

## **Employment and Consumer Citizenship: the cultural contradictions of late capitalism**

**Professor Bryan Turner**

Alona Evans Distinguished Visiting Professor of Sociology,  
Wellesley College, US

and

Director, Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim  
Societies, University of Western Sydney, Australia

If we take T.H.Marshall as providing the model of conventional welfare citizenship, then we can argue that effective, active citizenship was based on three fundamental forms of social contribution through work, public service (such as military service) and family formation (within the household). Marshallian citizenship presupposed a Fordist economy, a clear gender division of labour and high employment on the basis of Keynesian reconstruction. I have argued in *Rights and Virtues* (2008) that these three pillars of Marshallian citizenship have been eroded by a cluster of related but complex socio-economic processes such as the casualization of employment, the termination of conscription, serial monogamy and low fertility. The correlativity between rights and duties begins to break down.

More recently the relationship between the state and the citizen is changing as citizens are regarded as a passive audience to be manipulated or seduced by the media. With the decline of heavy industry in western economies, the dominance of patriarchy and production begins to decline giving rise to the notion of a crisis of masculinity. The shift from industrial production to service industries and consumerism has been perfectly illustrated by the credit crunch of 2008-9 in which citizens in Europe, North America and Australia were encouraged to spend rather than save to keep domestic economies afloat. The slogan in the United Kingdom was 'Shop for Britain' and in Australia Prime Minister Rudd encouraged citizens to get out and do their Christmas shopping. This suggests a new civil identity – the passive citizen consumer.

If the concepts of duty and commitment as features of citizenship are to be preserved, employment remains the key to active citizenship. Judith Shklar in *American Citizenship* identified earning as the fundamental component of autonomy and self respect. In a fragile

global economy and with ageing populations, we need new strategies to create work for young people if we are to avoid youth alienation and the erosion of citizenship. Educational strategies will therefore have to be connected carefully to the needs of citizenship, the needs of youth employment and the provision of pensions for the retired elderly. The paper concludes by attempting to sketch out the problems facing different types of society by employing John Rawls's contrast between 'well-ordered hierarchical societies' (WHSs) and 'liberal democratic societies'(LDSs). Can WHSs deliver citizenship? Can LDSs deliver employment?