peers or roughly equal in status, something achieved by narrowly prescribing who was and who was not a citizen. For Aristotle, the citizen had to be a male of known genealogy, a patriarch, a warrior and a property owner, where this was defined in terms of owning slaves and controlling a household (Pocock, 1998). His formulation depended on a rigid distinction between the public realm, the *polis*, and the private realm, the *oikos*. Women and slaves were part of the latter and controlled exclusively by the individual householder. The *polis* was the domain of public affairs determined by active citizens and participation was regarded as a good in itself. Thus citizens participated not merely to solve the common problems of the city state, but because such participation was an essential component of the good life.

At the heart of Aristotle's conception of citizenship is the idea that those who own and control property should collectively make and adjudicate the laws which ultimately determine how that property is disposed. The idea that voters required a property qualification before they could be allowed to participate survived well into the twentieth century in Britain, and was justified in much the same terms as Aristotle used. The argument was that only property owners can be stakeholders, and as a consequence they should be the only people allowed to make important political decisions. Aristotle characterised this idea in the following terms:

it is necessary that the freemen who compose the bulk of the people should have absolute power in some things; but as they are neither men of property nor act uniformly upon principles of virtue, it is not safe to trust them with the first offices of the state, both on account of their iniquity and their ignorance. (quoted in Clarke, 1994: 46)

The sociologist Max Weber had an interesting explanation of the origins of this notion of citizens as self-governing stakeholders. He argued that it arose out of the military organisation of the ancient and medieval cities. He pointed out that cities were first and foremost defensive groupings, requiring the participation of individuals who owned their own weapons and were competent to bear arms to defend themselves. As a consequence it was difficult for a small oligarchy to monopolise and retain power if it required the services of large numbers of armed freemen to defend the city. He wrote:

Military discipline meant the triumph of democracy because the community wished and was compelled to secure the cooperation of the non-aristocratic masses and hence put arms and along with arms political power, into their hands. (quoted in Shafir, 1998: 46)

While it was the Greeks who first developed the principles underlying active citizenship, the Greek conception was necessarily limited to the community of the city state. The Romans faced the task of codifying a concept of citizenship which could apply to their entire empire, which formed the bulk of the then known world. The Roman conception of citizenship is best illustrated by the case of Saint Paul who when arrested in Tarsus for preaching the gospel claimed the rights of a Roman citizen. In doing this he was claiming certain legal protections and rights that were not available to non-citizens and the claim actually prevented him from being flogged.

Originally, *civis Romanus* meant someone who participated in the various self-governing assemblies associated with the Roman republic in much the same way as in Greece. But it came to mean legal status rather than just a political status based on participation, giving the recipient legal rights and immunities which could not be abrogated by the arbitrary actions of others. In this way the Roman empire was able to develop a conception of citizenship which could generalise beyond the largely face-to-face groups of the city state. It undoubtedly enhanced Rome's ability to retain the allegiance of a very disparate group of tribes throughout the empire, since citizenship was commonly bestowed on cooperative elites from these tribes. In this way citizenship became a powerful instrument for integration within the empire.

The decline of the Roman empire fragmented citizenship, but the core features of the Greek conception, namely that individuals from similar backgrounds should participate as stakeholders for the purpose of influencing judicial and legislative decision-making, survived in the medieval cities. Feudalism with its hierarchical structure and ascriptive criteria for defining status did not encourage citizenship in this sense, but the values and activities associated with the concept survived in the medieval guilds, and among the citizen soldiers who were periodically required to defend their cities. Weber writes: 'The typical citizen of the medieval guild city is a merchant or craftsman: he is a full citizen if he is also a householder' (quoted in Shafir, 1998: 47). Weber argued that the medieval guilds pursued a 'town economy' whose objectives were both to promote and transmit occupational skills and also to expand their markets by dominating the surrounding countryside. Often this was achieved by making the use of the town market compulsory for the population in the hinterland.

When democracy gradually developed in Britain over a long period of time, it was characterised by a conflict between aristocratic land-owning interests rooted in feudalism on the one hand, and trading, craft and later on nascent manufacturing interests on the other. This conflict was decisively settled in favour of the latter by the English Civil War of the

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early seventeenth century, just as it was later settled in France by the French Revolution.

Once parliamentary sovereignty had triumphed in Britain, the story of the evolution of citizenship and democracy is one of extending the franchise and representation to wider and wider groups, eventually abandoning the property qualification which had been the hallmark of citizenship since ancient times. In a very influential article the sociologist T. H. Marshall set out a theory of the evolution of citizenship in Britain (see Marshall and Bottomore, 1992). Marshall was writing shortly after the Second World War and in the context of the creation of the welfare state by the 1945–51 Labour government.

