Reforming the French Welfare State: Solidarity, Social Exclusion and the Three Crises of Citizenship

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The article explores recent debates about citizenship and social provision in France. It examines the essential concepts comparable to 'social citizenship', as understood in British debates, and the role that they have played in the development of the French welfare state. Its conclusions are threefold. First, social provision in France is founded on the principle of solidarité, which holds that all citizens face a series of social risks (unemployment and illness) that make them dependent on one another. Second, as the traditional insurance principle (the core of the French welfare state) is founded on socio-economic conditions (concerning the nature of social interdependence and social risk) that no longer exist, the emergence of these social ills has led to not one but three crises of citizenship: a crisis of coverage, of legitimacy and of participation. Third, while it is too early to draw definitive conclusions, recent policy reforms suggest that the difficulties faced by French welfare are encouraging moves towards the British model of tax-based (rather than insurance-based) financing of social provision.

The last two decades have witnessed a renewed interest in citizenship and the welfare state among students of social policy and social thought. In the British literature, much of this work has been motivated by a desire to defend the welfare state against the attack, justified by 'new-right' theory and carried out by Thatcher’s governments, against it. In response to this assault, British social theorists have cast around for a foundation on which to construct a reinvigorated defence of welfare provision. They have turned to the concept of citizenship, and scholars have articulated a series of citizenship-based justifications of welfare. Though little noticed by British observers, a similar re-examination of citizenship and social provision has occurred on the other side of the English Channel, despite the greater legitimacy enjoyed by social provision in French political debate.4
In the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher's efforts to retrench the welfare state reflected the broader aim of reducing government spending and the role of the state in the British economy, but they were also rooted in ideological opposition to the principle of state welfare itself. New-right theorists argued that excessive welfare spending creates burdensome deficits and 'crowds out' investment, that it destroys market incentives by encouraging reliance on the state and that it encourages the breakdown of the family unit by providing support for those who leave a marriage.5

In France, by contrast, an attack from the intellectual right has not driven recent debates on social provision and the need for welfare reform. France does not have a 'new right' comparable to that which has flourished in the United States and the United Kingdom.6 There is naturally a 'political right,' but neo-liberal ideology enjoys only a precarious legitimacy in France. Even the Front National (FN), whose support reflects in part a profound disillusionment with traditional political programmes,7 does not directly attack the social protection system, but rather demands that it be reserved exclusively for French 'nationals' (an aim captured in the slogan 'la preference nationale'). Despite a certain degree of success in the early 1980s, 'Thatcherite' neo-liberalism, radical individualism and an idealisation of the market are poorly received in mainstream French political debate, particularly as they concern the system of social protection.

Indeed, the most striking feature of French political debate and discourse surrounding social policy, which reveals itself through even a cursory reading, is the legitimacy enjoyed by the concept of welfare itself. In the run-up to the 1995 presidential election, all candidates, from the Communist Party to the far right, affirmed their commitment to social solidarity and social protection.8 The centre-right candidate, Jacques Chirac (RPR), rallied support through his promise to confront 'la facture sociale'.9 The centrist Paris newspaper, Le Monde, recently made the sweeping claim that 'the case in favour (nécessité) of social security (which includes in France health care, old age pensions and unemployment benefit) for all is made so obvious (s'imposer) and with so much evidence that no politician would dare question it'.10 It is difficult to imagine a British or American broadsheet, irrespective of its political sympathies, making a comparable claim with any degree of confidence. In France, even those politicians, such as Alain Madelin (UDF), who embrace economic liberalism with a passion take care not to question the principle of welfare.11

In the absence of an ideological attack, the malaise surrounding social provision in France requires another explanation. To be sure, many of the problems facing French social provision have their origin in lower economic growth and lower tax revenues. In this, there is nothing special about the French experience. However, much of the current crise, as it is
often referred to in the French literature, has its roots in particular characteristics of French politics and political history. Both the traditional theoretical justification of welfare and the institutional basis of post-war social provision made it prone to severe difficulties associated with coverage, legitimacy and citizen participation. Although inherent in the French system, these tendencies were papered over by sustained economic growth in the first half of the post-war period. When high economic growth ended, these crisis tendencies revealed themselves.

