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Citizenship. A Very Short Introduction

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Chapter 3

Membership and belonging

Membership lies at the heart of citizenship. To be a citizen is to belong to a given political community. However, this link with membership renders citizenship 'exclusive' in ways that have become increasingly controversial. It makes citizens part of a select group, who enjoy privileges denied to non-members. Just as members of an exclusive golf club can use its greens and facilities in ways non-members cannot, so possessing the status of a citizen gives you access to the advantages of membership of a given political community. And just as the rules regulating the membership of golf clubs has often attracted criticism for being inappropriate or discriminatory, so have those conferring the status of citizenship. Indeed, many of the grounds for complaint have been remarkably similar – just as golf clubs have been condemned for limiting membership to well-born, white, rich men, so birth, ethnicity, wealth, and gender have formed the standard – and increasingly contested – criteria for citizenship.

Much like exclusive golf clubs, states have typically justified their exclusions on the grounds that prospective members must be able to contribute in appropriate ways and 'fit in' with existing members and the prevailing ethos. If golf clubs vet prospective members for their ability to pay the fees, prowess at golf, willingness to abide by the club rules and conventions, and their

general sociability and likely commitment to club events, so states assess citizens for their potential contribution to the collective goods of the community and their readiness and capacity to abide by its norms and customs. In each case, suspicion arises that the criteria for admission are self-serving and fail to treat all applicants with equal concern and respect. However, an all-important difference exists between golf clubs and political communities. Membership of a political community is for most people both necessary and unavoidable in ways that membership of a golf club is not. The decision to take up golf is a matter of choice, and even dedicated golfers can probably manage to play regularly without belonging to a club or learn to live without it. By contrast, it is virtually impossible not to live in a state. States not only cover most of the earth, but also – as we saw in Chapter 1 – provide the basic structure for a secure and fulfilled life within societies of any complexity. Statelessness almost always results when state failure of one kind or another leads people to flee – be it due to invasion and conquest by another state, civil war, famine, or an oppressive regime. Those in this condition do not live outside any state. Rather, they are forced to become supplicants for whatever aid and support those states willing to receive them, or unable to avoid doing so, condescend to provide.

The necessity and unavoidability of living in a state makes the exclusivity associated with citizenship doubly problematic. First, it seems invidious to exclude those who are subject to a given state's power from full membership, possessing the same rights as other citizens. Second, given that the state you initially find yourself in is an accident of birth, it may seem equally invidious to hinder people moving to become members of a different state that offers them better opportunities, if they are willing to take on the duties as well as enjoy the rights of citizenship. In this chapter, I want to explore these internal and external dimensions of the exclusiveness of citizenship. I shall start by exploring the rationale for the traditional qualifications based on class, property, gender, and ethnicity and the internal challenges that have been posed to

each. I shall then examine the exclusion of particular categories of outsiders, setting the scene for a more extensive discussion of global citizenship as going beyond membership of any particular nation or state in Chapter 4. In both cases, much turns on what the duties of citizenship are thought to involve and whether membership requires citizens not simply to play their part but also to belong in some fashion that goes beyond mere duty. As we shall see, the development – charted at the end of the last chapter – of national, democratic, welfare states as the main context for citizenship has allowed the criteria for membership to become progressively more inclusive internally, while remaining externally exclusive.

From subject to citizen: the internal dimension of inclusion and exclusion

I remarked in Chapter 2 how the criteria for citizenship in ancient Greece have cast a long shadow, defining many of the key attributes of the citizen for almost 2,000 years. The Athenian citizen was a householder and property owner, a master of the labour of others, a warrior, of Athenian blood, and male. It seems natural to reject these qualifications out of hand today as unwarranted and discriminatory. Many citizens do not possess any of these qualities – indeed, most citizens lack, or at some stage have lacked, several of them. Yet, there is an underlying rationale to the association of citizenship with these attributes which continues to shape how we think about what it means to be a citizen. So it is worth taking each in turn and pondering how far the reasoning lying behind their historical linkage with citizenship still applies, even if we would no longer relate such arguments to these specific qualities. I shall start with those related to property ownership and then move on to those linked to gender and ethnicity. As we shall see, a more inclusive view of citizenship has largely turned on breaking the connection between these three criteria and the qualities associated with being a citizen.

Property and the properties of citizenship

In ancient Greece, being the patriarch of a household was much more than simply owning a home. The house was the basic component of the economy – indeed, the term ‘economy’ derives from the Greek words for household (*oikos*) and rules (*nomos*). To be a householder signified being economically self-sufficient, with one’s material needs taken care of by a range of domestic servants, not least one’s wife as an unpaid household manager. Three features of this condition were deemed important for politics. First, as I mentioned in the last chapter, it meant that citizens could devote themselves to their civic duties, being freed from the need to earn a livelihood. Less plausibly, they were also supposedly above any need to pursue their private interests. Second, they were not only freed from a dependency on things but also from being the dependants of other people. Indeed, they owned others. Of course, they still needed food and so on to survive, and relied on others to provide the necessary goods. But they could direct those others as they chose, sell them if they failed to act as they wished, and so on. Unlike their dependants, they were independent – able to act and think as they believed best rather than as those on whom they depended for their living directed. Finally, it meant they literally had a stake in the political community, with their fate – or at least that of their assets – intimately bound to its fate, to the extent of being willing to fight and possibly die for their country.

These three properties of dedication to the public good, independence, and possession of a stake in the political community remain important for thinking about politics, but over time the qualities associated with them have become detached from the possession of private property. In fact, there has been a general reversal of assumptions: instead of private autonomy being the basis of public autonomy in the political realm, political participation and the regulation of the private sphere have become the guarantees of personal freedom. So, to take the first property of devotion to the public good, we still want to prevent politics

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being a source of personal gain and becoming either entangled with the private interests of citizens and politicians or having to compete with them for their attention.

However, the way we seek to stop this happening today completely overturns earlier accounts. For example, in line with the thinking that private wealth was a prerequisite for disinterested public service, it was generally thought inappropriate to pay politicians salaries well into the 19th century. Indeed, in Britain it formally remains the case at the local level: it was not until 1974 that a scheme was introduced for paying local councillors allowances for performing various tasks, though subsequent reforms have turned these into salaries in all but name. The aim was to prevent the development of a professional class of politicians. On the one hand, professionalizing politics was thought to undermine the system of citizens taking it in turns to rule and be ruled, creating a political class with a distinct set of sectional interests to those they governed. On the other hand, it was feared payment would turn public service into a means for private enrichment rather than a matter of civic duty – that, as the German sociologist Max Weber put it, politicians would live ‘off’ rather than ‘for’ politics. Of course, the flaw in this argument was that politicians could gain far more from making decisions favouring their business interests or those of their friends than any salary. Meanwhile, it effectively debarred those without private wealth from public office. Gradually, starting with those holding government positions, thinking on this score changed to quite the opposite – that a public salary, albeit one often far lower than many politicians could earn in the private sector, was the best means for freeing politicians from their private obligations. Likewise, making politics a profession gave politicians an incentive to develop their political skills and live ‘for’ politics, achieving success by showing they could lead and act for the public interest.

The innovation that made these changes possible was representative democracy and the system of competing parties.

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This development also had implications for the demands placed on citizens. Citizens remain eligible as potential rulers in being able to put themselves forward as candidates for office. But public service is no longer expected of the vast majority of citizens. Instead, the main task for citizens is to select rulers. It is the competition between parties and their alternation in office that allows different groups of citizens, via their elected representatives, to rule and be ruled in turn. The key issue for membership is no longer whether a potential citizen is qualified to rule but rather whether they are qualified to vote and to evaluate the suitability of others for public office. By making political participation far less onerous it comes within the grasp of almost all adults, even though some have argued it thereby becomes so devalued as to be worthless, a point we shall consider in Chapter 5. However, lack of time no longer forms a barrier.

What about self-interest? A common, if not necessarily accurate, criticism of democracy is that citizens vote in self-interested and possibly short-sighted ways. Such considerations have been invoked for curtailing the scope for democratic decision-making and handing certain areas to an allegedly more disinterested and public-spirited elite of ‘the great and the good’. Again, we shall return to these issues in Chapter 5. Here it suffices to note that while these concerns still linger, they no longer form a barrier to becoming a citizen – merely to what citizens may be allowed to do. True, there have been arguments that those who draw welfare should be barred from voting because their private interest is closely allied to increasing public spending to which they do not contribute, though in fact this group is among the least likely to vote and has the least influence in society generally. Yet, many have argued that the public interest simply is the aggregate interests of the citizens. Certainly, as we saw in the last chapter, there is a real danger that unless those subject to government are allowed to express their interests politically then they will be overlooked. So rather than seeing the public interest as apart from the private interests of citizens, as was argued in the past, it seems

more appropriate now to regard the two as linked, with the one informed by the other, promoting a sense among citizens that their interests are linked to those of the community as a whole.

