

# **Beyond housing classes:**

## **the sociological significance of private property rights in means of consumption†**

**by Peter Saunders**

The significance of domestic property ownership for the distribution of wealth, the structuration of classes and the mobilization of political conflicts has in recent years been the subject of widespread academic debate and political argument. In academic circles there is now general agreement that housing tenure should be seen neither as the basis for a distinct system of 'housing classes' (as was originally proposed by Rex and Moore, 1967), nor as the source of merely ideological divisions and interests (as was suggested in some of the cruder marxist analyses of this question), but intense disagreements still remain over the way in which housing tenure in general, and owner occupancy in particular, should be analysed in relation to wider class relations and political struggles. Similarly in political circles, there is much confusion and dispute among socialists over whether and how private home ownership can be reconciled with socialist principles of equity and collectivism, and this confusion has been exacerbated in Britain by the problem of how to respond to the Thatcher government's undeniably popular move to sell off desirable parts of the public housing stock to working-class tenants who seem all too eager to buy it.

I have addressed some of these issues in earlier work (Saunders, 1978; 1979) and in this paper I begin by critically reviewing my earlier arguments concerning the sociological significance of house ownership in the light of more recent work (and more recent developments in Britain) which has called some of them into question. In particular, I would now wish to abandon the attempt to theorize home ownership as a determinant of class structuration and instead to view the division between privatized and collectivized modes of housing as one factor which is contributing to

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what one recent writer has termed 'a process of restratification' (Mingione, 1981, 18) based on differing relationships to the means of consumption. I suggest, in other words, that social and economic divisions arising out of ownership of key means of consumption such as housing are now coming to represent a new major fault line in British society (and perhaps in others too), that privatization of welfare provisions is intensifying this cleavage to the point where sectoral alignments in regard to consumption may come to outweigh class alignments in respect of production, and that housing tenure remains the most important single aspect of such alignments because of the accumulative potential of house ownership and the significance of private housing as an expression of personal identity and as a source of ontological security. Such an argument has obvious implications for current socialist thought and practice, and some of these are considered in the concluding section of the paper.

## **I Domestic property and social class**

In earlier work on the sociological significance of housing tenure, I sought to demonstrate that house ownership represents a crucial material resource giving rise to interests which cut across lines of class cleavage originating in the social organization of production. Central to this argument was the view that, in postwar Britain as in a number of other western countries, ownership of housing has increasingly provided access to a significant means of wealth accumulation. Three principal sources of accumulation were identified: house price inflation (which has tended to outstrip inflation of other commodity prices), favourable rates of interest on housing loans (which have often been negative in real terms) and government subsidies on house purchase (which in Britain takes the form mainly of tax relief on mortgage interest repayments, but also includes various grants to owner occupiers for house improvements).

The importance of domestic property ownership as a means of wealth accumulation lay in the fact that the division between owners and non-owners provided a basis for distinct patterns of political alignment, both locally (as in conflicts over land use) and nationally (over questions of housing policy and housing finance). Arguments which attempted to represent this division as in some way 'false' or 'ideological' were therefore rejected on the grounds that housing tenure is both a material as well as an ideal basis for political mobilization, and it was concluded that we should consider the ways in which domestic property ownership may be contributing to a restructuring of class relations in advanced capitalist societies.

There have been three main lines of criticism in response to this argument. One questions whether owner occupation really does represent a significant and enduring source of wealth accumulation. A second argues that owner occupiers cannot be treated as an homogeneous interest group since they have not all been in a position to secure real economic gains. A third argues that the significance of tenure as a basis for social and political alignments has been grossly exaggerated. I shall briefly consider each of these points in turn.

*a Is domestic property ownership an enduring source of real accumulation?* Few commentators now doubt that, during the 1970s, many owner occupiers in those countries experiencing rapid increases in the rate of inflation did make substantial real gains from the rising capital values of their homes, irrespective of whether they intended or realized it. Farmer and Barrell (1981), for example, calculate that in Britain, owner occupiers achieved average real annual rates of return on their capital of between 11.7% (for those remaining in the same house) and 15.7% (for those who 'traded up') in the years from 1965 to 1979. Such staggering rates of return compare favourably with all other forms of investment over the same period.

It has been suggested, however, that this period was exceptional (Edel, 1982; Williams, 1982) and that a combination of high interest rates, falling inflation and a relatively stagnant housing market has depressed rates of return for home owners in recent years. There is some truth in this argument. However, it is important to remember first, that the major source of gain during the 1960s and 1970s was government subsidies, not house price inflation, in which case owner occupiers may still gain during periods of stagnation in the housing market, and second, that all markets are subject to troughs as well as booms, in which case the slump in house prices during the early 1980s may prove to have been merely a temporary reversal of a continuing long-term trend of rising real prices.

Edel denies this possibility through an appeal to the marxist theory of value:

In a capitalist system, housing is a commodity produced for profit. If housing prices rise, eventually this will affect the profitability of supplying more houses, and increasing new supplies will drive prices back towards the general inflation level. Price is, in some sense, regulated by value (Edel, 1982, 216).

The problem with this elegant argument is that it ignores the well-documented peculiarities of the housing market – shortages of building land, the restrictions imposed by planning authorities, the long time lag in responding to changing price signals, the political manipulation of the availability of credit to finance house purchase, and so on – which tend to hinder or prevent the operation of the law of value in the way that Edel posits. Furthermore, for as long as governments continue to subsidize house purchase, there are strong grounds for arguing that house prices will continue to rise in the long term, for as Farmer and Barrell (1981, 316) have demonstrated, subsidies such as those given in Britain encourage perpetual trading up and increase effective demand for housing over and above the increase in demand which follows simply from a rise in incomes. Put another way, subsidies raise the demand for housing faster than the demand for other commodities thereby helping to ensure that, in the long term, real house prices will continue to rise and house owners will continue to reap the benefit.

*b Are owner occupiers an homogeneous economic and political interest?* Owner occupation does still function as an important means of wealth accumulation. Nevertheless, some commentators (e.g. Forrest *et al.*, forthcoming; Gray, 1983; Paris and Blackaby, 1979; Thorns, 1981a; and 1981b; Williams, 1982; Williams and Doling, 1982) have insisted that the heterogeneity of market situations within the

owner occupied sector has meant that, by and large, working-class home owners have not been the ones who have benefited. Thorns, for example, draws on empirical data from both Britain and New Zealand to show that the most substantial gains have been secured in the higher echelons of the housing market and in areas of relative economic prosperity where house prices have remained buoyant. Indeed, in a later paper (Thorns, 1982a) he goes on to show that, with the onset of recession, unemployed home owners in the depressed regions have found that their loss of wages has been compounded by a fall in local house prices, and that any attempt to move in search of work has therefore entailed the sale of their homes at a loss.

Such evidence has been challenged (e.g. Pratt, 1982, 495), although the general point that different groups of home owners do not all benefit equally may be accepted. This does not, of course, warrant the somewhat exaggerated conclusion drawn by Gray (1983) and others that public sector tenants are in most respects better off in terms of their housing situation than owner occupiers. Nor does it refute the argument that owner occupiers as a whole nevertheless still share common material interests, for as I argued in an earlier paper (Saunders, 1978) it is quite possible to recognize that contingent factors, such as spatial location, may influence the pattern of distribution of resources while still recognizing the existence of shared material interests. Just as profitable capitalist entrepreneurs in affluent regions share common class interests with their less fortunate contemporaries in declining areas where companies are sustaining losses, so too home buyers throughout the country share common interests (e.g. in maintaining government subsidies) irrespective of variations between local and regional housing markets. Indeed, these interests may be most keenly felt by those who are doing least well, for they are the ones who depend most upon continuing government support for owner occupiers as a whole.