This article explores these developments through an examination of the concept of *solidarité*, which is central to French social provision. *Solidarité* holds that all citizens face a series of social risks (unemployment and illness) that make them dependent on one another. Through a brief examination of the concept's intellectual origins, we fill out its content and examine the role it has played in the development of French social provision since the Second World War. We argue that the current structure of French social provision – the insurance principle based on individual, earnings-related contributions and worker benefits – reflects the basic assumptions of *solidarité*. Above all *solidarité*, and French social provision, assumed that social risks – illness and unemployment – are randomly distributed.

We then turn to developments since the early 1970s and argue that high structural unemployment has set off the crisis tendencies intrinsic to French social provision. High structural unemployment has resulted in large numbers of individuals without social insurance (a crisis of coverage). Such unemployment has made it manifestly obvious that risks are not randomly distributed, and has thus undermined its basic theoretical foundations (a crisis of legitimacy). French intellectuals have developed the concept of *l'exclusion* (and several variants) to capture the condition of those more or less permanently outside the labour market. Given the importance of participation to French republican thought and to republican citizenship, the existence of large numbers of *les exclus* is not only an economic problem but also a problem of citizenship (a crisis of participation). French social provision thus suffers from three crises: a crisis of coverage, of legitimacy and of participation. These crises are not merely the contingent result of slower growth; they are the direct result of the particular French system of social provision.

The article concludes by considering the reforms encouraged by these crises. Although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions, recent policy reforms suggest that the difficulties faced by French welfare are encouraging moves towards the British model of tax-based (rather than insurance-based) financing of social provision.

The article is divided into three sections. The first traces the development of social, political and civil citizenship in France, emphasising
the particular importance of participation in the French citizenship tradition. It discusses the notion of *solidarité*, and examines how successive reforms to French social provision were enacted on its basis.

The second section argues that the particular institutional character of French social provision (contribution-based insurance schemes) and the theoretical justification of it (*solidarité*) have led, in the context of high-structural unemployment, to the three crises of citizenship. It discusses the conception of *l’exclusion*, which is used to characterise the condition of those who have fallen outside the social insurance system.

The final section examines the response of French policymakers to these crises, and it concludes that a partial shift from a more or less pure contributions-based system to a universalist system of the British sort is under way.

**CIVIL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP IN MODERN FRANCE**

It is helpful to speak, as T. H. Marshall famously did, of an evolution culminating in a tripartite definition of citizenship.\(^{12}\) Citizenship in the French (and much of the Western) tradition can be traced to the French Revolution,\(^ {13}\) when popular sovereignty was proclaimed. In its original form, French post-revolutionary citizenship incorporated a distinction, first articulated by Abbé Sièyes, between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ citizenship:\(^ {14}\) active citizens exercised full political rights, notably the right to participate in parliamentary debates,\(^ {15}\) while passive citizens held only civil rights. Active citizens were envisaged by Sièyes as the wealthy and educated, those with the time and ability to cultivate an informed interest in politics; passive citizens were the mass of poor and uneducated French working men.\(^ {16}\) In the years after the Revolution, civil citizenship more or less existed for the masses (at least insofar as they could sell their labour to the property-owning elite), and political citizenship for the few. Political citizenship was not generally enjoyed until 1848, when the distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ citizens was abolished through the introduction of universal male suffrage.

Social citizenship, as we would now call it, did not emerge until 1875 (the Third Republic), in response to the demands of the workers’ movement.\(^ {17}\) The debate, beginning in 1848, surrounding the ‘right to work’ is viewed as the origin of the ‘*question sociale*’, an expression originating in the second half of the nineteenth century to describe the social ills created by the Industrial Revolution. It was not until the political consolidation of the Republic, a century after the Revolution, that social rights occupied a central position in French political discourse.
SOLIDARITÉ AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social provision was explicitly founded on the principle of solidarité. Solidarité, insofar as it concerns the welfare state, has two main intellectual influences in France. The first is Emile Durkheim, who distinguished between mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity is essentially tribal, resulting from the homogeneity of an isolated community, 18 whereas organic solidarity is the consequence of social pluralism. Society is divided by technology and labour, and individuals are demarcated into a series of groups performing different tasks; it is from this division of labour that organic solidarity arises. As professional lives intermash, we become increasingly dependent on one another: the car manufacturer relies on the production of motor parts, both rely on the commercial industry, all three rely on the maintenance of the city’s infrastructure, and so forth.