A similar reversal of assumptions has overturned traditional thinking concerning the second property of the good citizen, independence. Again, the classical view that those who depend on others for their livelihood will lack independence prevailed up to the 19th century, justifying the exclusion of the vast mass of people. However, it had become plain much earlier that this view rested on an anachronistic understanding of the conditions for economic and social ‘independence’ that none could enjoy. As early as the late 18th century, the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith criticized Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s radical defence of the classical position by noting how a central feature of the intensifying of the division of labour allowed by the emerging market society, of which the professionalization of politics was but one example, was that we all became dependent on each other. A ‘free man’ could no longer be someone who was self-sufficient, the master of an autonomous economic system represented by the household. As civic republican theorists, such as Machiavelli and Rousseau, had always feared, a desire for luxury goods destroyed such independence even for those with considerable wealth. Yet, as Smith pointed out, the universality of mutual dependence also had a certain levelling effect. It created both a normative and a practical foothold for the equalizing of status in both a formal and a substantive sense. In market economies, we all do rather specialist jobs and depend on numerous others to supply our needs. But none of these others are our personal dependants, and it is hard to imagine a situation in a globally organized and complex economy where they could become so. Instead, we must all – even the fabulously rich and powerful – freely contract with others for their goods, labour, and services. In these circumstances of universal mutual dependence, independence is no longer a matter of private wealth but a public achievement of the laws and structures that regulate the conditions under which we contract

with others. Since these regulations apply to all, there is a normative presumption that the terms of our mutual dependency should be fair and acknowledge reciprocal rights and duties of equal respect and concern.

In Chapter 2, I noted that the idea of political society as itself the product of a contract offers a powerful theoretical tool for modelling such a fair social and political system. Freedom of contract also had important practical consequences, eventually allowing workers to organize and use their bargaining power to equalize first the terms and conditions of their employment and then their legal standing in other areas too, including politics. The key became to ensure all citizens could make decisions for themselves rather than having to defer to another's opinion because they depended on them entirely for their livelihood and information. At least a part of the rationale behind rights to education and welfare, for example, is that they secure people's independence as citizens by removing such dependence. The former enables citizens to access and assess information for themselves, the latter means they are never entirely at the mercy of another for the necessities of life. Moreover, the justification for publicly supporting these measures stems from duties of reciprocity between citizens that again follow from their condition of mutual dependence.

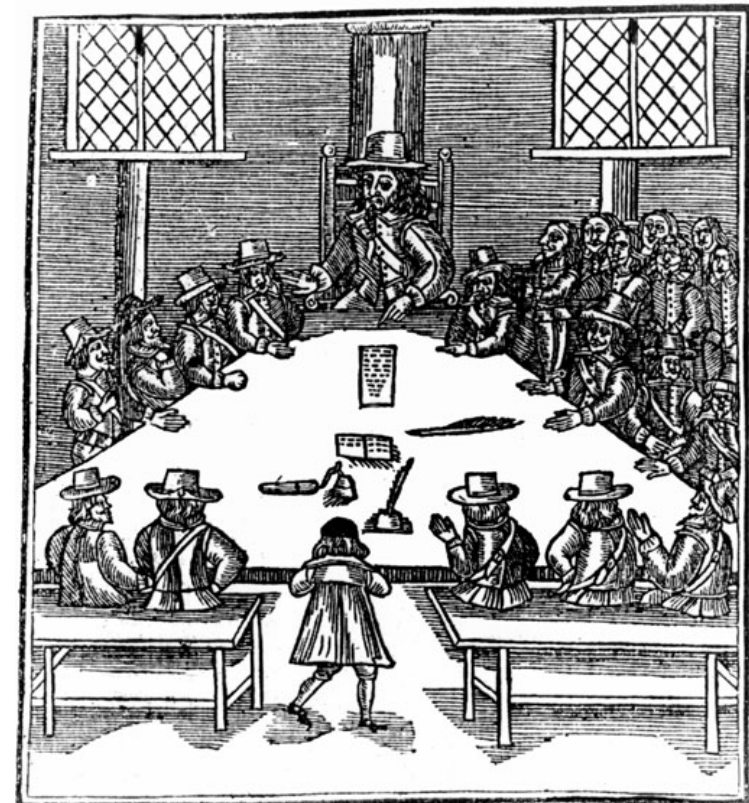
Of course, even with this public support, there may be some who remain in a natural state of dependency. Children are excluded from full citizenship on the grounds that they have yet to develop the capacity of independent reasoning or living on their own, and are necessarily dependent on the views and support of their parents. The mentally ill or disabled tend to be excluded on similar grounds. Even these categories of exclusion have prompted controversy. However, on the whole, criticism has been about grey areas, such as whether children become capable of intellectual and economic independence – and hence should qualify for the vote – at 21, 18, or, as has been recently proposed in the UK, 16,

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rather than as a result of rejecting the notion of independence outright.

Just as private property no longer seems a guarantee of devotion to the public good or independence, so – for related reasons – it can also be questioned how well it serves the third property of citizenship and provides evidence of a stake in the political community. Again, this argument persisted well into the 19th century. For example, it was at the heart of one of the earliest discussions of the principle of votes for all – the Putney Debates of 1647 during the English Civil War.

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7. The Putney Debates, October to November 1647

Certain factions in the army that had supported Parliament against the King believed that even common soldiers had earned a right to political liberty. In a famous defence of political equality, Colonel Rainsborough, the most articulate of the 'Leveller' faction, as it came to be known, argued 'that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore . . . the poorest man in England is not bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under'. The response of the 'grandees' gathered around Cromwell reflected the conventional wisdom of the time. Speaking on their behalf, Henry Ireton retorted that 'no person hath a right to an interest or share in the disposing of the affairs of the kingdom, and in determining or choosing those that shall determine what laws we shall be ruled by here - . . . that hath not a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom'. And, he implied, the most tangible sign of such 'a permanent fixed interest' was ownership of part of its territory - in other words, landed property. Yet, the link between property ownership and a concern with the long-term interests of the wider community has always been a contingent and partial one, and in today's globalized economy where key assets are owned by foreign investors has become even more dubious. It all depends how far the owners will benefit from any positive effects their use of those assets may have for their fellow citizens or share with them any ill effects of their activities. Unfortunately, this is often not the case and they can gain more from exploiting their property in ways that damage the 'permanent fixed interests' of the wider community. The classic example is pollution. Unless environmentally friendly policies benefit the owners of a company - either by enhancing their profits or because they themselves are adversely affected by unfriendly policies - then they will have no incentive to pursue them, and indeed often do not for this very reason.

However, if property is a poor guide to whether a citizen's interests are tied to those of the political community, some sign of long-term commitment does seem appropriate. After all, citizens not only derive benefits from the state but also can influence its

future shape through the decisions they make. Many states have therefore made a significant period of continuous residence a criterion for full citizenship - not just for immigrants wishing to naturalize, but also for those who are citizens by birth, with the latter losing certain rights if they choose to reside elsewhere. Certainly, residence offers a more tangible sign than property ownership that one is committed to pursuing policies that will not adversely affect fellow citizens because they will impact equally on you.

Nevertheless, a problem remains - to be explored below - that those affected by many state policies may reside outside its borders. Environmental measures once again offer a telling example. Thus, a policy forcing factories to construct tall chimneys, say, may be good news for local residents, but effectively exports the noxious emissions to those living across the border. As a result, some have argued that we should be treated as citizens of whatever political organization affects us. However, whereas sharing a reasonably delimited territorial space means we will be affected to a fairly substantial degree by the whole range of government measures, only a few selective policies will have a significant impact on those outside the borders. True, even within states there is some differentiation between issues that are best decided at a local level, because they can be most effectively organized by and need only affect a fairly small region, such as dustbin collection, and issues that are decided nationally, such as defence.

Moreover, in Britain and other countries, many people qualify as local citizens on the basis of residence, and vote in local elections, even if they do not meet the more demanding criteria for national citizenship. Yet, consideration is given to the knock-on effects of local policies for national ones and *vice versa* by virtue of the national political community encompassing the local, with full citizens having voting rights in both. By contrast, giving Danish citizens, say, a vote on certain British environmental policies

because measures such as tall chimneys result in acid rain that pollutes their lakes, would be inequitable if they were able to distort the political agenda so that spending on environmental protection to benefit Danes undermined national health or educational policies benefiting British citizens as a whole. Such problems might be got round if one could regard issues that affect a global political community as somehow encompassing national policies, but as the experience of the EU suggests, matters are not so neat.

