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CIVIC Centre

The values of social citizenship are often seen as a democratic ideal for the 21st century.

Gary Wickham and Gavin Kendall demur. They argue that citizenship is in reality a technical device for government, and that the grand social claims for it need to be scaled down.

Citizenship is catching a lot more attention on the Left of the political spectrum these days. As hopes (and/or desires) fade for apocalyptic social change, many on the Left are turning to older ambitions traditionally associated with liberalism, and in particular liberal democracy. One of these ambitions is an expanded notion of social citizenship. In recent years, citizenship has been adopted as a key principle in the political armoury of many on the Left. This has given the term a deceptively 'progressive' tinge.

Yet we want to argue here that while citizenship as a value has its merits, the Left should not get carried away by it. While it is often seen by liberals and radicals alike as a means of guaranteeing certain political outcomes, we want to argue that it is better seen as a technical tool, a device

used by government in managing populations, and one which guarantees no outcomes. If a government wants to improve the quality of life in a particular city, for example, or to promote the benefits of ethnic and cultural diversity, it will usually aim to do this by trying to make better citizens. It will try to make people proud to live and work in the city concerned and/or it will attempt to make a more tolerant body of citizens.

However, the role of citizenship is also rather more extensive than this. In being a technical device, citizenship involves governments actually 'making' citizens. That is, citizenship is concerned with forming certain types of persons as citizens—and, more particularly, as certain types of citizens, depending on the specific imperative of the particular government concerned. This actual formation of citizens involves definite administrative techniques on the part of governments—techniques, if you like, of citizen manufacture. The aim of these techniques is to identify needs and, at the same time, to begin to address these needs. This means constant calculation and assessment. These



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techniques of calculation and assessment vary in form depending on the requirements of the specific government concerned, and on the mode of government involved. For example, there has been a shift in modern western countries from the middle of the 18th century onwards to a mode of government featuring much greater reliance on bureaucracy. This new 'modern' mode of government has involved the rise of certain bureaucratic techniques of calculation and assessment which concentrate on more detailed records ('statistics') about each member of the population. The specific practical techniques of calculation are closely related to the sort of 'citizen formation' a particular government can aim to produce.

This point can be reinforced by comparing techniques of citizen manufacture used in the ancient Roman census with these modern bureaucratic techniques. In republican Rome a census was held every five years.¹ The site for the census was the *campus martinus*, the military training ground. It was the responsibility of the censor to register each citizen. However, registration meant something quite different then: it was an audit of a citizen's wealth and of his (women were not citizens in ancient Rome) moral character. The census even involved a purifying act of sacrifice, the *lustrum*. Compare this with the modern techniques of citizen calculation and assessment we discussed above, which simply record information about citizens and render this information statistical, ready for a variety of purposes.

Alongside these administrative techniques of citizen manufacture we must, of course, locate more direct techniques aimed at the formation of the citizenry—that is, particular direct forms of citizen training (especially in the field of education). For example, in the west, attempts to develop literate populations through the techniques of mass education were at first tied to a desire to guarantee the piety of the individual. Over the last 100 years or so, however, the instilling of literacy into the population has become linked, rather, to a different double aim. The first aim is to try to allow the citizen to develop his or her potential to the full. The second is, as Ian Hunter has argued (*ALR* 136), to train individuals to take up specific social and economic roles in society at large. We would argue that this double aim has managed to remain intact despite the fact that these aims often pull in opposite directions, as Hunter has outlined.

However, when citizenship is considered as a tool of government the distinction between the governor and the governed starts to become blurred. Citizens are expected to be both governors of themselves, and at the same time, objects of government. This is how they are both objects and devices of government. The examples we have offered so far bear this out.

Again, in being a tool of government, citizenship is (as we hinted above) widely taken by its supporters to be an ideal, something to be achieved and something worth achieving. This appears to cut across our notion of citizenship as a

technical device of government—it suggests that the technology must serve only 'good' democracy and its ideals, whereas we are suggesting it may serve any political project. This, as we shall outline below, is one of the reasons for dampening our expectations of the benefits of citizenship for the particular political aims of, for instance, social democrats.

So far so good for citizenship and government. The picture we have painted suggests government working well using citizenship as one of its key devices. In the remainder of this article we aim to unsettle this picture of smooth efficiency. Consider, first, our previous idea that citizenship is an ideal and the proposition that this cuts across our notion of technical citizenship.

As a technical device of government, citizenship involves training people to understand citizenship as a good thing, a 'natural' way of behaving for advanced, civilised beings. Hence the technical nature of citizenship actually *contains* the ideal of citizenship, and the claims about it as an ideal are meaningless. Such claims have no grounds beyond this technical realm. Furthermore, this means citizenship can be equally well claimed as an ideal by any governmental system across the political spectrum. Fascists, communists and social democrats can each use the technical device of citizenship for their own ends if they each put in the necessary work. And each use will inevitably (if it is done properly) produce, as part of its technical operation,

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citizens who see this use as an ideal. In other words, all claims about citizenship as an ideal should be treated with equal scepticism.