Léon Bourgeois, 19 who emphasised the dependence of everyone on all others, exercised the second influence. 20 He argued that this interdependence necessitated a system of social protection, founded on the principle of insurance, which would neutralise the risks associated with industrial life: accidents, illness and poverty of the aged. 21

Central to solidarité in both these traditions is this notion of social interdependence, a collective recognition that each individual is dependent upon others. 22 This interdependence is furthered by the social fact of risk. The fact that we all encounter a series of risks, notably illness and unemployment, makes us all subject to the periodic interruption of earnings, and it renders social solidarity imperative. 23

SOLIDARITÉ AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRENCH WELFARE STATE

There are at least two variants of solidarité: solidarité nationale (national solidarity) and solidarité professionnelle (occupational solidarity). 24 National solidarity involves something akin to the Beveridgean ideal – solidarity across all social and professional groupings – and recommends a tax-financed, non-means-tested system of social protection offering flat-rate benefits. Occupational solidarity, by contrast, involves solidarity within a given professional grouping, and it recommends a system of social protection funded through insurance contributions and offering earnings-related benefits. National solidarity promotes distribution across classes and aims at the prevention of poverty; occupational solidarity distributes income within a professional group and aims at the maintenance of income. 25

The French welfare state is largely based on the principle of occupational solidarity, which is to be secured in those programmes
founded on insurance: social security (pensions and unemployment insurance) and health insurance. The ordonnance du 4 octobre 1945 created the régime général, a compulsory scheme accounting for some 60 per cent of all benefits provided by such schemes. The régime was directed by a co-ordinated scheme of funds; it was managed by elected advisers of the administration (salaried employees) and held a monopoly. Some occupational groups refused to join the régime général, seeking to preserve older insurance arrangements, and, as a result, there is today a second substantial category of insured salaried workers outside the régime général. The loi du 3 octobre 1946 introduced accident compensation insurance and health insurance for the liberal professions in a manner that respected France’s tradition of decentralised insurance and the demands of existing schemes.

There are now some 122 separate schemes (régimes speciaux) that provide insurance for occupational groups who had been covered under pre-1945 schemes; they currently cover 20 per cent of the working population and include schemes for civil servants and employees of nationalised industries (electricity, the Paris Metro – RATP). In addition, there are 19 independent schemes for self-employed, non-salaried workers outside the agricultural sector (shopkeepers, artisans, those working independently in the liberal professions), and an agricultural scheme for those working in that sector.

These programmes were established with the specific aim of countering socio-economic risk, and the choice of the insurance principle as the dominant policy instrument reflected a pursuit of occupational solidarity as the chief policy aim. The insurance principle, the institutional core of the post-war French welfare state, has three components: (1) the system is designed to insure workers; (2) benefits are earnings-related; and (3) they are paid to workers and their families on the basis of their contributions. The insurance principle was further promoted through the introduction of unemployment insurance in 1958 (some schemes had existed before). The main exception to the Bismarckian thrust of the French welfare state is the family allowance scheme, which pays universal benefits to all French citizens and residents for the second child and all subsequent children. Social protection was thus to be achieved through a system of mutual aid (entraide), in which all contributed, and in which those periodically without employment were supported by the contributions of those within it.

After 1945, direct assistance by the state was viewed as a marginal element in social protection, and social insurance was to expand to include the whole population. In certain areas of social protection, notably health, the aim was largely realised: by 1985, all but .04 per cent of the French population (citizens plus residents) was covered by the various regimes
outlined above. It was, however, in confronting unemployment that the system revealed its Achilles’ heel.

FRENCH WELFARE AND THE THREE CRISIS OF CITIZENSHIP

French policy-makers were not particularly worried about unemployment in the immediate post-war years, a lack of concern reflected in the fact that they did not introduce a comprehensive unemployment scheme until 1958. During the 1945–74 post-war boom (les Trente Glorieuses), the French economy grew at an impressive 5.2 per cent annually, full employment was maintained, and France appeared well served by its system of social insurance. From 1973, however, and particularly in the 1980s, French unemployment increased more or less steadily, and France today faces an unemployment rate of 11.5 per cent, higher than post-unification Germany and among the highest in the OECD. While mass unemployment is not exclusive to France – Belgium, Italy and Spain face a similar problem – it uncovered the crisis tendencies intrinsic to the system.