Meanwhile, mere residence or being affected may not in themselves offer a sufficient stake in a political community to motivate people to try and ensure that its policies are efficient and effective if they do not have to pay for them. When the American colonists declared independence, they did so in large part on the basis of the slogan that there should be 'no taxation without representation'. But, as I noted above, it was long thought that the reverse should equally hold true – that those who did not pay taxes ought not to be represented. Otherwise, they would have no motive to encourage governments to pursue cost-effective policies. Similar reasoning has led some to argue that one should disenfranchise the elderly, who may have incentives not to save for the future – say, by greatly raising spending on their pensions, which are paid for by the subsequent generation. Of course, most pensioners have children and hence an interest in their future. Likewise, those on welfare gain in other ways from efficient government policies and have an interest in the economy remaining strong enough to be able to pay their benefits. Moreover, many argue that they have a duty to at least be potential contributors to state revenues by being available for work, willing to go on training courses, and so on. Such arguments lie behind workfare or 'mutual obligation' schemes in the United States, Canada, and Australia. This view that to qualify for citizenship you should be not just affected by policies but also contribute to sustaining them follows from the notion of reciprocity that lies at the heart of national welfare states – that citizens cooperate to

sustain the public goods that are provided by a political association. Criminals are excluded from citizenship precisely on the grounds that they have broken this social contract, though this practice has become increasingly controversial – especially in the United States, where convicted felons are sometimes disenfranchised permanently and not just for the period of their imprisonment.

For a long time the most tangible sign of a willingness to align one's interests with the state and do one's bit to uphold it was military service. Moreover, republican theorists worried that if rulers could use mercenaries or create a professional army, then they would be able to dominate the ruled. A citizen's army was a necessary complement to democracy to keep rulers in check. Note, this argument does not imply an individual 'right' to bear arms so much as a citizen's duty to participate in the defence of the country – a point implicit in the Second Amendment to the US Constitution's association of this right with the need for a 'well-regulated militia', though lost in subsequent debates. All these ideas lay behind the Levellers' demands reported above. So, it may seem odd to include this topic under the heading of property. Yet, in ancient and medieval times, the only warriors who counted were those who could arm themselves or raise and fund an army from among their dependants. Even as armies became professionalized during the 17th and 18th centuries, few ordinary soldiers enlisted willingly but had to be coerced into service and had to purchase their weapons from their pay. Once again, a major change came about in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the need for mass armies. The introduction of universal male adult suffrage and the conscription of all fit adult males more or less went hand in hand. Requiring the ultimate sacrifice without granting some say over when it might be demanded and what one was fighting for became untenable, particularly in light of the mass slaughter of the First World War. This event reaffirmed the importance of the old republican view of citizenship and military service, albeit in a much more inclusive

form that once again de-privatized the right to bear arms by disassociating it from having property in one's weapons. Meanwhile, it has become ever more redundant as wars have returned to being fought by professional armies and even to rely on private security firms, though this development potentially revives the classic republican worries about the separation of citizenship and the right and duty to fight.

Like all the other shifts noted above, this change initially affected men alone. Moreover, it was accompanied by, and largely assumed, a more thoroughgoing cultural identification with the state stemming from nationality – only patriots, it was thought, would be prepared to die for their country. Accordingly, the rest of this section explores how far the criteria for citizenship explored so far involve a gender and cultural bias.

Gender and the feminist critique

Many of the traditional attributes of citizenship have been associated with male roles, such as soldiering, from which women were excluded. This fact has produced a two-pronged feminist critique of the way citizenship has come to be defined and practised. First, feminists have argued that the public practice of citizenship has often rested on the private domination of women. Second, they have argued that citizenship has been conceived in terms of masculine qualities.

The first criticism is undeniable. Both in the past and to some extent today, men have turned women into personal dependants, whom they can treat as unpaid domestic servants and direct as they will. Economic dependency resulting from the man being the main 'bread-winner' and, up to the 19th century, coming into possession of his wife's assets on marriage, was often reinforced by coercion, including the legally sanctioned use of physical force – marital rape, for example, was not recognized in law or criminalized until well into the 20th century in many

jurisdictions. Control of women's domestic labour allowed 'male' jobs, including politics, to be so structured that the maintenance of a home and raising a family became factored out as not being a post-holder's responsibility. Despite major legislative changes over the past 100 years – from women obtaining equal voting rights to men in almost all established democracies by the mid-20th century, to anti-discrimination and equal pay legislation passed during the second half of that century – caring roles remain largely unpaid and under-supported, and still fall mainly to women. As a result, women predominate in low-paid, part-time jobs, and are under-represented and less well rewarded in most senior management positions. A recent survey in the UK revealed that women who work part-time earn, on average, 38% less per hour than men working full-time. Even women working full-time earn 17% less per hour relative to full-time men. Politics is no exception – indeed, it performs rather worse than many professions. Fewer than 20% of British Members of Parliament are women, for example, and – at the time of writing – only 5 out of the 22 paid members of the Cabinet, the 23rd unpaid member being the female Minister for Housing. With the exception of the Scandinavian countries, where women comprise around 40% of the legislature, most democracies fare little better – indeed many, such as the United States, where only 16% of national politicians are women, do considerably worse.

How can this situation be altered, and what are its implications for how we think about politics? In particular, does de-gendering citizenship involve a distinctively feminist approach to politics? The claim that we require a new approach typically centres on the feminist slogan 'the personal is the political'. At one level, this points to the need for a change of social attitudes that involves action outside the formal channels of politics – for example, through women challenging male assumptions that child care or cleaning are 'women's' work, that is either beneath them or for which they are somehow unsuited. At another level, it indicates how we cannot see politics as resting on a pre-political private

sphere. On the contrary, politics and its preconditions are themselves politically and publicly constructed. Marriage, after all, is a legal relationship and the law can enter the bedroom to decree rape unlawful. Likewise, ensuring employers have an obligation to grant maternity and paternity leave and providing state funding for child care are public measures that will to some degree restructure personal relationships. Both of these developments will clearly help women participate as citizens and politicians, hopefully altering prejudices to choosing women candidates and making the political workplace more compatible with men and women sharing domestic and family responsibilities. Equally clearly, as the figures reported above indicate all too starkly, change will only come with sustained and concerted public effort, and even then will be painfully slow.

Significant though both these ways of conceiving the 'personal as political' are for women, they reflect the general historical trajectory the understanding of citizenship has taken rather than being distinctively 'feminist'. As I noted in Chapter 1, it is now common to employ an enlarged view of citizenship that encompasses our broader social and moral obligations to others. As I also remarked, important though social morality is for politics, there is nonetheless a distinctive role to be played by collective decision-making within the formal political process of the state. The key change in this regard has been the recognition that giving women the personal freedom in the private sphere necessary for them to be able to participate on an equal basis to others is in fact a public matter – it results from putting in place a fair system of public rules and collective policies that encourage the sharing of domestic tasks and does not discriminate against individuals taking on caring roles for children or the elderly and so on. Yet, we have seen how this reversal of assumptions, whereby private autonomy does not provide the basis for participation in the public sphere but is rather the product of such participation, parallels precisely the route taken by the property-less. For they too had to overcome the private barriers to their public

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8. Marching for women's suffrage, New York City, 1913 (top), and a May Day workers' rights demonstration, New York, 2000 (bottom)

involvement by organizing for better working conditions, education, welfare, and so on – challenging in their turn the view that such issues were purely non-political.

The second feminist argument, that citizenship needs to be understood in feminine rather than masculine terms, is more controversial. Historically, women have been viewed as unsuited to citizenship on the grounds that they are too emotional – ruled by their passions rather than reason, and liable to be partial to those for whom they feel particular attachments rather than acting impartially. The claim of some, though far from all, feminists is that reason, impartiality, and universalism are indeed masculine ways of thinking, and that women take a more ‘caring’ approach centred on affection and feeling for particular others. Yet, because men and women have never been on a completely equal footing with each other, it is impossible to know which attitudes result from any possible differences in their nature and what is simply the product of cultural and social norms. As it is, there are women and men on both sides of this debate about the character of moral and political reasoning. Indeed, discussion of the appropriate role and balance between universal accounts of rights and justice, on the one hand, and more particular, affective ties of duty, on the other, largely shapes the other major issue surrounding membership – namely, how far citizenship should be limited to co-nationals who share certain ethnic or cultural characteristics.

Nationality, ethnicity, and multiculturalism

As we have seen, the development of a more inclusive account of citizenship rested on the emergence of publicly supported democratic welfare systems. Historically, these systems arose in the context of state- and nation-building. A key issue today concerns how far this connection between democracy and welfare, on the one hand, and the nation state, on the other, was a matter of historical contingency that can now be overcome.

The argument that nation-building is an inherent aspect of a democratic welfare system rests on the alleged contribution of national sentiment in creating solidarity and trust, while facilitating more generally the capacity of citizens to frame and sustain collective policies. Solidarity and trust are vital to any cooperative endeavour and are mutually reinforcing. Democracy assumes a people, or *demos*, who feel sufficient solidarity with each other to accept collective decisions and enough mutual trust to cooperate. Without solidarity, individuals would be tempted to obey only those collective decisions that benefited them and even then might be inclined to free-ride. Majorities may be unwilling to accommodate minorities, minorities to accept majority decisions. Without trust, the fear will be that nobody will play their part – that, for example, if an incumbent government concedes defeat in an election their successors will prevent their ever winning again, thereby justifying their rigging or halting the electoral process themselves to stay in power. Welfare similarly depends on the ‘haves’ showing solidarity towards the ‘have-nots’ and trust in the former doing their best to improve the conditions of the latter and, if successful, to shoulder a part of the burden in their turn. Finally, making collective decisions assumes common institutions, customs, and discourses that all involved agree are legitimate and can employ.

