

## ***'Assess the extent to which the modern state is based on active citizenship.'***

The modern state is not fully based on active citizenship. Active citizenship is a concept which expects citizens to be active in taking responsibility for dealings in society without the need for state intervention. In simpler terms, it is the idea of giving a little to community or 'helping out'. Based on this idea, in this day and age, a number of factors continue to get in the way of communities coming together and citizens taking an active role in society. Stress, working hours and even diversity all play a role in the prevention of active citizenship.

### ***Active Citizenship***

Active citizenship is a modern theory which has influenced the New Labour government. The concept is that instead of having the state provide everything, citizens actually work together and help each other to take responsibility for themselves and other issues needing to be dealt with in society instead of leaving it down to government. Active citizenship is where citizens exercise their rights from the state and carry out their responsibilities in return. The forms of active citizenship are endless, from recycling, to voting to donating time to a cause. Active citizenship is the expectation that citizens not simply do the bare minimum in society but participate in a way where they have done more than just enjoying their rights.

In the past, there has been a great sense of community in Britain. There were communities which identified with each other, helped each other out and organised events for all of community to be involved in. Nowadays, most people do not even know their next door neighbours name. However, it would be wrong to suggest that this sense of community does not exist at all in Britain anymore. This is where geographical factors play a major role. By this, I mean that some areas of Britain still contain community identity but others don't. In the cities, the busy hustle and bustle of everyday life prevents community ties and active citizenship to an extent which could be found in the rural villages, for example. If you sat and watched the streets of London, you'd see hundreds of people going about their daily tasks, businessmen and women running for the tube, tourists taking photographs of attractions and people shopping on the famous streets. There is no sense of community and the businessman who is late for his meeting isn't going to be too concerned with being an active citizen. On the other hand, if you spent a day in a village in Gloucestershire, you'd see all the retired community members chatting outside the local post office, walking along the street saying hello to everybody they come by and participating in the annual scarecrow competition. This illustrates how geographical factors tie in with other factors of stress, family life, working hours and even age.

"Active citizens, according to the Conservative view, would themselves take responsibilities for some of the things that need doing in society, rather than expect the state to do it for them: charitable and voluntary work, housing associations, neighbourhood watch schemes and the like are seen as alternatives to expensive, and often unsuccessful state provision." Professor Dawn Oliver

Dawn Oliver feels that according to the traditional Conservative party, active citizens came together as a community, and worked for each other to be independent of the state. This means that charitable and voluntary work was carried out by everybody working together, whereas today this is quite untrue, as it is most likely to be carried out by middle class, middle aged women. Furthermore, an article in 2004 suggests that voluntary work has declined dramatically<sup>1</sup>.

### ***The Modern State***

Dawn Oliver's view is no longer relevant to the modern state. The New Labour government has now attempted to take on board the needs of the modern state. The New Labour government has also adopted the concept of communitarianism, which was developed by sociologist, Amitai Etzioni who proposed the idea of restoring ideas of shared obligation and social responsibility to citizenship. However, these measures can't be successful whilst the factors of everyday life are still getting in the way of active citizenship.

### ***Factors preventing active citizenship***

Especially in the economic climate we are in at the moment, workers are trying to work as much as they can and are often taking on over time; this of course prevents free time to become involved in active citizenship. Even without the need for overtime, even those who work a 9 to 5 job and get home at 5.30 have a number of things they need to do in their evenings which are higher prioritised than becoming involved in community. People are stressed out with their daily hassles, they find themselves coming home from work and before they know it, it's the morning again. Families are the most likely to be affected by such issues, for example a single mother who has a full time job, she picks the children up from the child-minder after work, takes them home, feeds them, bathes them, puts them to bed, then she's exhausted and again, before she knows it it's the next day. Even the fact that Britain has a diverse range of cultures and races etc could play a part in the decline of active citizenship since there is a danger of all of these groups in society staying enclosed within their groups.

It is totally understandable why many people are refusing their duties as active citizens. They just don't have the time and thus don't have the desire. It is for these reasons that Dawn Oliver and Etzioni's ideas are unworkable in today's society.

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, it can be suggested that the modern state is not based fully on active citizenship. The majority of people are tied down in their personal lives in way which prevent them from being able to be active within society.

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<sup>1</sup> The Independent , 'Time-poor Britons shy away from charity work', 2/2/2004