The permanent slowing of economic growth since 1973 (averaging roughly half that of the previous 30 years) ‘triggered’ a series of crises, inherent to the French system of welfare, that had been hidden by three decades of sustained economic growth. High unemployment led to a growing percentage of the long-term unemployed, particularly young people who never enter the labour market at all, without adequate insurance coverage. In 1996, at least 1,650,000 individuals in France were without insurance. As these individuals naturally do not contribute to insurance programmes, they have no access to social insurance. Insurance cannot, as the founding fathers believed, extend to the whole population of the unemployed when those suffering from this social ill do not contribute enough to secure their entitlement. Although other programmes (notably a minimum income, discussed below) have been enacted for such individuals, the fact that such a large figure falls outside the social insurance system is itself evidence of the difficulties facing it.

This crisis of coverage is compounded by a severe fiscal shortfall: social security suffered from a deficit of 56.7 billion francs in 1993 (up from 17.7 billion in 1992) and 55.9 billion in 1994; the majority of the latter was made up of a 30 billion franc deficit in health. Recently, economic growth has reduced the deficit, but spending remains difficult to control. Despite solid economic growth in 1998, Martine Aubry, the Minister of Employment and Solidarity, has found her goal of a 12.9 billion franc deficit for the régime général in 1998, and a zero-deficit in 1999, extremely difficult to reach.

A proposal, at the centre of a current health care reform, to institute a
mechanism penalising doctors who exceed spending limits was rejected in December 1998 by the constitutional court (*Conseil constitutionnel*). The court deemed the mechanism a violation of the equality principle (*principe d'égalité*) because it proposes the penalisation of groups of doctors (generalists or specialists) who violate the limits, irrespective of the behaviour of individual doctors in a given group. Although the government is likely to propose an alternative mechanism, the ageing of the French population (over-60s are predicted to increase from 18.5 per cent of the population in 1987 to 30 per cent in 2030) bodes ill for its future liquidity.

The return of structural unemployment, in addition to the clear human suffering associated with it, has also led to a crisis of legitimacy. Occupational solidarity rests on the social fact of interdependence, and interdependence is premised on assumption that risks are *randomly distributed*. During the first three decades of the post-war period, citizens faced the risks of social ills, illness and unemployment, which were assumed to be largely unpredictable. This assumption is no longer defensible. The emergence since the first oil shock in the 1970s (referred to in the French literature as ‘*la crise*’) of mass, structural unemployment means that the long-term unemployed, and those who have never been employed, are increasingly an identifiable group.

Largely as a consequence of mass unemployment, France has witnessed a growing phenomenon of social exclusion: the emergence of identifiable groups of individuals, of which a disproportionate number are immigrants and the poorly educated, who find themselves marginalised from the French labour market. Those born into these disadvantaged ranks are unlikely to leave them, and the cycle of educational failure, poverty and unemployment repeats itself.

In both these instances, the French educated middle and upper classes can be confident that their chances of finding themselves permanently unemployed are markedly lower than those of the poorly educated children of immigrants or the working class. The very word *la banlieue*, which creates an image of crime and indigence, graffiti and burned-out cars cut off from central Paris and other French cities, highlights the extent to which the extreme deprivation of segments of French society is marginal to the majority’s daily existence and life chances.

These socio-economic developments have led to a new sociological phenomenon: *l’exclusion* (social exclusion). The concept of *l’exclusion*, in part because it is used frequently by the media, is difficult to define precisely. The term has its origins in the 1970s, appearing at the same time as ‘*la nouvelle pauvreté*’ (the new poverty), the focus on which broadly mirrored the ‘rediscovery’ of poverty among affluence in the United States and the United Kingdom. The term was first used explicitly by René
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Lenoir to refer to 'les oubliés de la croissance' (those forgotten by economic growth), such as the aged or physically handicapped. Yet it was in the 1980s that the term came to enjoy a central place in public debate. The transformation of l'exclusion from a specialised theoretical concern to a social preoccupation reflected above all the ever-rising rate of unemployment. Les exclus are for the most part those whose unemployment and poverty has impeded their participation in the labour market and in a range of social forms (cultural events, politics, sport, etc.) requiring more than subsistence income. The longer individuals stay in poverty and unemployment, the longer they are excluded from mainstream society, the more likely they are to join the ranks of les exclus.

It should be noted that, while the long-termed unemployed are the archetypal example of les exclus, they are not the sole example. The concept of l'exclusion is meant also to describe a multiplicity of situations in which the individual is prevented from participating, even temporarily, in society. Candidates for inclusion include women who face barriers to full rights in the labour market, alcoholics, alienated youth and drugs addicts. Such a large definition has led to the inclusion of an ever-growing number of social situations under the category of les exclus.