It has, however, been suggested that, even if there is such a mutuality of interests among house owners, it is unlikely to provide the basis for effective political mobilization since most owner occupiers seem remarkably unaware of and uninterested in the changing value of their homes.

Empirical evidence on this question is scanty and more research is needed. On the one hand, research reported by Agnew (1978) does suggest that in Britain, concern with domestic property prices is low, in which case owner occupiers may not readily be mobilized in order to defend their property interests. On the other hand, there is also evidence to suggest that ownership of housing appears to be a major factor influencing political alignment as measured by voting behaviour (Dunleavy, 1979) and associated with support for privatization in other areas of consumption provision (Kemeny, 1980). While more research is called for, it does therefore seem plausible to suggest that ownership of housing may be very significant in shaping people's political values and in structuring political alignments as well as in generating a distinct 'owner occupier interest' which no government can afford to ignore.

*c How significant is housing tenure as a basis for social cleavage? Even if we*

accept that domestic property ownership is in the contemporary period an important source of wealth accumulation for individual owners, and that owner occupiers as a whole share common material interests which are likely to become manifest in distinct forms of political alignment, there still remains the question of whether home ownership can therefore be seen as a significant factor in class restructuring. Views expressed in the recent literature range from those of Geraldine Pratt (1982), who argues strongly for a theory of home ownership as the basis for a middle property class, through those of David Thorns (1981b; 1982b), who endorses a theory of home owners as a middle property class while emphasizing the internal fragmentation of this class, to those of Peter Williams (1982) and Michael Ball (1982), both of whom reject house ownership as a factor in class structuration and detect in the current housing crisis a fusion between owners and tenants as both groups come to exert pressure on governments for reform of the housing system.

All three positions must be rejected. The problem with a conception of home owners as a property class, whether or not it is seen as internally fragmented, is that it overextends class theory and ultimately fails to relate class relations generated around ownership of domestic property to those generated around ownership of means of production. The attempt to integrate housing tenure divisions into class analysis, as in the work of Pratt and Thorns and my earlier conceptualization, is fundamentally flawed (e.g. see Hooper, 1982), the reason being that it elides the analytically distinct spheres of consumption and production. Class relations are constituted only through the social organization of production. It is confusing and unhelpful to use the same theoretical and conceptual tools to analyse relations constituted in the sphere of production around ownership and control of the means of production, and relations constituted through processes of consumption, even where (as in the case of house ownership) private ownership of the means of consumption may function as a source of revenue.

The recognition that housing tenure cannot be a factor in class structuration does not, however, necessitate agreement with writers such as Ball and Williams who seek to expel the question of tenure from the analysis of social stratification. Rather, we need to recognize that class is not the only major basis of social cleavage in contemporary capitalist societies, for increasingly people find themselves involved in political struggles which emanate not from their class location but from their location in what Dunleavy (1979) terms 'consumption sectors'. Seen in this context, home ownership does not alter people's class interests, but it is a major factor which helps to define their consumption sector interests. Consumption sectors, which are constituted through the division between owners and non-owners of crucial means of consumption such as housing, crosscut class boundaries, are grounded in non-class-based material interests and represent an increasingly significant form of social cleavage which may in certain circumstances come to outweigh class membership in their economic and political effects.

As a prelude to developing this argument further, it is important to emphasize that sectoral cleavages arising out of property rights in means of consumption are

not merely ideological or status divisions but reflect real divisions of material interest. Owner-occupiers, for example, form a distinct sectoral interest not because as property owners they naively *believe* that they have some sort of stake in the capitalist system, nor because their lifestyle (e.g. suburbanism) leads them to *claim* a superior status to that of non-owners, but because the objective conditions of their material existence are such as to drive a wedge between their interests and life chances and those of non-owners. Unlike Dunleavy, therefore, who sees such cleavages as primarily ideological, I am using the concept of consumption sectors to refer to material divisions which are every bit as 'real' and every bit as pertinent as those which arise out of the relations between classes.

It is also important to stress that interests represented in private ownership of crucial means of consumption such as housing cannot be dismissed as secondary to class interests arising out of ownership and non-ownership of means of production. One's class location does of course set limits upon one's consumption location (Ball, for example, shows that 86% of British mortgagors are drawn from the Registrar-General's classes I, II and III) but it does not determine it, and consumption-based interests must therefore be taken seriously in their own right as the foundation for sectoral alignments which bear no necessary correspondence to class alignments. As I have argued elsewhere with Alan Cawson in respect of the theorization of the state, consumption is constrained but not determined by production, and processes of consumption have their own specificity (see Cawson and Saunders, 1983; also Cawson, 1982; and Saunders, 1981, Chapter 8). Thus, the fact that there is likely to be an empirical overlap between class and sectoral alignments (most council tenants in Britain, for example, are working class) does not lead to the conclusion that sectoral struggles can 'therefore' be seen merely as an expression of deeper class struggles. Consumption-based material interests are no less 'basic' or 'fundamental' than production-based (class) ones; which is primary at any one time and place cannot be determined on the basis of an appeal to the logical primacy of production over consumption (to consume we must first produce), but will depend entirely on the issue at hand.

To summarize, housing tenure, as one expression of the division between privatized and collectivized means of consumption, is analytically distinct from the question of class; it is neither the basis of class formations (as in the neo-weberian tradition) nor the expression of them (as in the neo-marxist tradition), but is rather the single most pertinent factor in the determination of consumption sector cleavages. Because such cleavages are in principle no less important than class divisions in understanding contemporary social stratification, and because housing plays such a key role in affecting life chances, in expressing social identity and (by virtue of the capital gains accruing to owner occupiers) in modifying patterns of resource distribution and economic inequality, it follows that the question of home ownership must remain as central to the analysis of social divisions and political conflicts.

## II Private ownership of the means of consumption and the process of social restratification

Just as the main social division arising out of the organization of production in capitalist societies is that between those who own and control the means of production and those who do not, so the main division arising out of the process of consumption in such societies is that between those who satisfy their main consumption needs through personal ownership (e.g. through home ownership, personal means of transportation, private medical insurance and private schooling) and those who rely on collective provision through the state. In both cases, therefore, the main cleavage is that between property owners and non-owners, for while the principal classes are distinguished according to ownership and non-ownership of production resources, the principal consumption sectors are distinguished by ownership or non-ownership of consumption resources.

Clearly, however, we are dealing here with very different types of property rights, and ownership in one sphere has little correspondence to ownership in the other (few house owners, for example, also own the factories or offices in which they work). As Williams points out, private ownership in means of consumption does not generally confer the social and economic power associated with property rights in the means of production:

... the legal institution of property covers a wide range of situations . . . But clearly not all property has the same significance . . . The spread of home ownership does not confer economic power in the sense of the rights to those properties giving a say in the direction of the British economy (1982, 19–20).