The point is that citizenship is not an automatic good deriving its goodness from some aspect of human nature to do with collective behaviour. Our scepticism here is supported by the practices of the ancient Greeks who actually invented the notion of citizenship. For them it was not an automatic good, but rather a technical invention used to achieve and to cement the outcome of a contest in which certain city states, particularly Athens, were victorious over other city states. These Greeks used the techniques of citizenship in their victory, in producing the personnel necessary for that victory; only subsequently did the idea of citizenship become an ideal. Because it is so widely seen as an ideal, an automatic good, the exclusionary character of citizenship is often overlooked. Citizenship entails membership of a particular community. Membership means, by definition, some persons must be excluded. All communities exclude certain categories from citizenship—whether women, children, slaves, the propertyless, prisoners, or foreigners (including the 'guest workers' of modern Sweden and Germany).

In other words, if activists are to consider citizenship an ideal, as many on the Left seem to, they should not conflate it with the ideal of inclusion (such as membership of particular communities or associations), as so often happens. This is to misunderstand the very nature of citizenship. Connected to this point, certain expectations of citizens as ideal subjects and objects of government may be completely unrealistic. We have in mind, particularly, expectations to do with tolerance of diversity associated with the institutions and beliefs of multiculturalism (discussed by Barry Hindess in *ALR* 140). One expectation of multiculturalism seems to be that good citizens will celebrate ethnic diversity as a desirable feature of citizenship—and that if they don't celebrate it, ethnic diversity may become ethnic conflict and tear apart government programmes like multiculturalism.

It seems to us that this is a reasonable expectation of only a few highly trained citizens, and only at some times. In periods of extended peace, for instance, it may be possible to overcome the exclusionary character of citizenship and train a fair number of citizens to tolerate or even celebrate diversity. But in times of intermittent war (meaning the entire 20th century for most modern western countries), it is too much to expect more than a handful of citizens to overlook the exclusion which is a feature of citizenship in times of war. In wartime, a mark of good citizenship is to recognise the enemy as the *definitely excluded* enemy and to behave accordingly (there are extreme punishments for those who do not). It is a big step from here to celebrating diversity and concentrating on inclusion, especially when the step back is potentially always just around the corner.

These, then, are the problems which exclusion poses for citizenship seen as an ideal for 'good' politics. Moreover, these are underpinned by a difficulty with the sophistication of the citizen-forming administrative techniques we pointed to earlier. Administrative techniques which pro-

vide the necessary background for modern citizenship (identifying needs for governments and beginning to address them) are so sophisticated nowadays that they can analyse a body of citizens in terms of thousands, possibly millions, of different variables, including habits and attitudes. Identifying these variables and suggesting ways to begin to address them is one thing. Changing citizens by training them in (for instance) different habits or attitudes is a much slower and more difficult process. If this is the case, citizenship will not only struggle to serve as an adequate tool in the situations where the problem of exclusion rears its head—it will prove inadequate in many more situations. In other words, the sophisticated administrative knowledge techniques may be producing false expectations of what citizenship can deliver as a tool of government.

Another problem for modern citizenship is the sheer weight of numbers of citizens in the modern world. When citizenship was invented in ancient Athens it was never applied to more than 45,000 persons. Using citizenship as a governing device for only a small minority of persons resident in a community remained the norm right up to the modern era. But the modern era has involved both massive urbanisation and a dramatic increase in the sophistication and spread of calculation and assessment techniques. As a result the device of citizenship has come to be applied to a much, much higher proportion of residents of modern nations. The end result may not only be the fact that the newer type of citizenship (with its greater stress on self-government) differs markedly from the type used in the ancient world and the Renaissance. It may also be that the newer form doesn't work very well.

Finally, one reason modern citizenship doesn't work very well as a device of government might be because of resistance on the part of persons formed as citizens themselves—an irrational resistance both to being governed and to being governors. Perhaps there will always be too many citizens—for reasons which rational thought will never capture—who will not take the responsibility of citizenship seriously enough for it to bear the weight put on it by many of its advocates.

It is, of course, very easy to point to failures of citizenship as a governmental device. Yet the over-riding commitment by modern governments to the forms of government we've outlined in this piece (and in our last piece in *ALR* 141) suggests that such failures are virtually irrelevant. We need to do two things when thinking about government and citizenship. First, we need to think outside the concept of citizenship, to think beyond this 'necessary' governmental device, to examine the many instances of government where officials persist with techniques in the face of their blatant failure. And second, we need to lower our expectations about what citizenship can accomplish in the modern state.

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