A common nationality is said to foster solidaristic and trusting feelings by creating a common identity that draws on a shared culture, history, and language. These commonalities supposedly create a bond between people that reaches beyond their many differences of opinion and interests and enables them to cooperate with each other. This claim is partly sociological, partly normative, and partly functional. First, people find it easier to engage with and trust those whom they regard as similar in certain pertinent ways. Second, cooperative activities, such as democracy and welfare, involve more than the humanitarian obligations we owe to people in general, important though these are. They entail a high degree of reciprocity between people and the sort of special

obligations to particular others that exist among family members and good neighbours. Not only are such obligations difficult to create and sustain among all human beings, but also people of differing cultures will want to shape them in different ways. Last, but far from least, a shared language and political traditions greatly facilitate communication and decision-making, making it easier for all to participate on equal terms and reducing the scope for misunderstanding or incompatibility clashes.

On this account, therefore, nationality defines citizenship. It provides the social glue and medium that enables citizens to interact on equal terms in the life of the political community. Yet, while state-building and nation-building went hand in hand in the past, there are obvious problems in drawing too tight a connection between the two. It is estimated that there are between 5,000 and 9,000 ethnic-cultural groups in the world, and only around 200 states, over 90% of which contain more than one ethnic group. To overcome this diversity, nation-building in the past involved some or all of the following: genocide, forced mass-population transfers, coerced assimilation, and domination and control by the ruling group. With most states being formed through war and conquest, indigenous peoples and minority national, religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups have all suffered from these sorts of oppression, as have later immigrant minorities. No respectable advocate of nationalism today believes that such methods are in any way acceptable. Instead, they argue that a common nationality can not only accommodate diversity but makes it possible.

How can that be? First, they argue that if people are to interact effectively then some common structures are going to be necessary. So there will need to be broad acceptance that the existing legal and political institutions are, if not perfect, nevertheless the appropriate mechanism through which any change must take place – including changes to those institutions themselves. Second, there must also be the desire to engage with co-citizens on equal terms and to frame common laws and policies



9. A citizenship ceremony in Australia, 2005

in ways that can be justified as reasonable to all. Such requirements are consistent with citizens giving their allegiance to the state, having some knowledge of its political history and institutions, being reasonably fluent in its main language or languages, and having an appreciation of the cultural conventions and sensibilities of its members. Indeed, Western democracies have increasingly codified these elements of a common national citizenship, enshrining them both in tests and ceremonies for the acquisition of citizenship and in the teaching of citizenship in schools.

Typically, these policies have arisen as responses to fears of growing multicultural unrest and violence and concerns over rising rates of immigration. As a result, they have attracted criticism in certain quarters as perpetuating rather than diminishing discrimination towards minority groups, with some arguing such policies should be replaced by considerations based on human rights norms and international law. I shall consider these arguments more fully in the next chapter. However, the short response from the nationalist would be that rights norms will always need to be realized within a given cultural context, which fleshes them out in specific ways. Moreover, such acculturation will never be neutral in its effects. Choices will have to be made about public holidays, the official language(s), and so on that will inevitably impact on some minorities more than others.

However, the discriminatory effects of such decisions can be mitigated in all sorts of ways. There can be exemptions from laws that penalize certain cultural practices, such as the British exemption of Sikhs from the wearing of motorcycle helmets. There can be assistance for minorities to overcome certain disadvantages, from state support for cultural activities, including the funding of religious schools as in the UK, to affirmative action, and the symbolic recognition of their acceptance – for example, through multi-faith policies for religious education and public ceremonies. There can be the devolution of certain

self-government rights to national minorities, as is the case with the Scots, Welsh, and Northern Irish in the UK, and indigenous groups, such as the Inuit in Canada, and/or special representation (also for immigrant communities) in public bodies, as is the case for the Maori in New Zealand. There can be multilingual policies and even the allowance of parallel legal systems, as occurs with the Welsh and Scots respectively. Most states adopt some of these policies, and traditional countries of immigration, such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, have tended to adopt almost all of them, as has the UK.

The purpose of these policies is to render the notion of a common national citizenship more inclusive, creating a sense of belonging among the very diverse groups that make up modern societies. To return to the image of a social contract, they reflect the attempt for citizens to negotiate mutually acceptable norms of political cooperation that better reflect their civic equality. Yet, some commentators have criticized these measures as undermining the whole citizenship project – detracting from equal status and fragmenting civic identities, with a consequent loss of solidarity and trust and a reduction in participation. France, which has a strong tradition of republican civic identity, has tended to take this line, but it has also been endorsed by many liberals as well. However, the empirical evidence tends to suggest the reverse, with policies promoting a common national citizenship proving more acceptable where they are accompanied with an equally clear commitment to multiculturalism and diversity. The partial exception is with territorially concentrated minorities, where devolved institutions can strengthen rather than weaken demands for greater independence and even succession, as has proved the case in Quebec in Canada and Scotland in the UK, although if successful the new countries would have to confront many of the self-same issues of diversity.

Moreover, in any polity there are limits to how much accommodation is possible, notably when minority practices are

deemed to infringe human rights. For example, Western democracies have outlawed such practices as so-called female circumcision. However, numerous hard cases exist, particularly with regard to the education of children and attitudes towards women, who have a subordinate role in many cultures. In these cases, a potential tension exists between the maintenance of certain traditional practices and protecting the opportunity for children, and particularly women, to choose whether they abide by traditional norms or adapt or even drop them altogether, exploring instead the wider possibilities open to them in the broader community. These tensions have been resolved in different ways in different countries, but the sign of a commitment to common citizenship derives from all affected parties seeking solutions that are capable of being justified in mutually acceptable terms. In these ways, a national citizenship ceases to be something imposed by a dominant group on others but a shared civic project, involving a degree of compromise and adaptation on all sides.

From alien to citizen: the external dimension of exclusion

So far I have defined being a citizen in terms of certain properties – notably, a linking of one’s private interests and the public interest, including a commitment to the country and a willingness to contribute to its economic, social, and political public goods by working, paying taxes, and voting, and a capacity to evaluate political performance and exercise independent judgements. I have also noted that extending such properties to all relies on seeing them as public rather than private responsibilities, while their joint exercise is facilitated by a sense of common nationality. Finally, I have claimed seeing citizenship in these terms need not discriminate against women or minority cultures and nationalities. Instead, they have been able progressively to reshape national political cultures to reflect their claims to civic equality. Perhaps the crucial test of their success, though, is how

Membership and belonging

far the resulting membership criteria offer defensible grounds for admission for would-be immigrants.

This issue has become increasingly salient as migratory pressures have grown. Reliable figures are hard to come by, but it is estimated there were around 150 million migrants in 2000 – double the number in 1965. Of course, there have been periods of massive migration in the past. But the global scope, variety, and sustained volume of contemporary migratory trends are unprecedented. Some of this pressure has come from asylum seekers, driven out of their countries by war or oppression. Though a grey line often divides the two, I want to separate this group – whom countries have a humanitarian, and in the case of signatories of the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951) and its 1967 Protocol, a legal duty to assist – from immigrants seeking a different or better life. The key issue is whether it is legitimate for governments to limit rising demands from this second group.

Citizenship

All wealthy, democratic countries do limit immigration, usually through having residence requirements to show commitment, normally of around three to four years, a language test, and a test on national history, customs, and institutions, and have favoured those with desirable economic skills, such as doctors. These conditions codify the properties outlined above that have traditionally been thought necessary for someone to be a full member of the political community. How far they are perceived as discriminatory depends on the context and manner in which they are imposed. If the country is seen as generally welcoming to immigrants from all countries, not favouring ethnically and culturally similar groups, and there is public support for meeting the language and other test requirements, the required language skills are basic and the questions on politics and culture are reasonably straightforward and could be answered by most existing citizens, not being designed in such a way as to force all immigrants to renounce pre-existing identities and affiliations,

then these conditions can enjoy broad support, or at least be uncontroversial, even among immigrant communities. For example, in Canada, where citizenship and immigration policy has become increasingly open since the 1960s, these policies have been largely, if not universally, accepted as legitimate and legitimating – making it easier rather than harder for immigrants to feel full members of their new country. There, the external citizenship criteria for immigrants are but the counterpart to a broader and more multicultural internal citizenship policy. By contrast, when set against a background of suspicion towards immigrants tinged with racism, as tends to be the case with former colonial powers, such as Britain, these policies can be met with suspicion and regarded as exclusionary – a fear reinforced in recent times by seemingly panicked responses by some governments to the emerging link between immigrant communities and terrorism. By and large, attempts to allay the potential fears of native-born citizens have tended to backfire, appearing to give such worries credence while alienating the immigrant communities and exacerbating social tensions.

