Solidarity and Citizenship

These two words are words to be treated with a certain caution. They are rhetorical words that are used in many different ways and for a variety of purposes. Consider the different uses of “solidarity” by Christians, trade unionists, humanists, Fascists. Each conjures up a different set of connotations and suggests a different set of social relations and a different image of social cooperation; and each tends to have a different scope of application. With whom are we supposed to be solidary? With co-religionists, with the poor and suffering, with fellow workers, with fellow members of our nation or State? As for “citizenship”, it is remarkable how popular this term has become, both in the rhetoric of our politicians and journalists, but also among academic commentators. Everyone is interested in citizenship and in favor of taking it seriously, even if they do not all agree about what taking it seriously would involve.

I want to ask two questions. Is citizenship the solution to the present alleged lack or decline of solidarity? And if so, what are the implications for public and social policy in our societies?

These are not new questions. Preoccupation with a lack or decline of solidarity is ancient, perennial and, it seems, eternal. What people so preoccupied are actually preoccupied with is of course not always the same – as the different meanings of “solidarity” indicated above demonstrate. It can, in the first place, have an exclusive or an inclusive connotation: it can hold only among “us”, where “we” are identified by boundaries that exclude others, or it can hold across such boundaries. Moreover, secondly, I suppose the opposite of “solidarity” would be (if the word existed) “fluidarity” – a lack of stable social relationships or bonds or connections, an absence of community or fellow-feeling. In fact, the contrast between solidarity and its absence can be understood in various different ways which do not coincide. Thus it could refer to any or all of at least the following contrasts: cooperation (between individuals or neighbors or families or groups or classes) for shared ends versus conflict between them; open communication between them versus mutual indifference; the integration of individuals within institutions or organizations or neighborhoods as opposed to their isolation or atomization; altruism versus selfishness; mutual trust versus mutual distrust; the prevalence of a sense of public responsibility versus a culture of acquisitiveness; a respect for prevailing rules and norms versus anomie and social breakdown; face-to-
face relationships as opposed to the anonymity of strangers. In what follows, I shall focus on inclusive solidarity in some or all of these various respects. Across this range, social critics typically propose the diagnosis of a supposed lack or decline of solidarity and no less typically propose taking citizenship seriously as a cure.

A major statement of this suggestion was made in 1950 by the British sociologist T. H. Marshall in his lectures on *Citizenship and Social Class*. Marshall was struck by the social ills resulting from the inequalities of capitalism and by the injustice and the dangers to social solidarity of excluding the working class from the whole range of benefits that capitalism brought to its beneficiaries. He recognized that inequalities were endemic to capitalist organization and that the operations of the market would inevitably generate these. But he perceived a contradictory principle at work in modern capitalism that, he argued, rendered such inequalities more tolerable and ultimately harmless – namely, the pressure towards the equal status of citizenship, extended to all members of society. He saw three stages of the development of citizenship in the history of Britain in particular. In the eighteenth century civil rights were granted. These were “the rights necessary for individual freedom – liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice”. The institutions most closely associated with civil rights are the courts of justice. The nineteenth century saw the major granting of political rights: “the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body”. The institutions involved with political rights are parliaments and local government bodies. And in the twentieth century, according to Marshall, we were seeing what was, in some sense, the completion of this story with the implementation of social rights, by which he meant “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to a full share in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society”. The institutions most closely connected with social rights are the educational system and the social services.

Marshall, in short, thought of the social rights that came with the Welfare State (he was writing at the heyday of the post 1945 Labour Government) as the culmination of an evolutionary process, bringing the promise of citizenship to fruition, rendering the inequalities of capitalism tolerable by supplying all individual citizens with liberties, powers, sources of security and status in sufficient measure. Now, in the mid 1990s we cannot be so optimistic. For one thing, Marshall never thought much about how, practically and institutionally, this promise might be brought to fruition. Political rights, for instance, have been universalized, in the form of the suffrage, but, it can be argued, the