Such indeterminacy has led to criticism of the concept. Some French intellectuals have, in keeping with their penchant for terminological disputes, encouraged alternatives. Robert Castel, who recommends the concept of 'désaffiliation', maintains that the principal problem confronting contemporary French society is not so much l'exclusion, which concerns extreme instances of deprivation, but rather the growth of a 'précarité de masse' (a precarious situation for the majority) in the context of a system of social protection incapable of adapting itself to a profound restructuring of the labour market. In a similar vein, Pierre Rosanvallon criticised the excessive attention accorded to l'exclusion, arguing that 'la question sociale' cannot be reduced a simple 'dualisation' between those participating in and those excluded from the labour market. Finally, Serge Paugam argues that the concept of 'disqualification' highlights the sense of inferiority experienced by the marginalised.

Despite these differences, the concept captures a social reality that is difficult to deny: the growth of a new type of poverty and marginalisation, inseparable from structural unemployment. This social ill appears particularly intractable in a society that seems unable to achieve the labour market flexibility requisite to creating employment; from 1983 to 1991 employment increased by 0.5 per cent in France, compared with 1.7 per cent in the EU overall and 1.9 per cent in the United States.

While this intractability clearly reinforces the coverage crisis, it is also related to the third crisis of the French welfare state: the crisis of
participation. Recall that a distinctive element of the French conception of
citizenship, which is not captured by a Marshallian perspective, is the
centrality of participation to full republican citizenship. As full citizens are
those who participate in society’s social, economic and political forms, and
as les exclus are seen to be excluded from full participation, they are in an
important sense disenfranchised, less than full citizens.

To summarise, social protection in France is facing three related crises:
a crisis of coverage (a significant percentage of the population is without
social insurance), a crisis of legitimacy (interdependence is no longer an
indisputable sociological fact) and a crisis of participation (those whose
deprivation prevents full participation are lacking the full rights of
citizenship). These developments have their ultimate origin in socio-
economic conditions prevalent in much of Europe – slow growth and high
unemployment – but they are the direct result of peculiar features of the
French welfare system. The foundation of social provision on the concept
of solidarité (and the related assumption of randomly distributed social
risk), the insurance principle, and a particular republican linking of
participation with citizenship are the source of much of French welfare’s
current malaise.

In the final section, we consider how the French government, and French
intellectuals, have responded to these three crises.

RECASTING THE WELFARE STATE IN FRANCE

The impetus for efforts to reconsider the basis of social protection has been
the widespread recognition that the welfare state has shown itself incapable
of responding to the social ills created by slower economic growth since
1973.59 Conceived for a society of producers, the welfare state for decades
had only dealt with unemployment as a temporary phase before the return
of full employment. The phenomenon of l’exclusion, which is now more or
less a constant, existed only among the few marginalised, whose social
exclusion was accompanied by stigma and suspicion.60 Although there is
naturally disagreement over the future of French social protection, the
striking element in the debate is that both recent policy changes reflect a
subtle shift in favour of a system based to a greater degree on universal
benefits financed out of general taxes and offering flat-rate benefits; a
system, in other words, which approximates some aspects of the British
model of welfare. The French system remains rooted in the Bismarckian
tradition, but there are undeniably nods towards Beveridge.61

At the policy level, two initiatives reflect this partial shift. In 1988,
Mitterrand’s Socialist government adopted, with the support of a unanimous
vote in the National Assembly, the Revenu Minimum d’Insertion (RMI).
The programme offers a minimum income to unemployed individuals (not including students) over the age of 25 if they are willing to undertake training or to be placed in work. The aim of the policy was to contribute to an attack on *l’exclusion* through what is frequently called *l’insertion*, or the re-integration of the socially marginalised (as defined in economic terms) into society with the aim of eventually allowing them to participate fully in economic and social life.

The programme was innovative, particularly so in the French context, for several reasons. First, it was a universal programme: with the exception of students, all French citizens over the age of 25 may claim the programme, subject to the training condition, as a right of citizenship (*Le Monde*, 1 September 1997). Second, the programme was tax-financed, thus constituting a significant departure from the principle of social insurance. The numbers involved are considerable: approximately 2 million individuals (or 2.7 per cent of the French population) were covered by the programme in 1996. Finally, the programme links benefits with an obligation to work or retrain; as such, the programme implements elements of ‘workfare’, which has been put in practice in certain American states and, most recently, by the British Labour government.