Such failures have tended to bring the whole linkage between citizenship and membership of a nation state into disrepute. So long as this link exists, however, it will be justified to limit admission to citizenship by criteria that reflect the attributes necessary for participation in a national political community. Yet, some commentators have argued this connection is simply untenable, both practically and morally, in our increasingly globalized societies. Instead, they seek to define citizenship in terms of universal human rights. It is to the degree to which such a definition is normatively and practically possible that I now turn.

Chapter 5

Participation and democracy

We saw in Chapter 2 how for the ancient Greeks political participation formed an intrinsic part of citizenship. To enjoy the promise of civic equality that the status of citizenship holds out, all citizens had to play their part in the political process. Otherwise, instead of a situation of ruling and being ruled in turn, a citizen would simply be ruled. Indeed, our word ‘idiot’ comes from the Greek *idiotes*, a term used to describe someone who concentrated entirely on their private affairs to the neglect of the public realm. These days, though, most of us tend to be idiots in this respect.

Disenchantment with democratic politics has never been more pronounced, with voter turnout and trust in politicians in a slow but steady decline within all the established democracies. Political citizenship is rejected as both too demanding and of dubious worth. People increasingly adopt what I called the imperial Roman view of legal citizenship. They place their faith in the courts and other supposedly impartial, expert regulatory bodies to provide an equitable framework for their activities, rejecting politics as at best ineffective, at worst pernicious. I have already cast doubt on some of the assumptions underlying these kinds of arguments at various points throughout this book. This chapter seeks to make the case for linking citizenship and democratic politics in a more systematic fashion. In particular, I want to argue that democratic politics as it is practised in the

established democracies, such as the United States, Britain, Sweden, Germany, New Zealand, Australia, or Canada, does not deserve anything like the cynicism and criticism that it has become conventional to direct at it.

In Chapter 2 we noted that, like many of the political terms examined so far, the word ‘democracy’ has Greek roots, literally meaning ‘people’ (*demos*) ‘rule’ (*kratos*). We also saw, in Chapter 3, that who the ‘people’ are begs a number of questions that can be answered in various ways – from the very narrow in scope, as was the case in ancient Greece where women and slaves, among others, were excluded, to the very broad, on certain cosmopolitan accounts encompassing the whole of humanity. Much the same applies to the nature and sense in which the people, however defined, are said to ‘rule’. What ‘rule’ involves can also be read in narrower or broader terms. On the broadest accounts, democratic rule involves all the relevant people taking every collective decision by consensus. On the narrowest of accounts, it suggests that rulers should simply rule for the benefit of all the people – whether or not they happen to be chosen from or by the people: a hereditary line of enlightened despots would be ‘democratic’ in this sense so long as their rule was benevolent and beneficial. Midway between these two positions lie the actually existing democratic systems of today, whereby democratic rule means that rulers are to some degree chosen by, accountable to, and removable by, the ruled.

Much of the criticism of what might be called ‘real’ or ‘actual’ democracy stems from comparisons with the imagined superiority of the supposedly ‘ideal’ democracy offered by either the broad account of direct participatory democratic rule, whereby all are involved in making and administering the law, or the narrow account’s vision of a class of benevolent expert rulers who, free from prejudice or private interest, have the ability and desire to govern for the people rather than themselves. The first section points out some problems with both these alternatives. It turns out that neither captures the idea of a political community of equals

that lies at the heart of citizenship. I shall offer an alternative account of democracy that is more in tune with this idea, exploring in the second section how far contemporary democratic practices serve to realize it. Finally, the third section concludes this chapter and the book as a whole with some reflections on the prospects for political citizenship in contemporary societies.

What is democracy, and why is it important for citizenship?

This section will explore ‘direct’ or ‘participatory’ democracy, in which all citizens participate in law-making, and guardianship, where no participation is involved. In pointing out the problems of both, I hope to highlight the merits of the real systems of representative democracy that characterize most working democracies today.

Participatory democracy

The 18th-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau – the last great advocate of the ancient model of participatory citizenship – famously declared that the ‘people of England’ were ‘free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing.’ Many contemporary critics of today’s democracies are apt to go even further and complain that even when electing the legislature, the people are not ruling – at best they are voting for their rulers from among a pre-selected shortlist that offers them little in the way of choice. I shall explore the accuracy of this characterization of democratic elections below. But what of the implied alternative?

At its most extreme, a radical democratic position becomes almost synonymous with anarchism. According to this view, people can rule themselves democratically only if they take every decision, can weigh up all alternatives, and come to a unanimous conclusion. Otherwise, the minority in any vote will be ruled by the majority rather than ruling themselves. Yet it does not take much thought

to see how difficult this result would be to achieve in practice. Imagine that an election involves four main issues: inheritance tax, spending on hospitals, the terms of an international treaty, and involvement in a military campaign on foreign soil. Suppose, then, there are 3 possible policies being canvassed on the first issue, 5 on the second, 4 on the third, and 2 on the last. That gives $3 \times 5 \times 4 \times 2 = 120$ possible views that a citizen might take on these issues. To vote on all of them would be time-consuming enough, to expect unanimity – even after a long, public-spirited discussion of the merits of each of them – not only raises the degree of commitment expected of each citizen to a level that starts to exclude having time for anything else, but also is highly unlikely given that each policy option is liable to reflect different and occasionally incompatible moral positions and empirical assumptions which can all claim a reasonable degree of plausibility. Given that my example considerably simplifies the number and complexity of the issues and related policy options that generally need to be decided by governments in advanced societies, the prospects of direct participatory government seem remote, to say the least. Even if we drop the unanimity condition, it will simply be too time-consuming and inefficient to involve everyone in debating and deciding every single issue. It would raise the transaction costs of each decision to a level where government would grind to a halt.

It is sometimes suggested we could reserve such methods for the absolutely key issues, such as constitutional amendments, and those that affect us most closely – notably the very local or those in the workplace. Both proposals are certainly more plausible from a practical perspective. However, each invokes a slightly different line of argument for more direct democracy, with the reasoning underlying the second proposal proving more convincing than the reasons supporting the first. The rationale for having referenda on constitutional issues is often said to be that although it is impractical and perhaps unnecessary for people to decide all policy questions collectively, they could only be said to rule



13. French campaign posters for the referendum on the European Constitution, 29 May 2005

themselves so long as the 'rules' by which they are ruled are directly and collectively made.

Yet, for a constitutional referendum fully to live up to these expectations, it too would need to involve both the opportunity of voting on all the possible options, otherwise voters have at best only a negative voice to reject proposals advanced by others, and be repeated at regular intervals, otherwise past voters – many, possibly all, if one thinks for example of the US Constitution, dead – will be effectively binding present voters. These stipulations might be said to be made unnecessary so long as amendments are possible. However, if changes need unanimity or, as is more common, a supermajority of voters to be passed (that is, more than 50% – with two-thirds of the electorate being a regular condition), then a 'status quo' bias is established. In practice, additional votes are awarded to what exists, because far more are required for change than for things to stay as they are. That may seem appropriate if one can assume that what exists is likely to be superior to any proposed reform. But there is no sound reason to believe this to be the case. On the contrary, unless all citizens are entirely equitably and fairly situated at the time a given constitution is enacted, a condition so far never met anywhere, then there is a real danger entrenchment will merely further advantage the privileged against the underprivileged. Moreover, it is very hard to anticipate the potential perverse effects of particular clauses or the ways societies may change. For example, many provisions of the US Constitution clearly reflect the time-bound assumptions of 18th-century America, when militias provided the role now allotted to a professional army and news travelled only as fast as the fastest horse. However, although a majority might well wish to change these and other clauses, doing so has proven extremely difficult because those who gain advantage from them can hold out against reform.

Many of these criticisms were made somewhat presciently by Thomas Jefferson in letters to one of the drafters and key

proponents of the American Constitution, James Madison. As Madison came to appreciate, they point not just to practical but also logical and normative problems with seeing democracy as a system of collective self-rule. Although a given people may regard themselves as having collective problems that require a common solution, the degree to which they identify themselves as a collectivity will always be limited. Despite sharing certain values and concerns, they may make divergent empirical and moral assessments as to the advisability of certain policies and their conduciveness to the public interest. They may also have equally reasonable but incompatible interests or commitments. As a result, any collective policy will require a degree of give and take from people, with some almost inevitably compromising more than others. Consequently, almost all involved in any collective decision will be to some degree ruled by others. So, the electorate of a country may agree we need a collective policy to tackle the threats posed by global warming. But for a whole host of reasons – from ideological differences, to differing interests and evaluations of the scientific evidence – they may disagree as to what precisely ought to be done. Among the package of measures any government is likely to adopt, most people will find some they agree with and others they do not. So John may agree and Paul disagree with the increased use of sources of alternative energy, such as wind power, but John disagree and Paul agree with raising fuel taxes. Both John and Paul may support the government, but John rules Paul on the first measure and Paul rules John on the second.

