

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The question of working-class
home ownership
by

Alan Mabin and Sue Parnell

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INTRODUCTION

Government accommodation represents a high proportion of the country's urban housing stock. The dominance of public housing in the township landscape highlights the importance of the policy shift towards home ownership. The selling of state-owned rental units is taking place in a context of intense scarcity of housing in South Africa - a scarcity which has deepened over the past ten years. This scarcity has helped to generate rent strikes, protests and even riots in the townships where the majority of black South Africans live. The housing problem has also caused concern among employers over their employees' living conditions. These events and concerns have contributed to policy shifts on the part of the state.

The announcement in March last year of the government's intention to sell 500 000 houses was widely welcomed, by the daily press, The Urban Foundation, and the Soweto Civic Association among others (c.f. Rand Daily Mail, 4.3.83, 5.3.83; Citizen, 4.3.83; Star, 4.3.83; Beeld, 4.3.83). The sale of state housing extends the shift in policy which has included the employment of 'self help' schemes and other projects which have involved self-provided housing. Indeed, since the late sixties policy has moved further away from state provision of housing towards forcing hundreds of thousands of people to provide their own shelter through squatting. In this paper we attempt to explain the shift in state policy; we then examine the implications of 'home-ownership' schemes for black working class South Africans in the light of the substantial literature on the subject emanating from other countries. Political strategies with respect to the housing question are briefly explored.

THE SHIFT TO HOME OWNERSHIP

The South African state's involvement in housing grew rapidly from the nineteen twenties onwards, as municipalities and central government departments assumed ever more responsibility for the investment of capital in housing. Their heyday of state housing construction in South Africa was in the fifties and sixties, when most of the housing units which the government now plans to sell were built (Morris, 1981). The crucial aspect of this development was that the state retained control over the housing and, through numerous offices in the townships and housing estates, collected the rents paid.

In recent years in many capitalist countries less and less housing has been produced and rented by the state. Increasingly, people who live in the cities of the capitalist world have been forced to look away from the state as the source of their housing. This process has been described by Michael Harloe (1981) as the 'recommodification' of housing, by which he means that from a situation in which much housing was supplied by the state, people in capitalist cities now find themselves forced to seek housing which they purchase or rent in the market rather like any other commodity - except that it is their largest single item of expenditure. This recommodification is typified by the Thatcher government's policy of selling off council housing in Britain (Rose, 1980; Mabin, 1983). An early scheme allowing council tenants to convert to home ownership in South Africa was introduced by the Johannesburg City Council in 1944 (Parnell, 1983). But the dominant theme in the state's rôle in housing in subsequent decades was one of socialised, collective consumption, to apply the phrases of French urban sociologists (Pickvance, 1976; Preteceille, 1981). 'Collective consumption' has proved not to be a necessary and permanent feature of capitalism, but an historically-specific phenomenon (Rose, 1980; Mackenzie, 1978), and shifts in housing policy began to emerge in South Africa as elsewhere at least fifteen years ago.

The process of recommodifying housing in South Africa has advanced through at least three phases since the late sixties (Mabin, 1983) :

1. The state simply ceased, or practically ceased, its direct involvement in the construction of urban housing, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to provide their own housing - which many have done in squatter settlements. Renting a piece of land in the Winterveld or hiring private contractors to lay foundation slabs in Kroonstad is

what self-help really means under these conditions (Hart, 1983). Far fewer people have been able to borrow from employers and institutions to build or buy in more established areas.

2. The state, especially at the local level, began to plan and manage (though not to construct) new housing schemes for sale instead of rental. The classic example is the Cape Town City Council's scheme at Mitchell's Plain, though the change in local authority and Department of Community Development policies making this possible seems to have had its roots in white housing schemes in the early seventies (Financial Mail, 5.5.1978, Special Report, p.3; Robins, 1983).
3. Increasingly the state has begun to lease on long term or to sell its existing rental housing stock (Morris, 1981). This would not have been possible without the acute housing shortage brought about by the effects of earlier state policies, since building society and other institutional lending is dependent on a ready ability to resell houses on which bond repayments are in default (Mabin, 1983). In recent years the government's policy has been :

' The promotion of facilities for the provision of adequate housing of satisfactory quality and standard at reasonable cost for all population groups, and the encouragement of home ownership with emphasis on the leading rôle that the private sector should play in this and the consequent restriction of the rôle of the public sector as far as possible to the provision of sub-economic housing.' (Republic of South Africa, 1977, par. 2).

There are many forces producing this recommodification of housing. In the case of the United States and Western Europe, recession, the fiscal crisis of the state and the restructuring of capital have been linked to the shift away from state-supplied housing (Miller, 1978; Harloe, 1981; Tomaskovic-De. and Miller, 1982). These essentially economic forces do not operate in a political vacuum, however. In both the Federal Republic of Germany and the United Kingdom, social democratic and conservative governments have been responsible for the encouragement of home ownership schemes (Harloe, 1981); while in the United States the political program of the present federal government clearly favours private home ownership over public housing

provision / (Tomaskovic-Devey and Miller, 1982).