Such a component of the policy is somewhat surprising, given French academic and political hostility to social protection à l’anglo-américaine. The inclusion of a work/training requirement, in one sense, makes the policy more Beveridgian than the British: in his report, William Beveridge recommended the introduction of a work or training requirement as a condition of receiving unemployment benefits. The recommendation was never implemented by the 1945–50 Labour government. The comparison, however, should not be pushed too far: conceptions of social and individual responsibility differ in the two countries, and *l’insertion* is grounded – at least ideologically – in society’s responsibility to ensure the individual’s integration into society and the labour market, rather than the individual’s responsibility to pay for welfare benefits with his or her labour.

In May 1998, the Jospin’s Socialist government placed a new law against exclusion before the National Assembly. The legislation is based on principles announced by Alain Juppé a year earlier, an indication of the bipartisan commitment to reforming social provision. The new legislation extends the universalist thrust of RMI. It grants all individuals who have been long-term unemployed a ‘right to personal support’ (*droit à un appui personnalisé*). For young persons, the law proposes a training programme lasting up to 18 months, based on internships and education aimed at granting a professional qualification. For adults unemployed for more than six months, the legislation proposes the expansion of programmes designed for those without insurance: *les contrats emploi-solidarité, les contrats*
emplois consolidés. In a further shift towards tax-financing, the state will take over 80 per cent of the latter’s financing.67

A second important policy step towards a universalist form of welfare provision has been recently taken. In 1991, the Socialist Rocard government introduced the first shift from contribution-financing to tax-financing through the Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG), a 1.1 per cent tax (raised by the conservative Balladur government to 2.4 per cent in 1993) levied on all incomes.68 Since the July 1994 budget, a gradual taxation of family allowances has been pursued.69 In 1995, the Juppé reforms, introduced by then Prime Minister Alain Juppé, sought to consolidate this shift to taxation. Most of the media attention to the reforms centred on the proposal to harmonise the benefit formulas and entitlement conditions between the separate occupational pensions (régimes spéciaux) and the régime général, as it was this proposal that led to the massive wave of strikes (peaking at just over 2 million people on 12 December 1995) and Juppé’s ultimate climb-down.70

Yet the plan also contained a further shift from contribution-based financing to taxation in health care, with the ultimate aim of introducing a universal health insurance scheme based on flat-rate contributions and benefits.71 In addition, the government hoped to make family benefits taxable and means-tested, a clear break with the insurance principle.72

While the UDF/RPR coalition lost the June 1997 elections without entirely completing its plans, it centralised control of the social security budget in hands of the government. The measure required a constitutional amendment (voted through on 19 February 1996), and it was bitterly, though unsuccessfully, resisted by the unions, which saw the amendment as a threat to their autonomy in administering the programme.73 Measures were then passed in April 1996 calling for an annual fixing of the total social security budget by parliament (thus removing this privilege from the sickness funds) and the imposition of financial penalties against private practitioners exceeding overall spending limits.74

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin’s Socialist government, elected in June 1997, supported the proposals in opposition,75 and it has taken a number of steps to implement them. Shortly after the election, Martine Aubry, the Minister for Employment and Solidarity, expressed the new government’s commitment to a universal health care system.76 In November 1997, it passed a social security reform transferring a substantial part of illness contributions to the tax-financed CSG.77 The government adopted a cap on social security and, although the current mechanism for penalising medical practitioners has been rejected, an alternative will likely be sought.

Currently, the Socialist government is passing a significant legislative reform through the National Assembly. Under the banner of ‘la loi de lutte
contre les exclusions' (the law of the fight against exclusion), Martine Aubry proposes a health reform based on two aims. First, the law will extend health care to the 0.4 per cent of the population without access to the régime général (approximately 300,000 people), thus fully universalising health care. Second, it will provide complementary coverage for the seven million who only have access to this régime. At the time of writing, the major debate centred on the scheme's financing, with the most likely result being a compromise between those in favour of a fully state-sponsored initiative and those in favour of administration entirely by the existing associations. A compromise proposal envisages the state covering two billion of the estimated six billion francs per year and securing the rest through limited monthly contributions from those benefiting.  