Treating democracy as a system of popular sovereignty, in which people rule themselves, proves misleading, therefore. Moreover, it directs attention away from, and may even undermine, its true role as a fair decision-making process among political equals. Seen in this light, the core purpose of democracy can be aligned directly with the underlying rationale of citizenship given in this book – namely, the establishment of a condition of civic equity. As we noted in Chapter 1, citizenship assumes both social relations

and, by contrast to anarchism, the necessity of the state to regulate them. Its importance arises precisely because our freedom as individuals can be both limited by the freedom of others and require their active cooperation, producing a need for collective rules and policies that mediate our potential conflicts and promote valuable public goods. Citizenship is about ensuring these rules and policies treat all those involved as deserving equal concern and respect. Regarding democracy as a system of self-rule denies the very need for such common structures because it suggests we all ought to be able somehow to get what we want – that it would be ‘undemocratic’ for John and Paul, in my example above, to compromise at all. Worse, it potentially subverts the search for equitable solutions by allowing individuals to hold out against any changes that might threaten their existing privileges. By contrast, a more citizenship-centred view of the democracy regards it as a fair process whereby we settle our differences and pursue our collective ends on an equal basis – accepting that of necessity this involves ruling and being ruled in turn.

When we turn to the second proposal I gave above of where more direct and participatory forms of democratic politics might be plausibly employed – namely, when making very local decisions among a relatively small group of people, such as in neighbourhood associations or the workplace – then it is in fact their link to political equality that gives them their best rationale. The smallness of the group means all can have a say and an opportunity to listen and respond to others, and so are more likely mutually to adjust their positions to reflect their respective arguments and concerns. Moreover, because they live nearby or work together, they usually have a number of fairly well-defined shared purposes and issues, and so identify themselves as more of a collectivity. As a result, the areas and principles over which they might disagree and the range of options they need to consider will be much more circumscribed than within a larger, more heterogeneous community. Even so, consensus may not be

possible or even desirable given that, as we saw above, it may simply be a way for the prejudiced or privileged to hold out against legitimate change. Consequently, a decision may need to be made by majority vote. Yet, nobody need feel too excluded as a result – each has had a hearing and been able to vote on the same terms as everyone else.

In these local settings, therefore, participation and direct democracy will often support political equality because they allow all views to be given a full and equal airing, and enable citizens to take on board the opinions and preferences of others. By contrast, note how direct involvement in a referendum – which is often upheld as a model of ideal, direct democracy – gives no opportunity for voters to mutually modify their positions to show equal respect for the views of others. And, as we saw, if the vote requires more than a majority to be passed, as is often the case, then those who favour change are treated less equally than those who prefer the status quo. As such, it fails by the standard of citizenship by not encouraging participants to view each other as equals.

Guardianship

What of the other ideal of democracy canvassed above, that of decision-making by benevolent experts? Advocates of this argument contend that rule *by* the people often fails to deliver rule *for* the people – not least because giving equal weight to all views offers no guarantee that outcomes will be either equitable or serve the public interest. Instead, they are more likely to reflect ignorant or self-serving prejudices. These dangers can be corrected by either the objectivity offered by expertise, or the impartiality provided by a neutral ‘third’ party. As a result, citizens will often be better off not participating in ruling themselves and trusting instead in specially selected guardians. Yet each of the claims underlying this proposal is suspect.

The argument based on the objectivity of expertise originated with Plato. He maintained that democracy was analogous to handing the running of a ship to the passengers rather than entrusting it to a captain. Just as handling tides and rough seas and keeping the ship from being dashed to pieces on the rocks was a job for a trained professional, so, he reasoned, government was likewise a matter for those who had the capacity for and had learned the art of governing. The difficulty is that this analogy breaks down at a number of places. First, there is no 'objective' science of either the ends that governments should pursue, or necessarily of the best means to realize them. Both are subject to often contentious and fallible judgements. Human reasoning has proven incapable of defining with certainty the most appropriate course of action in all circumstances for all human beings. The openness of the social world, the fact that human beings operate in unpredictable and multifarious ways, make social science far less 'hard' than either natural science or mathematics, where reasoning operates within an empirically and logically closed set of parameters according to common norms. Consequently, though the captain may deal with the technicalities of sailing the ship, it is the passengers who rightly determine its destination. For there is no science of best destinations for all people apart from what they themselves see as most suitable given what they seek out of life.

Second, unless we assume experts to be unfailingly selfless and altruistic as well as omniscient, there is no guarantee that they will rule for the benefit of others rather than themselves. Though experts design and build the ship and a captain charts its course, it is not their benevolence but the need to woo passengers that leads them to respond in a variety of ways to what people want and in the process improve both ship design and navigation. Without that incentive, many technical improvements – especially those specifically 'for' the people – might never come about. Of course, competition between sea captains and their companies takes place in the market, and although the terms may be equal for all, not all passengers have equal standing – the wealthy are better positioned

than the poor. Yet, those issues that should be the same for all regardless of wealth, such as basic matters relating to the sea-worthiness of the vessel, the qualifications of captains, and so on, arise from state legislation that responds to the more substantive equality provided by democratic voting. Again, these are technical issues, and politicians will necessarily draw on the advice of a whole range of expert advice when formulating legislation on such matters. But governments take them into account because citizens have pressurized them to respond to sea disasters and the like by imposing a basic regulatory structure on the shipping industry that reflects matters of public interest that market competition alone would be unlikely to secure on an equal basis for all. Meanwhile, most technical solutions will raise problematic empirical and moral issues that even experts may disagree upon. For example, there will be a balance to be made between safety and various costs of time, the price of a ticket, and so on. Again, the most appropriate judges of the risks involved will be those likely to bear them and in a position to weigh them against their other concerns and interests – namely, citizens.

Plato's case for 'objective' rule by experts rests on dubious foundations, therefore. It fails to displace the democratic case that the best guide we have that social and political decisions will be in the public interest is that they reflect the expressed and evolving choices of citizens under conditions of political equality, and that rulers are accountable to them for their actions. The impartiality argument also has Greek roots but takes a slightly different tack. The claim here is that citizens are likely to be partial to their own concerns and so fail to accord equal concern and respect to those of others. As a result, we may need an impartial arbitrator to ensure all views are considered fairly. That need not be a guarantee the right decision is reached, but at least it will not result from bias or prejudice.

A key difficulty with this proposal is whether such an impartial arbitrator exists. Judges are often portrayed in this guise, and in

certain circumstances they can be – for example, when adjudicating domestic disputes between separating couples. However, when deciding collective decisions affecting all citizens, they are as much a party to any disagreements as anyone else. Of course, their declared reasoning is constrained by points of law – yet this may be a hindrance rather than an advantage to the extent that it forecloses giving a full consideration of the complete range of moral and empirical issues raised by a given case.

Moreover, the dangers of partiality among the electorate are overdrawn. The fear here is of the tyranny of the majority. Yet, it is necessary to specify carefully when a majority could be said to be tyrannous. This is likely to occur in cases when the majority who decide is identical to that whose rights and interests are at stake in the decision. The commonest example of this phenomenon is when an ethnic group votes to boost its own privileges at the expense of another ethnic group, as occurred in the past in Northern Ireland, where the Protestant majority consistently boosted their own position with respect to the Catholic minority. However, these are special cases which, as in Northern Ireland, can be accommodated through democratic mechanisms that force power-sharing between the main groups. It is unclear that issues such as affirmative action or abortion, to cite two key areas of judicial decision-making in the United States and elsewhere, conform to this pattern. On these sorts of issues, judges are as partisan as every other citizen in that they have a personal view of the matter. Meanwhile, those most affected – minority groups and women respectively – are as divided in their views of these policies as the rest of the population. It is not that all white males vote against them and all black women for them.

What democracy provides in this instance is an impartial process for resolving the dispute. ‘One person, one vote’ recognizes each citizen as equally entitled to have their view given as much weight as anybody else’s. Of course, equal weighting in the decision-making process offers no guarantee that the decision

itself will be one that treats all with equal concern and respect. Yet the very fact that majorities usually have to be constructed by winning the support of millions of citizens, with most citizens finding themselves in a minority on some issues and a majority on others, creates an egalitarian bias within democracy. Because everyone is involved in making all decisions, there is an incentive on the part of citizens to give equal consideration to the views of others for fear that they will not receive it themselves. Many readers may feel this is a somewhat idealized view of the democratic process. In the next section, therefore, I want to show how many features of existing democratic systems actually promote this result.