Leaving on one side the observation that most of those who today enjoy property rights in the means of production (small business owners, shareholders, contributors to pension funds, etc.) do not enjoy the power to give direction to the British economy either, we may nevertheless agree with Williams that the legal category of ownership needs unpacking. However, to argue from the fact that ownership of consumption goods such as housing is different from ownership of production goods such as factories to the conclusion that private ownership in the sphere of consumption is thus unimportant (or even, as in Forrest *et al.*, forthcoming, that it does not represent property ownership in a sociological sense at all) is clearly fallacious. What such arguments do is to focus entirely on one dimension of property relations (the question of economic power) to the neglect of another which is equally important (the question of exclusivity in rights of control, benefit and disposal).

This point may be made clearer by reproducing the typology of property rights developed by Newby, Bell, Rose and myself in our study of agricultural landownership (see Table 1). It is clear from this that an exclusive focus on the significance of the difference between types (1) and (2) (e.g. in the argument that house ownership is different from ownership of capital) fails to take into account the equally important distinctions between types (2) and (4). Just as important for an understanding of the sociological significance of property ownership as the

**Table 1** A typology of property

		Degree of exclusivity	
		HIGH	LOW
Degree of potential for accumulation	HIGH	Individual means of production (1)	Collective means of production (3)
	LOW	Individual means of consumption (2)	Collective means of consumption (4)

Source: Newby *et al.*, 1978, 339.

distinction between production and consumption property is that between personal and collective property. Put another way, consumption sector cleavages between individual and collective modes of ownership are no less significant than production-based class divisions between ownership and non-ownership of accumulative forms of property, for increasingly today, ownership rights in crucial means of consumption such as housing, transportation, education and health care provide not only a degree of personal autonomy and control which is denied to non-owners, but also privileged access to key determinants of life chances (shelter, mobility, cultural capital and even life itself).

I take up the issue of personal autonomy and control in the final section of this paper, and shall concentrate here on the growing importance of individual ownership in the means of consumption as a determinant of life chances.

If we were to develop an historical analysis of the changing 'modes of consumption' in a country such as Britain over the last 150 years, then we could begin by identifying a succession of three phases (I avoid the theoretically contaminated notion of 'stages' for no necessary evolutionary model is intended) which may be termed 'market', 'socialized' and 'privatized' modes of consumption.

In the first of these phases, consumption was organized primarily through the market. The contradiction between low wages (a condition of capitalist profitability *at that time* given the low productivity of labour characteristic of labour-intensive production methods) and a market-based mode of consumption was manifest throughout this period, not only in the form of periodic cycles of 'over-production' (due, as Marx argued, to the necessarily restricted purchasing power of workers in their role as consumers) but also in the material conditions of life endured by the working class (slum housing, disease, ignorance and so on). In this first phase, however, the role of the state in respect of consumption was generally limited to regulation (e.g. through the establishment of the municipal boards of health) and to maintenance of the Benthamite subsistence principle (e.g. through the Poor Law), and material provision on any scale beyond this was left to private charities and benevolent employers.

Gradually, as a result of a number of factors including paternalistic concern from one section of the dominant class, fear of insurrection from another, economic self-interest from a third and diverse pressures for improved living standards

on the part of some working-class people and working-class organizations, a second phase developed during the latter part of the nineteenth century in which direct state provision of key items of consumption – health, housing, education – whose cost was still prohibitive for most working people, came to supplement and eventually largely to replace the subsistence provisions of the Poor Law Guardians and the handouts of private charities. In Britain, this new mode of consumption became firmly established before the first world war and reached its final maturity in the wake of the second.

This new socialized mode of consumption to a large extent overcame the contradiction which had lain at the heart of the market mode between low wages and adequate provision of consumption, but as many writers have recently pointed out, it achieved this at the expense of another – that between the socialized costs of welfare provision and the availability of government revenues. It is this contradiction which became increasingly manifest through the 1970s in the form of a 'fiscal crisis', and the response has been a marked shift in recent years towards a new third phase in the form of a privatized mode of consumption.

In retrospect, it can be seen that the foundations for this third phase were in fact laid much earlier than the 1970s, however. For the last 30 years or more, we have arguably been witnessing the transition from socialized to privatized consumption. The first steps, taken very early on, involved the abandonment of the universalistic welfare principle (thus acceptance of and even support for the private sectors in medicine, education and housing) and the introduction of user charges and the shift in emphasis from 'citizenship rights' to 'private property rights' which these steps entailed has continued with a few breaks and minor reversals ever since.

Now there is no doubt that a major factor in explaining the development of a privatized mode of consumption has been the growing strain placed on government budgets by welfare spending. Much more important than this in the long term, however, has been the growth in real incomes experienced by a large proportion of households (due both to rising real wages during periods of economic growth, and to increasing numbers of dual-earner households), for it is this which represents the necessary condition of privatization. Since the 1950s, an increasingly large proportion of working families have come to be able to afford private modes of provision – first (in the 1950s), in personal transportation, then (through the 1960s and 1970s) in housing (where the privatized mode is, of course, still subsidized by the state), and increasingly today in health care (the recent decision of the Electrical Trades Union to subscribe on behalf of its members to private health insurance represents an extension of private medicine from the professional to the skilled manual sectors of the workforce, just as house ownership spread across the same class boundary a decade or so earlier) and in education (e.g. in the growth of private tuition in subjects like music, in the increased fees for adult education, and so on).

The way in which this transition to a privatized mode of consumption has been, and continues to be, accomplished is through first, the introduction of user charges, second, the raising of user charges to notional market levels, and third, the transfer from state to private sector ownership. The clearest example of this in Britain

relates to housing (where the process is now well developed), for having raised public sector rents to private sector levels, it is now a simple matter to transfer ownership from the state to the individual tenant. The same process is also now clearly visible in the fields of health and education, as is apparent in a report of the Central Policy Review Staff to the Thatcher Cabinet in September 1982 which outlined proposals for replacing the NHS with a new system of public and private health insurance, and for replacing free entitlement to higher education with a limited number of state scholarships. In virtually every area of consumption, the same process of transition is occurring, and once set in motion, the move to privatization seems to take on a momentum of its own. Thus, the raising of public transport fares to market levels serves to encourage private car ownership; the raising of school meal charges to market levels serves to encourage private forms of catering; increased charges in the National Health Service serve to encourage private health insurance – and in all of these cases, the more users who opt for a private solution, the poorer becomes the quality and the higher the price for those who remain dependent upon the dwindling socialized mode (see Hirschmann, 1970 on the ‘exit phenomenon’).

We are then, moving towards a dominant mode of consumption in which the majority will satisfy their requirements through market purchases (subsidized, where necessary, by the state) while the minority remain directly dependent on state provision. As Rose observes ‘Collective consumption is proving to be not a permanent feature of advanced capitalism but an historically specific phenomenon’ (1979, 23) and the period of collective provision (phase two above) may come to be seen in retrospect as a temporary ‘holding operation’ or period of transition between the decline of the old market mode and the emergence of a new mode of private sector provision which has today become both possible and attractive for an increasingly large proportion of the population. If this is the case, then the division between the privatized majority and the marginalized minority (which is already evident in respect of housing – see Forrest and Williams, 1980, 16) is likely to create an increasingly visible fault line in British society, not along the lines of class but on the basis of private ownership in the means of consumption.

