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Party leaders have talked a lot about encouraging both good and active citizenship and about more community and voluntary involvement in the business of good government and a just society. Many academics have written a good deal in recent years (ourselves included) about theories of citizenship, while others produce measures of popular participation (heartening or disheartening according to the base-line of what is counted as involvement). The party debates and proclaimed policies do not always seem clearly connected with actual practice and much or most of the academic debate has not seemed able – or even intended – to reach out beyond seminars and research ratings to a wider public and publicity.

So rather than plunging back into the internal debate we have asked our expert contributors to write relatively short but pointed essays assuming, on top of all that writing and research, that a radically more active citizenship is a worthy aim; but then to speculate and spell out what they each think, in respect to some broad area of concern, could be the social and political consequences of the United Kingdom, as a whole or in its parts, becoming a citizen culture. However, each essay will also indicate how these aims could be achieved, through what institutions, old or new, or through what changing mind-sets or values.

So these are our ‘starter’s orders’ for each of the contributors to consider, no more but no less. We all want to address aims and instrumentalities in terms relevant and readily comprehensible to the intelligent and concerned reader, not specifically the academic or research specialist, although students may like this book for trying speculatively to get to the heart of possible reforms more than their teachers secure in their specialisms. This sense of who we are writing for follows the origins of this book in the Stevenson Lectures on Citizenship for 2006–7 at the University of Glasgow, an evening series specifically aimed at the general public. Not all the original lecturers figure here – lectures are more discursive; new

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voices and topics have joined us and everything has been rewritten and pointed to this book's title: 'Active citizenship: what could it achieve and how?'

Bernard Crick
Andrew Lockyer