Citizenship and democracy today

The political systems of those countries we call democracies could not be more different from the model of direct, participatory democracy, though they increasingly involve many elements of supposed democratic guardianship. Their main democratic features lie in offering regular elections in which all adults can select between the representatives of competing parties by some form of majority vote. All these elements have been criticized by proponents of the two democratic ideals explored in the last section for either failing to engage citizens fully in the democratic process, or encouraging populism and pandering to the lowest common denominator. But each of them makes an important contribution towards securing political equality between citizens in ways that are appropriate to contemporary conditions. In particular, they promote the three qualities we saw these two alternatives lacked: first, equity in the formulation of collective decisions; second, the accountability of rulers to the ruled and incentives for them to pursue the public’s interest rather their own; and third, impartiality in the resolving of disagreements.

Strictly speaking, a system of majority rule involves making decisions according to one person, one vote and going with those

options that receive more than 50% of the votes cast. From the perspective of political equality, this arrangement has the benefit of treating all people's views in an anonymous and neutral manner – it does not matter who you are or what you believe or why, your judgement counts exactly the same as everyone else's. It also reflects shifts in opinion, so that if the people's views move from 60% against a motion to 49% against and 51% in favour, then the decision passes. In consequence, it accords all views equal respect. Nevertheless, there are a number of possible problems.

For a start, not all democracies employ a genuine system of majority rule. Notoriously, Britain and the United States use an electoral system whereby a party need only attract more votes than any other in a majority of the legislative constituencies to win an election. Technically speaking, these are plurality systems and consistent with the winning party not only attracting fewer than 50% of votes cast – a frequent occurrence in both countries – but also fewer votes than the runner-up, although so far this has happened only three times in Britain – in 1951, when Labour polled more votes but the Conservatives gained more parliamentary seats, and in 1929 and the first election of 1974, when, by a narrower margin, the reverse occurred.

The various forms of proportional representation (PR) seek to overcome this problem but run into difficulties of their own when electors are offered more than two options. PR systems look at how voters rank their preferences among all the available options and select the one that most people rank highest. These systems certainly offer a more equitable mechanism for weighing votes than the plurality, first past the post, mechanism adopted in the USA and UK. However, the different forms of proportional representation aggregate people's preferences in different ways and so identify different options as the most highly preferred. Worse, it may well be that if we compared people's ranking of each option against that of every other option, we would find that none of them was uniquely preferred over all others.

Take the following simple example of 100 voters choosing which of three sources of generating electricity to support:

40 Voters	30 Voters	30 Voters
Nuclear Power	Coal	Wind Energy
Wind Energy	Nuclear Energy	Coal
Coal	Wind Energy	Nuclear Power

As we can see, 70 voters prefer nuclear power to wind energy, while 70 voters prefer wind energy to coal, but 60 voters prefer coal to nuclear energy. So no single option is uniquely preferred over all others. This phenomenon is known as a voting cycle and was first identified by the Marquis of Condorcet in the 18th century, and then rediscovered by Charles Dodgson – the mathematician better known as Lewis Carol, the author of *Alice in Wonderland*. In the event of such cycles, selecting any option as more preferred than any other seems arbitrary. It will be a function of the voting system and the ways politicians manipulate it.

Fortunately, though logically possible, these sorts of dilemmas turn out to be rare in practice. One reason for this rarity stems from the role of parties. Parties bring together people's different preferences on a whole range of issues into a single programme, uniting them within an overall ideological framework along a spectrum that in most democracies goes from left to right. That simplifies the actual choice voters have to make to something more like a decision between two alternatives. Even within a multi-party system, they are generally choosing along a continuum of left to right. In competing for people's votes during elections, parties have an incentive to build, or in a multi-party

system to be part of, a winning coalition. So they try and develop or form part of a package of policies that will reflect people's most preferred ranking on different issues. They achieve this result by converging on the median voter – that is, the voter whose preference rankings are at the mid-point between the two extremes. That convergence is sometimes mistakenly criticized for failing to give voters a choice. However, the opposite turns out to be the case – it is actually the result of parties seeking to maximize the degree to which they reflect voter choice. In effect, electoral campaigns mirror the results of deliberation in small settings. In formulating and discussing the most electorally attractive policy packages, parties are essentially coordinating the mutual accommodation of millions of citizens' views and preoccupations so that they align with their most favoured preference orderings. As a result, voters' views are not only equally respected, but are likely to be shown equal concern too.

Citizenship

Meanwhile, party discipline keeps representatives to their electoral pledges. An aspect of the participatory critique of representative government voiced by Rousseau and others is that once elected representatives are free to do as they please. Indeed, prior to the full development of parties, the electoral process was often characterized as the means whereby the electorate selected the most able rulers from among their social or intellectual betters rather than a mechanism for influencing policy. In essence, it amounted to an electoral form of guardianship. This view was most famously expressed by the 18th-century English statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke when he informed the electors of Bristol that 'your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion'. However, contemporary parties remain remarkably faithful to their electoral commitments. Though the tendency of parties to force their representatives to vote on block is often criticized on Burkean grounds by media commentators, it is in fact essential for their accountability to the judgements of the electorate. Of course, unanticipated issues and

circumstances arise that call for changes in the legislative programme, but these tend to be made within the framework set by the last election or, more frequently perhaps, in anticipation of the next.

Somewhat oddly from a democratic perspective, this attentiveness of politicians to the views of the electorate is occasionally criticized as revealing how they will do anything for power. Yet that criticism is as nonsensical as attacking commercial firms for pandering to the wishes of customers simply to make a profit. Just as markets exploit the entrepreneur's desire for a profit to the customers' advantage by using competition to prompt them to innovate and lower costs so as to maintain or increase their market share, so democratic systems employ electoral competition for the benefit of voters by harnessing the desire of politicians for power and their fear of losing it to make them responsive to policy failures and the evolving views of the ruled.

Moreover, politicians no more do 'anything' for power than most entrepreneurs pursue profit at all costs. In particular, politicians and their parties remain remarkably faithful to their 'brand' or ideology. Even when stealing the opposition's policies – itself a benefit to voters in that it reflects the need to build coalitions across the party divide – they attempt to do so in ways that are consistent with an evolving ideological identity. Political cynicism proves much rarer than journalists tend to make out.

These effects are all good news for citizens. At the small cost of a reasonably low input from them, they can get governments to address their interests and views in ways that treat them – via the voting system – with a high degree of equal concern and respect. They can remove unresponsive or incompetent politicians and arrive at collective decisions in an impartial manner. Yet, it is undeniable that disaffection for the workings of democracy has never been higher. Why has this dissatisfaction arisen, and what does it tell us about the nature of citizenship today?

Participation and democracy



14. Barack Obama campaigning to be the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, 2008

The end of citizenship?

As we have seen, citizenship involves a degree of solidarity and reciprocity between citizens. They need to see each other as equal partners within a collective enterprise in which they share the costs as well as the benefits. That holds as much for participating

in elections as paying taxes. For various reasons, such sentiments seem to be on the decline. Two broad and, in certain respects, related manifestations of this phenomenon stand out: the growth of a more consumer-orientated attitude towards the state and government, and the fragmentation and attenuation of political community.

Voting within modern democratic systems is sometimes portrayed and criticized for being self-interested. Indeed, this view often lies behind fears of tyrannous majorities. As I noted in Chapter 1, though, the self-interested voter would be more inclined to stay at home. The probability that any one person's vote would make a difference is so small, that the costs of time and inconvenience will almost certainly outweigh any expected benefit. To vote, individuals must feel it is important to express their views within the public arena, and that their voice connects in various ways with the voices of millions of others, so that it is not just an isolated vote that they are casting. For rather different reasons, certain groups of people have started abandoning this civic duty.

One group, characterized by the economist J. K. Galbraith as the affluent 'contented majority', have become more ambivalent about electoral politics as they have grown increasingly unwilling to contribute to collective goods from which they may only benefit indirectly. They seek a more direct correlation, akin to that enjoyed by customers in the market, between what they pay and what they get as individuals. In consequence, they are inclined to accept a gradual privatization of many hitherto public services, such as health, education, and even the police. Privatization undermines civic attitudes not so much through private suppliers providing public goods and services, which in certain cases may produce gains in terms of efficiency compared to a state-run provider, as when such goods become perceived as private consumables rather than a collective responsibility, that ought by right to be supplied to all citizens on an equitable basis. If a family has private health insurance and does not use the public education

system, they will be less inclined to support their provision at public expense for others. This group's political activity takes a correspondingly more privatized form. They gravitate towards narrower campaigns and pressure groups, often focused on a single issue, deserting the more encompassing representation offered by parties. They seek consumer rights and privileges with regard to particular public services, but are unprepared to pay for the improvements through higher taxes.