In arguing thus, I am explicitly denying the claims of those, like Szelenyi, who continue to argue that state provision in the sphere of consumption (i.e. phase two) is ‘necessary for the whole reproduction process and more specifically to the reproduction of labour power in modern capitalism’ (1981, 579). Such arguments ignore both the rise in real incomes of many middle and working-class households which has made privatization possible, and the widespread desire for personal control in the sphere of consumption which has made privatization politically feasible. While it remains the case that private provision is still underpinned in some instances by the state (e.g. through mortgage interest subsidies, pay beds in National Health hospitals, tax benefits for private schools, and so on), and that the shift to a privatized mode of consumption does not therefore represent a return to the market mode of the nineteenth century, it is also clearly the case that universal direct provision by the state is in no sense functionally necessary in advanced capitalist societies and is now in a process of decline.

It is important to emphasize that my argument does not rest merely on the extrapolation of a current trend which may soon be reversed, for I see the shift to privatization as both established and enduring. Apart from Szelenyi's argument about the necessity of socialized provision for reproduction of labour power, an argument which ignores the crucial significance of the rise in real household incomes, two main arguments have been advanced in the recent literature to suggest that privatization may turn out to be a temporary phenomenon. Neither is convincing.

The first suggests that, like the earlier market and socialized modes of consumption, a new privatized mode gives rise to a fundamental contradiction which now takes the form of that between support for private ownership of consumption provisions and the requirements of capital for what Miller (1978) terms 'recapitalization'. Applying this argument to housing provision, for example, Harloe suggests that the level of government subsidy required to support further owner occupation represents a degree of drain on state revenues, and hence on capitalist profits, which is likely to provoke intense pressure from private industry (apart from the building industry) for a reversal of policy:

Perhaps the continued development of the private market in housing, at the very time when it seemed as if its dominance was generally established, is becoming ever more problematic (1981, 46).

Similarly, Ball has argued that, 'The present structure of owner-occupied housing provision is increasingly coming into contradiction with the needs of capital' (1982, 72).

This economic argument is then reinforced by a political one to the effect that loss of electoral support, together with incoherent but threatening outbreaks of civil unrest (as in the British inner-city riots of 1981) is likely to check any further attempts at decollectivizing consumption. Harloe and Paris, for example, suggest that in Britain 'The political base for the policy of reducing collective consumption ... seems to have largely disintegrated' (1982, 6), that the Thatcher government is almost certain to fall at the next election, and that no future administration is likely to continue reducing collective consumption provisions in the light of this experience.

Neither of these two arguments against the likelihood of a continuing spiral of 'decollectivization' or privatization of consumption is compelling, however. While accepting that high levels of subsidy to encourage home ownership represent a deflection of revenues away from investment-starved industrial capital, there is no reason to suppose that such subsidies must therefore be reduced in the future. Pressure on government by corporate capital is by no means always successful, nor are subsidies to owner occupiers the only area of state spending which could be cut in response to such pressures. Furthermore, privatization in other areas of consumption such as health and education need not necessitate increased subsidies but on the contrary probably represents a reduction in state spending and is thus entirely consistent with a strategy of recapitalization. Harloe's argument can in

this sense be turned on its head, for demands from the private sector for recapitalization may be seen as one factor likely to encourage further privatization of consumption provisions. The main economic limitation on such a process is not so much the investment requirements of private capital as the level of effective demand on the part of consumers, and here, as we have seen, the level of real incomes and of popular aspirations is now such as to suggest that the scope for further privatization (even at a time of economic recession) may be considerable.

This leads us to consider the political argument that further substantial cuts in the provision of collective consumption are unlikely since the support base for such a policy is small and is becoming yet smaller. As Harloe and Paris put it 'It is hard to see what basis of political support will eventually remain for such policies' (1982, 37).

This is a curious argument for it overlooks the widespread popularity of the private ownership solution in areas such as housing where most people have for many years aspired to owner occupation. As I have argued elsewhere, British political culture is founded on a dichotomy of principles — citizenship rights on the one hand, rights of private property on the other. If the erosion of citizenship rights is coupled with an extension of private property rights (as, for example, in a policy of reducing the public housing sector while supporting the extension of individual home ownership), then the basis of political support is likely to be as large as the potential number of new owners. To argue that decollectivization is unpopular is to ignore the fact that privatization (the reverse side of the same coin) may be highly popular. Indeed, the further privatization extends, the greater becomes its momentum. The more council tenants who buy their houses, the greater will be the pressures on government to support and generalize the home ownership option and the stronger will be the desire on the part of the remaining tenants to escape the increasingly marginal and inadequate state sector. Similarly, the more trade unions that cover their members by private health insurance, the more parents who withdraw their children from the state education system and the more people who resort to private car ownership in order to ensure personal mobility, the greater will be the tendency for privatization of health, education and transport to continue. Far from having reached the limits of decollectivized consumption, all the signs are that the scope for further privatization, especially in health and education, is considerable.

If this is the case, then we may see developing in British society a major new fault line drawn not on the basis of class (ownership of means of production) but on the basis of sectoral alignment (ownership of means of consumption). A fundamental division is already beginning to open up between those (the majority) who are or will be in a position to enjoy market access to good quality services and those (the increasingly marginalized minority) who are not. The contrast between owner occupiers and public sector tenants (a division which takes on additional significance given the accumulative potential of house ownership) is merely the most developed form of this sectoral cleavage.

My argument here has something in common with Mingione's discussion of

'social disgregation' and the process of 'social restratification' in advanced capitalist societies. Thus Mingione argues that traditional class boundaries have become fragmented as new divisions have emerged around questions, not of production, but of reproduction (i.e. consumption):

The main axis of the contradictions of modern societies is progressively shifting from the economic sphere of production relationships to the social sphere of complex reproduction relationships (1981, 11).

While he insists that this shift has not significantly modified the division of capitalist societies into the two main antagonistic classes (those who manage capitalism and those who are oppressed by it), he does recognize that these two principal classes have become internally differentiated with respect to conflicts arising out of the process of reproduction, and in this sense his argument is consistent with my suggestion that divisions in the sphere of consumption do not re-structure class relations but do crosscut them.

Where I differ from Mingione is in his attempt to reduce consumption cleavages to a class analysis even in the face of his own recognition that the main axis of conflict has now shifted from production to consumption. In his attempt to reconcile his observations that consumption may be becoming the primary basis of social cleavages with his theoretical commitment to a marxist class theory in which the struggle between capital and labour must remain paramount, Mingione is forced to the conclusion that struggles in the sphere of consumption are just one part of a broader movement aimed at the overthrow of capitalism:

Urban conflicts to get better housing or transport are only part of a much more comprehensive conflictual movement to establish an alternative social system (p. 24).

This empirically implausible conclusion is justified in theoretical terms by the extension of the marxist concept of exploitation to include reproduction (consumption) as well as production relationships:

Class struggles are fundamentally originated by capitalist exploitation relationships — mainly the direct extraction of surplus value from the immediately productive part of the working class. But . . . exploitative capitalist social relations do not occur only in the strict production area but also and necessarily within the general social reproduction process which is formed to reproduce the very possibility of exploitation. In this sense, exploitation not only strikes the productive workers in social relations other than the immediate production of surplus value, but it also involves various social groups, which cannot be considered productive workers, in different aspects of their everyday life (pp. 30–31).

In this way Mingione is able to argue that 'the large majority of the population' is today 'exploited' in the realm of consumption since consumption is organized in order to facilitate continued exploitation in the realm of production.