Similarly, many political pressures have been, at least in part, responsible for the recommodification of housing in South Africa. In order to examine these pressures, the Mitchell's Plain housing scheme in Cape Town provides a useful example. Four particular factors have been identified as having had an influence on the emergence of this scheme, which was built for owner-occupation:

1. the demands of tenants in council rental schemes for better housing, expressed through urban unrest and political protest, particularly in 1976 and 1980;
2. demands for better housing for workers made by some employees and their organisations in order to reduce absenteeism and other problems, and in order to house the better-paid sections of the work force;
3. the wider state policy of regional development necessitating the development of new coloured group areas in the Western Cape such as Atlantis and Mitchell's Plain; and
4. the 'overall national strategy' of, developing a 'black middle class' which can be co-opted to the support of government and business involves the development of separate residential areas for 'petty bourgeois' and working class people, as opposed to the earlier policy of encouraging 'balanced social communities' in which people of diverse incomes were housed in the same areas (Social Review, 1981, pp. 25-28).

It is undoubtedly the case that the state has been forced to respond to political forces in the development of its housing policies. But as the case of Mitchell's Plain shows, these political pressures have been intertwined with economic forces in producing shifts in policy. Thus, well before the major urban upheavals of 1976 and 1980, the Cape Town City Council was engaged in the planning and construction of Mitchell's Plain, in part owing to the lack of finance available for the construction of further rental schemes (Financial Mail, 5.5.1978, ^{Special Report} 6, p.3; c.f. Morris, 1972, pp 13-15). It is clearly necessary to look beyond the purely political arena for explanations of recommodification of housing. Yet the political pressures cannot be ignored. As David Dewar has noted, the state is involved in an attempt to depoliticise the housing question by

distancing itself from the provision of shelter; the same point is constantly reiterated in seminars and conferences on housing (e.g. Lamont, 1983; Dewar, 1983). At the same time, the fiscal questions surrounding the state - as reflected in rising taxation and cuts in spending - reveal that the state is at least reluctant, if not unable, to finance new, large-scale housing construction. The full explanation of recommodification in South Africa requires an integration of the economic and political dimensions which has not yet been accomplished.

Among the factors which require integration into the explanation of shifts in government housing policy is the interaction between private institutions such as banks and building societies, always important as determinants of the housing question in capitalist societies (c.f. Harvey, 1975; Boddy, 1976; Boddy, 1981), and the state. The commission of enquiry into certain matters relating to building societies in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1982) took the view that 'the government's policy on building societies emanates essentially from its policy on the housing of the various population groups' (Republic of South Africa, 1982, p.5, par. 2.3.2). At the same time the building societies themselves clearly play a rôle in the formulation of state policy, for it was the same commission, chaired by Mr Boet Viljoen (past president of the Association of Building Societies) which originally recommended the sale of existing Soweto houses (RSA, 1982). The same individual's reaction to the government home ownership announcements was that 'it was great news ... the building societies are willing and able to advance mortgage finance' (Rand Daily Mail, 4.3.83). 'Mr Viljoen also expressed delight that people who had rented their homes for many years would be able through home ownership to share in the fruits of the capitalist system' (RDM, 4.3.83).

It is at least possible to suggest that financial community enthusiasm over home ownership schemes is related to the support which the institutions receive from the state in connection with home ownership. Building societies, for example, receive state support, e.g. tax concessions on money invested with building societies (Republic of South Africa, 1982, p.3, par. 2.1.4) and a favourable legal framework with regulatory prescriptions 'mainly in respect of less restrictive requirements for liquid assets, prescribed investments and capital and reserve ratios' (Republic of South Africa, 1982, p.6, par. 2.3.3.). The financial 'shelter' experienced by

building societies from the State has made them 'pillars of stability within the national economy' (RSA, 1982, p.6., par. 2.4.3.). A satisfactory analysis will have to incorporate such factors in its explanation of recommodification.

To return to the political terrain, perhaps the most intriguing question with respect to the state's program of house sales is the haste with which the program is being pursued. While pressure from various quarters may have been responsible for the overall shift in housing policy, the speed with which the state is attempting to dispose of its housing units is suggestive of additional motives. While it remains impossible to move beyond speculation at this stage, the impending autonomy to be granted to (or imposed on) local authorities in coloured and Indian group areas and to community councils in prescribed African urban areas and the need to find ways of financing these authorities may well have necessitated the sale of housing in the relevant areas to provide initial capital (through donation of sale proceeds from the National Housing Fund) and ongoing rates and service levy income from owner occupants. By the time these new types of local state apparatus come into being the sale of much state housing may well be a fait accompli.