This shift in the social attitudes and political activity of the more affluent citizens is connected to one aspect of the fragmentation of modern communities produced by the growing gap between rich and poor over the past 30 years. These two groups have gradually come to inhabit different worlds, with the former tempted to see the latter as a problem to be contained rather than as fellow citizens within a shared system of social cooperation. Meanwhile, the social exclusion of the poor includes difficulties in organizing politically and comparatively lower levels of participation. Parties find themselves caught in a dilemma as a result. If they seek to ape the changes in the electorate and become more like single issue campaigning groups, they attract criticism for cynically departing from their role as inclusive and principled movements aiming at the collective good. Yet, if they adopt that traditional strategy, they risk losing affluent voters without attracting the votes of the poor.

Cultural fragmentation poses a parallel problem. Attention in the media tends to focus on multiculturalism resulting from immigration. However, we saw in Chapter 3 how by and large immigrants seek inclusion within the wider political community through policies of non-discrimination. The aim of the vast majority of immigrants has been to broaden the political culture of the host state by removing its discriminatory elements, not to create political enclaves to preserve a culture that most second- and third-generation immigrants come to merge with, or even discard for, that of the host state. By contrast, already existing, territorially concentrated minority nations and ethnic groups have

become ever more vocal in their demands for greater political autonomy, especially when accompanied by religious and linguistic differences from the dominant national group. These demands have led to the asymmetric devolution of power to those territories controlled by given minorities, such as Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland in Britain, or Quebec in Canada, and in Catalonia and the Basque region in Spain.

What the growing divide between rich and poor, and the cultural split between minority nations or ethnicities and the majority national political culture, share in common is that both represent developing segmental or vertical divisions within contemporary societies. Democracy works best when the main disagreements among the population are cross-cutting or horizontal divisions. In these cases, politically important divisions cross over each other. So there will be socialists among the rich and conservatives among the poor, there will be poor and rich Catholics who oppose abortion, and poor and rich people who are pro-choice, there will be men and women who favour and oppose affirmative action, and in both cases some will be black and others white, with rich and poor and those pro- and anti-abortion on each side, and so on.

As a result, consistent minorities are likely to be rare – that is, people who are in a minority on every issue they care about. The anti-abortionist may be in a minority on that issue, but could be in the majority on affirmative action, say. Of course, the issue they care the most about may be the one they are in a minority on, but the 'intensity' of that situation is likely to be mitigated by their getting their way on many other (for them) lesser issues. Such balancing occurs as much within as between parties – especially in predominantly two-party systems. The resulting need for everyone to compromise is often misguidedly denigrated as unprincipled. However, it is precisely this need that produces toleration and mutual recognition between citizens, enabling all to be seen as equals and to some degree be included within any winning majority. Even when one's most favoured party is in opposition, at

least some of one's preferences are likely to be adopted by the governing party, and possibly promoted better by them than one's own preferred party.

When vertical divisions predominate, such inclusiveness is harder to achieve. Although many cross-cutting issues may exist, the prime identity will be ethnicity, religion, or nationality and all other issues will be subordinated to it. In Belgium, for example, there are Flemish- and French-speaking conservative and socialist parties, but their collaboration is mitigated by the predominance of the cultural and linguistic divide.

In such cases, voting rarely influences the policy choices of governments because its main purpose is to obtain influence for one's cultural group. Here the danger of minority oppression is greater because of the separation between the two groups. Power-sharing may overcome this danger to a degree but can be at the expense of democratic responsiveness. In Belgium, for example, elections now barely reflect the issue of how the people are governed, just the extent to which one's group is involved in the governing coalition, be that government effective or not. If divisions become too entrenched, then the only solution may be complete separation. Yet the vast majority of states will contain some significant cultural minorities, so there will always be limits as to how far this strategy can be taken. The parallel with the divide between rich and poor is that the former likewise secede from the broader political community into their own gated communities. They withdraw from contributing to the public sector and seek to rely on private service providers alone.

Globalization has further dissipated political community. States become weaker and less able to deliver collective goods, increasing consumerist and privatized political action. National political cultures are similarly weakened by global market pressures to greater mobility and the enhanced ability to defect from collaborative arrangements. We noted in Chapter 4 how this



15. The Flemish nationalist group Voorpost carrying a symbolic coffin of Belgium

development has been welcomed by cosmopolitans, who see the potential for a post-national culture that overcomes cultural, socio-economic, and political divisions through a commitment to human rights. As the European Union, without doubt the most developed transnational political community in the world, reveals, though, such hopes seem far from realized. The EU's political organization remains firmly based in the national and subnational allegiances of citizens, with European parties mere parliamentary factions with no electoral presence. Meanwhile, the EU's *raison d'être* has been to enhance the free movement of capital, goods, labour, and services in order to promote a European-wide market. While beneficial economically, this policy has fostered the forces weakening national political communities without creating a European political culture. Participation in EU elections is even lower and falling faster than in domestic politics, though privileged groups have exploited to great effect the more privatized routes of pressure group politics and legal action.

What is to be done? Two of the most canvassed solutions are more participatory forms of democracy, either through referenda or among selected affected interests or focus groups, such as citizens' juries, and various forms of expert guardianship. These have been increasingly deployed as supplements, and even alternatives, to electoral democracy within well-established democratic systems, such as the UK and the USA, as well as being extensively used in the EU, where (as we noted) it has proved impossible to create a genuine *demos* or party democracy. Tasks hitherto undertaken by the elected administration in these countries have increasingly been devolved onto unelected and semi-independent regulators – be it the setting of interest rates by the governor of a central bank, the determination of the minimum wage by special commissions, or the arbitration of disputes about the location of nuclear reactors by judicial tribunals.

To the extent that citizens have any say at all in such matters, it is through consultation exercises via deliberative juries among a

representative sample of the public, the involvement of campaigning groups; or local and, very occasionally, national referenda. However, we saw that these devices are more part of the problem than its solution, for each works against the idea of a condition of civic equality which is the defining feature of citizenship. Deference to expertise suggests that the issue is one that citizens are either incompetent or untrustworthy to express an opinion on, or that is somehow beyond politics – a matter of how things are. Either way, such moves suggest that it is somehow unnecessary and even illegitimate for citizens to seek to engage with each other as equals in deliberating about matters of collective concern. As such, it reinforces the disenchantment with and withdrawal from politics as a civic duty to reach agreement on the public good. That is not helped by consultation exercises with selected citizens and groups. For, as we saw, these likewise do not encourage citizens to accommodate and respond to the needs and views of others when framing collective policies. On the contrary, they allow citizens to employ politics to pursue purely private concerns or voice personal beliefs without any requirement to take account of the opinions of their fellow citizens.

Attempts to rebuild a commitment to political participation through citizenship education represent a more promising response, although as we saw in Chapter 3, they are not without problems of their own. By and large, patterns of civic engagement or disengagement are created at an early age. Studies have shown that voting or not voting in the very first election for which one is eligible is a good guide to one's likely participation or lack of it in later life. So, the more young people can be informed about and interested in democratic politics prior to their first opportunity to vote, the better. Civic engagement is also likely to be improved by attempts to devolve power to more local communities. Shared values and common purposes are likely to be stronger in such settings, and with them the willingness to engage in collective programmes.

However, the biggest nettle to grasp is probably that of widening social and economic inequality. As we have seen, more than anything else it is the capacity for the wealthy to remove themselves from collective arrangements that erodes the commitment to a search for public solutions on the basis of political equality. Globalization is often blamed for this development, with the dominance of market forces said to be inevitable when companies can operate outside state control by organizing production and exchange transnationally. Yet, such arguments appear to be exaggerated. As the example of the Scandinavian countries shows, it remains entirely possible for states to adapt to this new global economic environment and compete successfully, while retaining a commitment to their traditionally high levels of welfare and social spending. Moreover, through cooperation in regional bodies such as the EU, they have been able collectively to regulate global economic processes.

Commentators tend to divide as to whether they blame the current decline in active political citizenship on citizens themselves, social forces, such as globalization, or politicians and political structures. No doubt all share some responsibility. However, as we have seen, none can be regarded as being beyond remedy or as having rendered the ideal of citizenship either implausible or incoherent. Nation states retain their capacity, both alone and increasingly through cooperation, to tackle the economic, social, and cultural problems of today's globalized and complex societies. They also remain a highly suitable context for what remains the most appealing and viable form of democratic politics: namely, a system of representative democracy based on competing political parties.

Above all, the appeal of a society of civic equals who share in fashioning their collective life remains a powerful one. Citizenship informs and gives effect to central features of our social morality. It underlies our whole sense of self-worth, affecting in the process the ways we treat others and are treated by them. It stands behind

the commitment to rights and the appreciation of cultural diversity that are among the central moral achievements of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It has become fashionable to try and detach these effects of citizenship from any involvement in politics or democracy. What I hope to have shown in this book is that that is not possible. Citizenship and democratic politics stand and fall together. To seek to divorce the two undermines not just the possibility of political citizenship, but the values associated with the very idea of citizenship itself. The reinvigoration of citizenship, therefore, depends on revitalizing rather than diminishing political participation and with it the sense of belonging and the commitment to rights that are its prime benefits.