The argument is, however, fallacious because of its assumption that any process which directly or indirectly enables capitalist production to continue must be part of the exploitative relationships on which such production is founded. Further, it also assumes that patterns of exploitation in production are directly mirrored in patterns of exploitation in other spheres of social activity (an assertion which is

likely to be hotly contested by feminists among others). It simply does not make sense to argue that, because the great majority of the population is 'exploited' (in the marxist sense) at work, they must also be exploited in every other aspect of their lives, for it is a very curious notion of exploitation which allows us to see home owners, car drivers, private patients and the like as 'exploited' in the realm of consumption.

If the concept of exploitation is to retain any meaning or analytical value when applied outside of production relationships, then it can only be in the sense of the denial by one group of another's access to crucial social resources. A relationship of exploitation thus involves the *generation* of unequal life chances. This is the sense in which Giddens (1973) uses the concept, and it is also the basis of Parkin's theory of exploitation as social exclusion (Parkin, 1979). But seen in these terms, exploitation in the process of consumption takes place, not between big capital and everybody else, but between those who can claim exclusive access to crucial consumption resources, and those who are excluded from such resources. Thus, superimposed upon class relations of exploitation (in which a very small number of people exploit a large majority) are new sectoral relations of exploitation (in which a relatively large number of people exploit an increasingly marginalized minority for whom collective provision remains the only, and strictly second-best, option). This means that if, as Mingione argues, consumption divisions are today replacing production divisions as the major axis of social stratification, then the implications for future patterns of social conflict and cohesion are enormous, for in a 'them-and-us' society, the 'them' is assuming a majority position of exclusive access to crucial life chances, while the 'us' — composed almost entirely of those who, by virtue of race, gender, religion, age or education cannot achieve market access to basic consumption resources — is becoming a small, isolated and fragmented minority.

The response of this marginalized minority to a progressive process of exclusion — from personal mobility and personal housing today, and in the future from prompt and high-quality health care and perhaps from decent education for their children — remains to be seen, but already there are indications that it may range from relatively coherent communal self-help strategies on the part of those who enjoy cohesive social networks (i.e. what Pahl, 1980, has termed the development of an 'informal economy') to sporadic and relatively unorganized outbreaks of civil unrest and attacks on private property on the part of those who lack either the patience or the resources necessary for the development of such a compensatory strategy.

### III Private property, consumption and socialism

The increasing significance of the division between ownership and non-ownership of key means of consumption in advanced capitalist societies has recently begun to pose some significant dilemmas for socialists, largely because socialist thought

has hitherto lacked a theory or an ethics of personal (consumption-oriented) property ownership.

In marxist theory, consumption has always been analysed as secondary to and derivative of production. Marx himself provided the logic for this:

Production, distribution, exchange and consumption... all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity. Production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over the other moments as well. The process always returns to production to begin anew. That exchange and consumption cannot be predominant is self-evident... A definite production therefore determines a definite consumption (1973, 99).

It is this logic that has led subsequent marxist theory to view divisions and interests arising out of the process of consumption as merely phenomenal expressions of deeper and more fundamental (because logically prior) divisions between those who own and control the means of production and those who do not. Thus struggles over access to or control of resources such as housing or health care are treated simply as 'displaced' class struggles, and the division between production-based movements (e.g. trade unions) and consumption-based movements (e.g. community groups) is analysed as 'at best a surficial estrangement, an apparent tearing assunder of what can never be kept apart' (Harvey, 1978, 34). Even where marxist theory has focused particularly on the politics of consumption (as in the work of Castells), the argument has been that consumption-based social movements only become theoretically and politically significant insofar as they feed back into and are subordinated to class movements in the sphere of production (e.g. by facilitating new popular class alliances in opposition to monopoly capital).

Now it is of course the case, as Marx argues, that production is logically prior to consumption, for we cannot consume what has not first been produced and consumption thus marks the end point of the production-exchange-distribution-consumption cycle. It is also the case that the ability to consume is to some extent dependent upon location in the social organization of production, for those who are unemployed or are in low-paid and insecure employment cannot generally gain access to private modes of provision of key consumption resources. Nevertheless, as Acton (1955) among others has argued, the logical primacy of production does not itself demonstrate its social determinancy. For example, the fact of being an owner of capital or a wage earner does not itself determine whether or not one is in a position to gain access to particular private modes of consumption, for lines of class cleavage do not correspond to lines of sectoral cleavage in the sphere of consumption, and those who are exploited in one sphere may occupy an exploitative location in another. It is therefore quite misleading to argue, as Harvey and others have done, that there is an 'underlying unity' between the two, for although consumption location is to a large extent dependent upon production location, it does not correspond to it, and it generates new and independent effects which may prove more significant (e.g. in structuring material life chances and in stimulating political mobilization) than the simple division between those who sell their labour power and those who purchase it.

The failure of marxist theory<sup>1</sup> to recognize the independent significance of the sphere of consumption is today reflected in widespread confusion and argument in socialist circles concerning the appropriate response to the privatization of key areas of consumption. The failure of theory to distinguish consumption and production cleavages (through the constant reduction of the former to the latter; consumption is seen simply in functional terms as reproduction) has resulted in the surprising failure of socialist practice to distinguish two very different forms of property (namely, individual means of production and individual means of consumption). Thus, despite the insistence of Williams and others that corporate ownership of capital is a very different form of property from, say, individual ownership of housing, socialist writing still continues to argue against the latter through an extension of arguments relevant only to the former. Because marxist theory establishes the case for common ownership and control of the means of production and because marxist analysis reduces consumption to production, marxist practice finds itself opposing any extension of individual property rights in the sphere of consumption, even when the majority of working-class people appear to aspire to such rights.

An obvious case in point concerns recent British housing policy which has deliberately set out to support the extension of private home ownership and to reduce reliance on welfare (collective) provision. For the remainder of this paper

<sup>1</sup> Although not central to my argument here, it should be noted that marxist theory is not alone in this failure, for Weber too inadequately theorizes the sociological significance of consumption in the modern period (not surprisingly, perhaps, since both he and Marx were writing at a time before the division between privatized and collectivized consumption became pertinent).

In contrast to Marx, Weber does of course explicitly recognize that consumption may generate social cleavages which are distinct from, and may even be more fundamental than, divisions arising out of the social organization of production (i.e. ownership and non-ownership of productive property). However, for Weber, consumption forms the basis of status stratification in which different social groups are distinguished, not in terms of their life chances, but in respect of their differentially valued life styles. This distinction between class and status stratification seems to have most salience for Weber in the analysis of precapitalist societies where the principal basis of social differentiation may reflect differences of social honour rather than economic (market) power. In the context of modern capitalist societies, however, it is clear that for Weber, as for Marx, domination rests firmly on economic power rather than social prestige, in which case status divisions arising out of consumption are very much secondary to class divisions. Indeed, as Parkin (1971) suggests, status allocation in capitalist societies may more usefully be understood as an emergent function of class relations than as an independent basis of social stratification.

While accepting Weber's observation that mode of consumption is closely associated with the attribution of prestige, it has been my concern in this paper to show that it is also increasingly associated with the distribution of life chances. Those who can afford to buy private medical treatment, for example, are not simply engaged in a process of conspicuous consumption, but are laying exclusive claim to privileged treatment which has a crucial bearing on their future life chances. Consumption location is thus a source of material as well as ideal interests and cannot be analysed merely in terms of status any more than it can be reduced to class. Weber is in this sense no more useful for developing a theory of consumption-oriented ownership than is Marx.