In Marshall's view the development of citizenship in Britain was a process involving three distinct phases. It first involved the establishment of civil rights such as the right to own property, equal access to justice, habeas corpus, free speech, freedom of assembly and religion and the freedom to organise trade unions codified by the repeal of the Combination Acts. Roughly speaking these rights were in place by the end of the eighteenth century. In Marshall's view, civil rights included the right to work, which had in Elizabethan times been curtailed by the Statute of Artificers, confining certain occupations to certain social classes, and by the apprenticeship system which he saw as an instrument of exclusion as much as one of education and training. The growth of ideas of free trade opposed such local monopolies, and the common law together with legislation removed such barriers to the right to work. With this in mind Marshall wrote: 'By the beginning of the nineteenth century this principle of economic freedom was accepted as axiomatic' (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992: 11).

The story of civil rights was one of the gradual addition of new rights to those which already existed, albeit only for adult males. The remnants of feudalism lingered on in the countryside long after they had disappeared from the towns. Thus the expansion of civil rights can be seen as a process in which citizenship, which had been sustained in the medieval cities, expanded out to encompass the entire nation and to incorporate a broader range of rights.

The second phase of the growth of citizenship in Marshall's account was the growth of political rights, principally the right to vote, the right to run for office and to participate fully in the politics of the community. The formative period for this was the early nineteenth century, starting with the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832. In Marshall's view the growth of political rights differed from the growth of civil rights since it consisted not in creating new rights, but rather in the granting of old rights to new

sections of the population. The 1832 Reform Act was limited in that it extended the franchise to less than a fifth of the adult male population, but it was an important precedent in recognising that the franchise should be extended beyond the elite groups represented in the eighteenth-century House of Commons. He argued:

It is clear that if we maintain that in the nineteenth century citizenship in the form of civil rights was universal, the political franchise was not one of the rights of citizenship. It was the privilege of a limited economic class, whose limits were extended by each successive Reform Act. (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992: 13)

This process culminated in the Act of 1918 which adopted universal manhood suffrage and thus dropped the property qualification which had been the hallmark of citizenship since the time of the ancient Greeks. A few years later the franchise was extended to all adult women, which completed the process of defining political rights in terms of membership of the community, rather than in terms of the ownership of property.

If the eighteenth century was the source of civil rights and the nineteenth century political rights, for Marshall the twentieth century was the source of social rights. By social rights he meant principally economic welfare and social security, although he defined these in very broad terms:

By the social element I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in society. The institutions most closely connected with it are the educational system and the social services. (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992: 8)

The original source of these social rights was membership of local communities and functional associations, a source supplemented by the Poor Law and a system of wage regulation which was locally administered. Marshall noted that system, which had its origins in Elizabethan times, was severely undermined by free trade ideology which accompanied the growth of civil rights. The 1834 Poor Law Act, for example, restricted the scope of the Elizabethan Speenhamland system of poor relief, and established the principle of 'less eligibility', i.e. the proposition that payments should always be lower than the minimum market wage available in a locality. Thus the growth of civil rights served to undermine traditional social rights. He wrote:

The Poor Law treated the claims of the poor, not as an integral part of the rights of the citizen, but as an alternative to them – as claims which could be met only if the claimants ceased to be citizens in any true sense of the word. (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992: 15)

Marshall makes a similar point about the right to education, which was not seen as an integral part of citizenship during the formation of civil and political rights. He concluded that as far as social rights were concerned it was 'not until the twentieth century that they attained equal partnership with the other two elements of citizenship' (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992: 17).

Marshall's argument has subsequently been very influential in debates about citizenship, but it has not gone unchallenged. There is now a range of studies which suggest that Marshall's analysis is far from being a universal model, so that the idea of citizenship being a cumulative linear process from civil to social rights is highly contestable. The first significant welfare reforms in Britain introduced by Lloyd George when he was the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Liberal government prior to the First World War, openly copied the example of Bismarck's Germany (Heclo, 1974; Steinmo, 1993: 59). Bismarck had introduced welfare payments in the German empire explicitly in order to undermine support for the socialists and to reinforce the allegiance of the working class to his authoritarian state. At the time most citizens of Germany lacked basic political and civil rights. Similarly, Michael Mann (1987) has argued that in some societies social rights have been seen as direct substitutes for civil rights rather than as complements to them. Thus fascist and communist regimes provided little or no civil rights, but quite extensive social rights, particularly in the case of the Soviet-style communist regimes.

Fraser and Gordon (1998) suggest that the strong civil rights tradition of the United States, with its emphasis on individual rights and the sanctity of contracts, has served to inhibit the development of social rights. In this case even low wage earners have an anti-welfare ideology, as they explain:

> The widespread fear that 'welfare' recipients are 'getting something for nothing' is an understandably embittered response from those who work hard and get little; their own paltry remuneration becomes their norm and they see themselves cheated by welfare clients rather than by their employers. (1998: 125)

Thus Marshall's 'linear, cumulative model' of the development of citizenship is problematic, but it is nonetheless a starting point for debates about contemporary citizenship in Britain.

Beiner (1995) divides contemporary theorising about citizenship into three classes: liberal, communitarian and republican theories of citizenship. Liberal theories emphasise the importance of the individual and see the political community as a mechanism for maximising individual