As the last proposal makes clear, the steps towards a univeralist basis of social provision are neither complete nor uncontested. They face opposition within and outside the National Assembly, the Communist members of the coalition are hostile to reductions in spending, and it is unclear if the Socialists will succeed in radically overhauling French welfare. In any case, the centralisation of control for social security in parliament, and the move towards greater tax financing, suggests a significant shift of support away from the once sacrosanct insurance principle and towards a universalist conception of social protection.  

CONCLUSION: CITIZENSHIP, SOLIDARITY AND EXCLUSION IN FRANCE  

During the last two decades, the pressures faced by the welfare state in an era of lower economic growth have forced a reconsideration of the relationship between citizenship and social protection. To a degree, this might be a reflection of the fact that the place of social citizenship in practical political debate is far less contested in France than it is in the United Kingdom. As much as citizenship is central to the history of French political thought, it remains omnipresent in contemporary France, and a (not obviously related) range of factors have forced a reconsideration of citizenship: the need to integrate a large population of permanently resident immigrants, a bitter debate about the merits of (assimilationist) republican citizenship occasioned by the Revolution's bicentennial commemoration, European integration and the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's openly racist Front National.  

These disparate developments exacerbate a crisis of national confidence, itself created by economic globalisation and diffuse fears for France's competitive position in the international economy, in the 'modèle français,' based on an interventionist state oriented towards the active promotion of
social cohesion. As the defence of social cohesion is viewed in liberal circles as inseparable from a vindication of French citizenship, the last development has served to reinforce the centrality of citizenship in a society whose opinion-makers in the media, politics and the universities are preoccupied, not to say obsessed, with the concept.93

In the United Kingdom, by contrast, the turn to citizenship, a concept that commanded relatively little attention before then, reflected in large measure the seeming powerlessness of those actors wishing to defend the welfare state – unions, academics, social actors, pensioners – against the Thatcher governments’ heavy-handed retrenchment measures. Although these efforts have arguably produced few direct results, there is little doubt that they were inspired by a desire to check Thatcher’s legislative assault.

While the (re)turn to citizenship in France has been contemporaneous, it is more accurate to claim that the presumed comfortable fit between citizenship and welfare has been called into question by socio-economic developments since the end of the long post-war boom. Indeed, as we argued, the principle of welfare has been relatively unscathed by high unemployment, budget deficits (in the context of more or less strict Maastricht convergence criteria) and slow economic growth.

What has survived these socio-economic changes less well is the traditional insurance principle and the concepts that underpin it. The link between citizenship and welfare is articulated through the notion of solidarité. Solidarité is expressed in the French welfare state largely through solidarité occupationelle, although certain programmes, notably family allowances, express solidarité nationale.

Socio-economic change has, we have argued, created three crises which undermine the previously clear link between citizenship and solidarity. First, high structural unemployment has led to a crisis of coverage in which the long-term unemployed and youth are effectively excluded from social insurance. Second, a crisis of legitimacy has resulted from the fact that those conditions sustaining interdependence (and solidarité itself) – a random distribution of social risks – no longer apply. Finally, a crisis of participation means that, in the context of republican values, les exclus, those who do not participate fully in society and the economy, are in an important sense denied full citizenship.

These three crises of citizenship have led to attempts to alter the institutional architecture, and the intellectual foundations, of social protection in France. The adoption of the Revenu Minimum d’Insertion and the Contribution Sociale Généralisée represent an important shift to tax-financing and flat-rate benefits; the former has been expanded by governments from both sides of the political spectrum, and there is pressure in favour of universal health care. If, in the United Kingdom, a politically
and economically driven crisis led to citizenship as the possible foundation of welfare, an economically and socially driven crisis of citizenship in France may drive the country towards a British conception of welfare.

NOTES

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1. The ‘welfare state’ is difficult to define. We use the term generally, to refer to the complex of programmes designed to ameliorate the condition of those who find themselves unable to participate in the labour market, because of sickness, unemployment or age.


4. Use of the term ‘welfare state’ in France is inappropriate, as many of its main components (namely the insurance programmes) rests outside the state. We nonetheless retain the term for simplicity. This point was emphasised by Bruno Palier at a European Consortium for Political Research workshop on citizenship and the Welfare State, Bern, 27 Feb.–4 March 1997.