I shall concentrate on owner occupation as an example of private ownership of means of consumption, for this illustration demonstrates clearly the need for fresh thought by socialists on the whole question of property rights and collectivism in the sphere of consumption.

The Labour Party in Britain has, at least since 1964, been a reluctant champion of owner occupation while at the same time attempting when in government to safeguard the welfare sector (although as Harloe and Paris, 1982, point out, the 1974-79 administration in fact initiated the current cutbacks in public-sector housing investment). The marxist literature over this period has tended to be highly critical of such a position and has argued firmly against further extension of home ownership among the working class despite the fact that about 40% of manual worker households already own the houses they live in. These criticisms have come to a head since the election of a Conservative government in 1979 which has pursued an energetic policy of selling council houses to sitting tenants at substantial discounts. Although there has been some disagreement among marxist intellectuals over the appropriate response to such a policy (see, for example, the debate in volumes one and two of *Critical Social Policy*), this has tended to revolve around the question of tactics (is it wise for socialist-controlled local authorities to attempt to block sales when many tenants wish to buy?) rather than the principle, on which all parties to the debate are agreed, that socialized provision is the only appropriate mode of housing provision, and that owner occupation is thus to be discouraged if not actually abolished (cf. Cowley, 1979, 146).

The question raised by, but rarely addressed in, this whole debate is why collective provision of a resource such as housing is to be upheld against individual ownership. The only coherent attempt to answer this question has taken the form of an economic argument relating to the pooled historic cost of public housing and the costs incurred in home ownership through interest payments to financial institutions and charges levied by exchange professionals. Public provision, in other words, is seen as being in the interests of all householders because it is, or in principle could be, cheaper. Cheapness, however, does not establish the case for socialism, nor does it provide a conclusive case for restricting or even preventing individual choice in the matter of housing provision. As we shall see in a moment, the case for socialism rests on the case for abolishing relations of exploitation, and any attempt to restrict market choice in the sphere of consumption should be weighed against this rather than on what will inevitably be a paternalistic judgement about the individual costs incurred in market provision.

Such economic arguments do not, however, generally lie at the heart of the socialist 'gut reaction' against home ownership. Two other factors are more pertinent in explaining it.

The first is the historical legacy of antilandlordism bequeathed by radical thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (the period of the market mode of consumption referred to earlier). Landlord ownership clearly was and is incompatible with socialist principles since housing here takes the form of private capital which is used to lay claim to a portion of the surplus value extracted from

workers at the point of production. Since, 80 years ago in Britain, the only effective alternative to private landlordism was state landlordism, public provision came to be championed in opposition to the capitalist form of housing provision, and today it is still championed even though the principal alternative is now owner occupation which has transcended the problem of tenant-landlord relations. It is in this sense that we may agree with Stretton when he observes:

It was a tragedy that socialism had to be born between the first industrial revolution and the second, when working families had scarcely any private resources and an appalling proportion of all private property was used by the few who owned it to exploit the labour of the many who didn't. . . . It is a terrible mistake to let the abuse of capitalist property discredit the idea of family property or to confuse commercial capital with the home capital which really has opposite possibilities (1974, 76).

This is, however, a 'terrible mistake' which continues to be made in socialist writing on housing tenure.

The second factor, also historical in origin, is the traditional intellectual distaste for all forms of 'petty property' and the ways of thinking and acting which have been associated with it. Owner occupiers are for socialists today what the French peasantry was for Marx in the mid-nineteenth century – a hopelessly conservative section of the population which is too easily seduced into supporting the *status quo* by virtue of its vested interest in a small holding of land. Every display of personal attachment to this land and property on the part of owner occupiers – the gnomes in the garden, the name on the garden gate, the classical door chimes inside the personally erected front door porch – is for socialist critics a further wincing reminder of the 'petty bourgeois' mentality and aspirations which are apparently unleashed by a 'home of one's own'. Private ownership is attacked because individualism – the private realm – is deeply distrusted.

The socialist case against owner occupation thus boils down to little more than an ill thought-out commitment to the ultimate value of collectivism coupled with an implicit fear of individualism. As Keat has noted, 'For many socialists, capitalism is to be condemned not only as a system based on the exploitation of one class by another . . . but also for the individualistic character of its social relationships' (1981, 127). Yet it is clear that socialism must be reconciled with individualism, and that common ownership of the means of production cannot imply collective ownership of *all* property. What Lafargue calls property of personal appropriation (a subcategory of individual ownership of means of consumption which relates to 'the food one eats . . . and the articles of clothing and objects of luxury – rings, jewels, etc. – with which one covers and decks oneself' – Lafargue, no date, 4) will presumably remain individual private property even under socialism. Indeed, it can plausibly be argued that such intensely personal forms of ownership perform important psychological functions for the individual, whether in socialist, capitalist or precapitalist societies. As Trasler suggests:

Children and adults depend upon their possessions for security (in several senses of the term), for reassurance, as a means of expressing love and acknowledging loveworthiness, and as the means of exerting power over others and defending oneself against intrusions on his (sic) autonomy' (1982, 46).

It would indeed be by an awesome state which sought to dispossess the suitor of his roses or the child of its teddy bear.

The psychology of personal property ownership is an underdeveloped area deserving of more attention, but what does seem to be clear is that such property does function in important ways as a means of maintaining control over one's personal world and of expressing one's identity, both to self and others. Unless the self is to be totally eclipsed by the collectivity under socialism (what Durkheim saw as the pathology of excessive altruism, or what with historical hindsight we may refer to as the Kampuchean formula), then there will clearly remain an important aspect of private, and hence exclusive, property ownership in any future socialist reconstruction of society.

This then raises the question of the limits of property of personal appropriation. Where along the continuum of property rights of consumption – from clothing to personal means of transportation to housing to schooling and medical treatment – is the point at which private ownership becomes incompatible with socialist practice?

One answer to this can be developed on the basis of the concept of exploitation discussed earlier. According to this, exploitation is defined not simply in terms of the extraction of surplus value in the sphere of production, but more generally as the asymmetrical production of life chances (Giddens) and the exclusion of one group by another from access to social resources (Parkin). All property ownership, of course, entails exclusion – without ineligibles, no property – but only closure around certain kinds of resources can be seen as exploitative in the sense of *generating* unequal access to life chances. Private property rights in educational provision or medical care, for example, are exploitative for so long as the private sector offers material advantages such as cultural capital or swifter treatment which are denied to those for whom a market mode of consumption is closed off and which thus create new sources of inequality over and above those arising out of the world of work. But what of housing?

As it stands, private home ownership in Britain is exploitative for two reasons. First, it functions as a source of wealth accumulation and thus provides a means of augmenting material resources which is denied to non-owners. Second, because like any other form of property ownership owner occupation entails not only the right to use the dwelling (a right also enjoyed by those who rent) but also rights of control (within limits enforced through planning and through law) and alienation (i.e. rights of sale and inheritance) which are denied to non-owners, it tends to intensify inequalities of power and to perpetuate such inequalities across the generations. Tenants, in other words, are not only economically disadvantaged relative to owners, but they lack the control over their immediate environment which owners generally take for granted, and these disadvantages are magnified inter-generationally through property transfers within the owner occupied sector.

It does not follow from this, however, that a socialist housing strategy should attempt to restrict consumer choice between tenures (e.g. by preventing council tenants from buying their homes or by expropriating existing home owners), but

rather that it should remove the exploitative aspects of ownership. This would mean first, the prevention of future capital gains, not necessarily through taxation and removal of subsidies (for as we saw earlier, such negative strategies would now prove politically difficult if not impossible to implement), but through, for example, the extension of tax relief provisions to rent payments as well as mortgage interest payments thus negating the relative advantages currently enjoyed by house purchasers or through a new system of indexed mortgages which would prevent capital gains accruing from inflation while at the same time avoiding the need for subsidies (see Easton, 1979; Stretton, 1974). Second, it would also mean extending rights of control and alienation to the public sector through the introduction of measures such as tenants' charters, devolved estate management and voluntary leasehold ownership schemes (see, for example, the proposals outlined in the recent Labour Party discussion document, *A future for public housing*, 1981), thereby effectively equalizing rights between those who own and those who rent their homes. In this way, rather than restricting choice, choice could be extended and two-way mobility between the sectors encouraged through the development of a positive housing programme as opposed to the enforcement of negative sanctions.

With its exploitative advantages removed, it may be imagined that owner occupation would in time fade away. Jacobs, for example, suggests that, 'Stripped of the special advantages it now enjoys, owner occupation will gradually decline in importance as the superiority of public ownership becomes increasingly apparent' (1982, 44). However, while the logic of this argument (which is based on the assumption of purely economic rationality) may perhaps be true of private health and education provisions (for were it possible to remove the exploitative aspects of market provision in these two cases, it seems probable that few people would be willing to continue to pay for them), it seems less plausible in the case of housing where motives for purchase are as much expressive as economic<sup>2</sup>.

The marxist literature on owner occupation is replete with caustic critiques of the view, often expressed in government publications, that the desire for home ownership is in some way 'natural'. Such criticisms are entirely justified, but having made them, it is still necessary to consider why such a desire appears to be so entrenched and so widespread. As I have argued elsewhere, the explanations in terms of ideological manipulation which are all too often advanced in this literature are both crude and unsupportable (see Saunders, 1979, 82–83).

In an interesting paper, Rose has suggested that:

<sup>2</sup> It should, however, be noted that the case for the abolition of the private sector in health and education is much stronger than it is in the case of housing precisely because it is almost inconceivable that the exploitative relations entailed in private medicine and private schooling could be removed while leaving a market option open. For example, the advantages of an English public school education, many of which are intangible (contacts, preparation for elite membership, etc.) cannot be eradicated without eradicating the schools themselves. Similarly queue jumping for medical treatment cannot easily be prevented while leaving private medicine itself intact.

Little attention has been paid to the emergence and development of desires and pressures for home ownership by working people themselves . . . there has been a widespread lack of recognition that this way of occupying houses was historically created, actively sought after, fought for . . . (1981, 3–4).

On the basis of her research in Northampton and Cornwall, she suggests that, far from being a passive response to bourgeois ideology, working-class aspirations for home ownership were in the nineteenth century a response to the increasing erosion of personal autonomy by capitalist social relations, and thus represented an attempt to reestablish a 'separate sphere in the sense of seeking out, in and through the fabric of everyday life, a distinct cultural space for gaining as much control as possible over the purpose and direction of our lives' (p. 32).<sup>3</sup> While noting that for some (e.g. housewives and home workers) the home has represented an isolated workplace rather than a refuge from work, Rose nevertheless points out that this desire for a 'separate sphere' of personal control and autonomy may still be a major factor in the desire for home ownership today. As Porteous observes, the home is 'the locus at which individual control of fixed physical space is paramount' (1976, 384).

In my view, however, the desire for home ownership goes even deeper than the desire for a private realm of personal control and autonomy and may be explained as one response to what Giddens (1981) has referred to as the 'erosion of ontological security' in the modern world following the development of capitalism. The ontological security provided in precapitalist (or what he terms 'class-divided') societies by enduring ties of kinship and tradition has been eroded, according to Giddens, as a result of the progressive extension of 'time-space distanciation'. What he means by this rather clumsy neologism is that both temporal organization (epitomized by the formal character of clock time) and spatial organization (epitomized by the replacement of natural spatial configurations by created ones) have led to the abstraction of the content of human activity from its temporal and spatial context, a 'transformation of substance into form' (p. 152) resulting in the characteristic sense of rootlessness and ultimate meaninglessness of modern life. As Giddens suggests, this has led to a renewed search for ontological security which is today founded (in a more fragile form than previously) in the private realm.

<sup>3</sup> The possibility that the market mode of consumption may have been positively valued by some sections of the working class in the latter part of the nineteenth century as a means of establishing a degree of autonomy from capitalist work relations and from state domination is one deserving of further research. Green's work on the Friendly Societies, for example, suggests that workers and their families were able to exert considerable control over their medical treatment through cooperative mutual aid strategies (Green, 1982); an argument which in some ways parallels Rose's work on the development of working-class aspirations for home ownership during the same period. Seen in this light, the possibility presents itself that the development of a socialized mode of health and housing provision for the working class in this century had the intended or unintended effect of undermining a crucial sphere of autonomy and control in the organization of consumption. Certainly, there is historical evidence to show that many working people were hostile in the development of many state welfare provisions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see, in particular, Pelling, 1968), in which case theories which trace the origins of the welfare state to the popular pressure for it may need to be reexamined.

It is my contention that the desire for home ownership is primarily an expression of this need for ontological security, for a 'home of one's own' is above all else a physical (hence spatially rooted) and permanent (hence temporally rooted, even in perpetuity across generations) location in the world where the individual can feel, literally and metaphorically, 'at home'. It is, in short, the individual solution to the societal problem of alienation, in the broadest sense of that term.

This leads us to a final concluding observation. It is a commonplace in the contemporary marxist literature to suggest that the home offers scant compensation for the deprivations of work (cf. Harvey, 1978), for if the causes of alienation lie in the social organization of production, then its solutions must lie there too. This may or may not be so; many home owners appear to find ample and genuine satisfaction in their home-based pursuits – gardening, decorating, furnishing, DIY and the rest – and the fact (persistently referred to in the literature) that home ownership appears to be a conservatizing influence must surely lead us to conclude that this is so precisely because it (to some extent at least) compensates felt human needs. It is therefore plausible to suggest that, if personal home ownership provides some, albeit fragile, ontological security in the modern world, then the desire for it may remain pervasive and widespread for as long as temporal and spatial distancing generates ontological insecurity. Since it is difficult to envisage a socialist mode of production which returns us to the precapitalist immediacy of temporal and spatial organization, we may assume that the desire for individual property rights in the home will continue even after the socialist reorganization of the workplace has been completed. In the modern world, in other words, the home must be added to Lafargue's catalogue of 'property of personal appropriation', in which case the need to develop a coherent socialist theory of individual property ownership is stronger now than ever before.

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On peut considérer cet article essentiellement comme une contribution à notre manière d'envisager l'organisation sociale de la consommation dans les sociétés capitalistes de dernière époque.