7. To understand the FN, it is necessary to recall the role played by Gaullism in the French right. After the authoritarian right was discredited with the collapse of Vichy, Gaullism achieved a reconciliation of the republican ideal (support for democracy and social solidarity) with traditional nationalism. This partnership meant that the far right was marginalised until its re-emergence on the political scene in the 1980s in the form of the Front National. see R. Raymond Les droites en France (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982); J-F. Sirinelli, Histoire des droites en France (3 vols.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). For recent work on the Front National, see J-C. Cambadélis and E. Osmond, La France blafarde (Paris: Plon, 1988); and N. Mayer and P. Perrineau, Le Front National à Découvert (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po 1996).


16. Female suffrage was not contemplated at this point and, indeed, was not introduced in France until 1945.


21. It should be noted that Durkheim and Bourgeois were part of a larger movement commanding considerable support in the Third Republic. See Hayward (note 19) pp.19–48.


36. While health insurance covers essentially the entire population, it does not cover all expenditure: approximately 25 per cent of medical consumption costs are met through supplementary insurance schemes. In 1992, mutual aid societies financed 6.2 per cent of medical care costs, while private insurers paid 3 per cent. See D. Wilsford, ‘Reforming French Health Care Policy’, in J.T.S. Keeler and M.A. Schain, Chirac’s Challenge: Liberalization, Europeanization and Malaise in France (Houndmills: Macmillan 1996) p.25.


40. Statistics on those without insurance are extremely difficult to find. I arrived at the above by adding those receiving the French minimum income (le Revenu Minimum d’Insertion, discussed below), and labour market programmes designed for those without insurance: les contrats emploi-solidarité, les contrats emplois consolidés and les contrat emplois ville (Fullerle: Annuaire des statistiques et sociales (Paris: SSESE 1997) p.310; Fullerle: Les contrats emploi-solidarité (CES 1997), les contrats emplois consolidés (CEC) et les contrats emplois ville (CEV) en 1996 (Paris: Da RES 1997) p.2). These statistics do not take into account those who, in response to the bleak employment situation, drop out of the labour market altogether. They should be construed as conservative estimates.

41. Reland (note 39) p.171.

42. Wilsford in Keeler and Schain, Chirac’s Challenge (note 36) p.252.


45. Reland (note 39) p.171.


50. R. Hansen Against Social Solidarity and Citizenship: Justifying Welfare in Britain and France’, in Bussemaker, Citizenship (note 26) p.34.


58. Bonoli and Palier (note 26) p.47.


61. In discussing the British model, we are treating it as an ideal type. In practice, all European welfare systems (including the British) have elements of tax-based and elements of insurance-based systems. The trend we are identifying is a shift away from the pursuit of an insurance-based system as an ideal to one incorporating a substantial role for tax-financed, universal programmes.

62. M. Autès, ‘Pauvreté et RMI’, Intégration et exclusion dans la société française contemporaine (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille 1993). RMI was the last in a series of programmes, all but one of which were established since 1970, designed to provide a
minimum income to various groups: the *minimum vieillesse*, *minimum invalidité* and *allocation aux adultes handicapés* (AAH), for the old, invalid and handicapped; the *allocation de parent isolé* (API) et *allocation d’assurance-veuvage* (for single parents and the aged, both established in the late 1970s); the *allocation de solidarité spécifique* (ASS) (for the long-term unemployed); and the *allocation d’insertion* (principally for the young in search of their first job).


68. Reland (note 39) p.175.

69. Ibid.


73. One of the areas in which the generally weak French unions (only 10 per cent of French workers are unionised) exercise influence is in administering the social insurance programmes. The most important unions in this respect are the Force Ouvrière, which controls the *Caisses nationales d’assurance maladie* (health insurance), and the Confédération Française et Démocratique du Travail, which controls the *Caisses nationales d’assurance vieillesse* (pensions). See J. Reland (note 39) pp.175–6.

74. Wilsford (note 36) p.254.

75. Bonoli and Palier (note 26).


77. *Le Monde*, 6 Nov. 1997. These developments are not viewed with equanimity by all French observers; for some, they represent the slow but inevitable undermining of French social security. See B. Friot, *Puissance(s) du salariat: emploi et protection sociale à la française* (Paris: La Dispute 1998).


82. The Front National loudly proclaims its attachment to the Republic, but its claim that non-white immigrants are incapable of assimilation runs counter to the republican belief that republican values are universally acquirable. For a ‘citizenship critique’ of the far right, see P. Breton and B. Reunau, *L’appel de Strasbourg: le réveil des démocraties* (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue 1997).

83. In France, certain writers speak of *citoyenneté d’entreprise*, *citoyenneté culturelle*, and so forth.