Un centre d'intérêt majeur de l'exposé est la signification économique, politique et sociologique de la propriété de logements individuels et la première section considère les travaux récents portant sur le débat qui se poursuit concernant les catégories et les conditions d'occupation de logements. A la suite de l'examen, on soutient que, quoique les droits à la propriété individuelle dans le domaine du logement soient d'une importance cruciale à la fois sur le plan économique (en produisant des avantages matériels grâce aux gains en capital) et politiquement (en encourageant, dans l'ensemble, le sens des valeurs non ou anti-collectivistes), il n'est pas possible de les analyser sous l'angle de la théorie des classes. On suggère plutôt que nous devons établir une distinction entre les relations de classes, résultant de l'organisation sociale de la production, et les relations sectorielles qui résultent de l'organisation sociale de la consommation. La division entre les propriétaires et non propriétaires de logements constitue, si l'on considère cette distinction, l'une des bases des fissures sectorielles.

La seconde partie de l'exposé s'efforce alors de développer une perspective théorique et historique concernant les alignements sectoriels et soutient, en ce qui concerne les transports, les soins médicaux et l'enseignement ainsi que le logement, qu'une transition à long terme d'une mode de consommation socialisée à un mode privatisé au Royaume-Uni aboutit aujourd'hui à une scission sectorielle majeure entre une majorité de ménages privilégiés qui bénéficient de l'accès à ce que fournit le secteur privé et une minorité exploitée et de plus en plus marginalisée qui continue à compter sur l'Etat. On suggère que cette division non seulement coupe en travers des lignes conventionnelles de fissures de classes mais devient sur certains plans plus significative que la classe quant à l'impact qu'elle a sur les alignements politiques et la distribution des possibilités offertes dans l'existence.

La section finale de l'exposé considère la signification de cet argument quant à la théorie et quant à la pratique socialistes contemporaines. Soutenant que la théorie socialiste ignore ou tend à ne pas accorder d'importance bien souvent à la question de la consommation, alors que la pratique socialiste (par exemple en ce qui concerne les logements fournis par les municipalités au Royaume-Uni) est trop souvent fondée sur l'héritage anachronistique du XIXe siècle, l'exposé considère dans quelle mesure les droits à la propriété privée quant aux moyens de consommation peuvent être compatibles avec, et même constituer un élément important, d'une réorganisation socialiste de la société.

Dieser Artikel ist in erster Linie als ein Beitrag zu unserem Verständnis der sozialen Organisation des Verbrauchs in spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaftsformen zu verstehen. Der Hauptbrennpunkt des Artikels ist die wirtschaftliche, politische und soziologische Bedeutung privater Hauseigentumschaft, und der erste Teil beschäftigt sich mit den jüngsten Aktivitäten in der anhaltenden Debatte über Eigentumskategorien und Hausbesitz. Als Ergebnis dieser Übersicht wird argumentiert daß, obwohl das private Eigentumsrecht im Wohnungswesen von zentraler Bedeutung ist, sowohl wirtschaftlich (indem durch Kapitalgewinn materielle Vorteile entstehen) und politisch (indem weitreichende nicht-oder anti-kollektivistische Wert gefördert werden), es doch nicht im Sinne von Klassentheorie untersucht werden kann. Es soll hier vielmehr gesagt werden, daß wir unterscheiden müssen zwischen Klassenbeziehungen, die sich aus der sozialen Produktionsorganisation ergeben, und Sektorbeziehungen, die sich aus der sozialen Verbrauchsorganisation ergeben. Die Unterteilung von Hausbesitzern und Nicht-Hausbesitzern ist, im Sinne dieser Unterscheidung, eine Grundlage sektoraler Spaltungen.

Der zweite Teil des Artikels versucht dann, eine theoretische und historische Perspektive für sektorale Gleichschaltungen zu eröffnen und argumentiert, in Bezug auf Transport, Gesundheit und Erziehung wie auch das Wohnwesen, daß ein langandauernder Übergang von einer sozialisierten zu einer privatisierten Verbrauchsweise heute in Großbritannien in einer großen sektoralen Spaltung resultiert zwischen einer privilegierten Majorität von Haushalten mit privaten Mitteln und einer in steigendem Maße abgedrängten und ausgenutzten Minorität, die weiterhin auf den Staat angewiesen ist. Diese Spaltung, so meinen wir, läuft nicht nur quer durch die konventionellen Klassenunterschiede, sondern wird in mancher Hinsicht bedeutungsvoller als diese insofern, als sie eine Wirkung auf politische Gleichschaltungen und die Verteilung der Lebenschancen hat.

Der letzte Teil des Artikels behandelt die Bedeutung dieser Argumentation in Bezug auf die heutige sozialistische Theorie und Praxis. Er spricht sich dafür aus, daß die sozialistische Theorie

die Frage des Verbrauchs oft vernachlässigt oder abgetan hat, während die sozialistische Praxis (d.h. in Bezug auf Stadtwohnungen in Großbritannien) zu oft auf anachronistische Methoden aus dem 19. Jahrhundert zurückgeht, und untersucht das Ausmaß, in welchem private Eigentumsrechte mit einer sozialistischen Reorganisation der Gesellschaft vereinbar sind und vielleicht sogar einen wichtigen Aspekt derselben darstellen.

Esta ponencia debe verse principalmente como una contribución a nuestra comprensión de la organización social del consumo en sociedades capitalistas avanzadas.

Uno de los principales enfoques de la ponencia es en el significado económico, político y sociológico de la propiedad particular de la vivienda, y la primera sección considera recientes labores en el debate continuo respecto a las clases de viviendas y a la tenencia de viviendas. Como resultado del examen, se arguye que, si bien los derechos de propiedad privados en la vivienda son de vital importancia, tanto políticamente (al fomentar valores en general no o anti-colectivistas), como económicamente (al generar ventajas materiales a través de beneficios de capital), no se pueden analizar en términos de la teoría de clases. En su vez, se sugiere que tenemos que distinguir relaciones de clase, resultantes de la organización social de la producción, y relaciones sectoriales, resultantes de la organización social del consumo. La división entre propietarios y no-propietarios de viviendas, es, según esta distinción, una de las bases de divisiones sectoriales.

La segunda parte de esta ponencia trata entonces de desarrollar una perspectiva teórica e histórica sobre los alineamientos sectoriales, y arguye, con referencia al transporte, la sanidad y la educación, igualmente que la vivienda, de que una transición a largo plazo entre un modo socializado a un modo privatizado de consumo en Gran Bretaña está produciendo hoy en día una gran división sectorial entre una mayoría privilegiada de hogares, que gozan del acceso a provisión particular, y una minoría cada vez más marginalizada y explotada, que siguen teniendo que depender del estado. Esta división, se sugiere, no sólo corta a través de las líneas convencionales de división de clases, sino que en algunas formas se está convirtiendo más importante que la clase respecto a su impacto en las alieaciones políticas y la distribución de las oportunidades en la vida.

La última sección de la ponencia examina la importancia de este argumento para la teoría y práctica modernas del socialismo. Arguyendo que la teoría socialista con frecuencia ha desatendido o desechado la cuestión de consumo, mientras que la práctica socialista (por ejemplo, en relación a las viviendas municipales en la Gran Bretaña), se funda, en muchísimos casos, en las herencias anacrónicas del siglo diecinueve, la ponencia examina hasta qué punto el derecho de propiedad privada en los medios de consumo puede ser comparable con cualquier reorganización socialista de la sociedad, e incluso ser una importante característica de la misma.