The explanations advanced in the popular media (especially newspapers) for the sale of state-owned rental units have tended to concentrate on the political elements involved. Similarly, reactions to the selling scheme have centred on its political significance. In the following sections of this paper, we focus first on the economic consequences of the state's program in order to inform a subsequent analysis of the political significance of new developments in housing in South Africa.

IMPLICATIONS OF SELLING STATE HOUSING

Simply because the state decides to sell its houses and flats to their current tenants does not mean that all tenants will become - or, more importantly, remain - home owners. 'State homes for sale' does not necessarily mean a 'massive boost for home ownership', to juxtapose two newspaper headlines at the time the selling scheme was announced (RDM, 4.3.83, Citizen, 4.3.83). The difficulties in arranging finance for many tenants to buy their existing houses have long been recognised (Boaden, 1980). An examination of the costs involved in purchasing a home illustrates these difficulties. In the new selling scheme, the pricing principle is that

the 'revalued price' of housing units is calculated as

$$\text{Price} = \frac{\text{original cost} \times \text{building index inflation rate}}{2}$$

Thus a house built in Soweto in 1960 for R400 would cost its tenant about R1 700 in 1983 (Kruger, 1983). Discounts are, however, available, as shown in Table 1. Thus, a tenant who has occupied a house priced at R1 700 for 5 years or more, and who buys within one year of July 1, 1983, is eligible for discounts of 30%, 5% plus 5% or a total discount of 40%. The price to such a tenant would, therefore, be about R1 000. However, in addition there are costs associated with transfer fees, water and sewage connections and certain other costs. Even for a Soweto resident who secures an 80% employer subsidy or (under the 99 year lease scheme) building society loan, therefore, the initial outlay on the 'home ownership' scheme or under the 99-year leasehold scheme for the cheapest houses will be about R475 or R985 respectively (1). The income of Soweto residents in 1982 was distributed as shown in Table 3. At the same time the cost of living for a family of six in Soweto was estimated to be R277 (Potgieter, 1982). More than half of Soweto residents earning below this figure could not realistically be expected to have saved the R500 to R1 000 required as the initial outlay for home ownership (2). These rough calculations suggest, therefore, that from a financial standpoint some fairly large proportion of Sowetans will be unable to enter the ranks of holders of 99-year leases or occupancy titles. The same conclusion can presumably be reached with respect to residents of other African residential areas in South African cities.

This conclusion further suggests that the population of the urban African townships will become divided into a number of different groups. It is not the intention of this paper to suggest that such groups will constitute 'housing classes' in the sense which Rex and Moore (1967) imply. Nevertheless at this point some different groupings can be identified.

1. Not all the houses in any township will be offered for sale, for a variety of reasons including the difficulties of securing finance in cases of substandard construction and poorly divided semi-detached or row housing. In Soweto, for example, it is the intention of the West Rand Administration Board (WRAB) to offer approximately 27 000 units on leasehold and 40 000 on occupancy titles, out of a total of

about 105 000 units (Knoetze, 1983). Therefore, some 40 000 houses will remain rental units. The official tenants of these houses will continue to pay rents to WRAB or to the Community Council; as yet it is unclear what the structure of rentals will be, but it seems that steep rises are in the offing, judging by events in Soweto and elsewhere. A similar group of 'council tenants' will no doubt exist in other townships.

2. Within most townships there is, of course, a large number of subtenants renting rooms or other spaces. The existence of this phenomenon, which is well-known to administrators (Knoetze, 1983), means that there is already a substantial private rental market in shelter. Since housing will be sold in the first instance to official tenants, this group can be expected to persist in much the same form for the foreseeable future.
3. The financial situation of many of those who purchase houses will ensure that a private housing market will develop in places like Kagiso, Chatsworth, Retreat and other townships.

While the private sector support of home ownership means that many blacks can receive employer assistance in buying a home, the housing scheme run by Anglo American, for example, requires that participant employees leaving the company liquidate their loan within six months of leaving the corporation, during which period full building society interest rates are charged (Rand Daily Mail 23/2/83). An individual defaulting on mortgage repayments will be evicted.

Many former tenants who have bought their houses relatively cheaply will sell out at enough profit to buy a couple of new household appliances and thereafter rent their homes from private landlords - until they are evicted or forced out by unaffordable rents. As purchasers of homes default on bond repayments their houses will be resold to other buyers - perhaps landlords again. It is inevitable that a concentration of ownership will occur (Mabin, 1983).

Some of those who pass relatively briefly through 'owner occupancy' will no doubt secure positions as council tenants, more perhaps as subtenants. But, in addition, many will be 'private tenants'.

4. A tight private rental market and changes in influx control laws making "adequate housing" the control on access to the cities will force people out of town altogether. It seems most likely that these people will end up in some towns in the bantustans ('homelands') such as Mafikeng or Umtata; in the 'self-help' schemes of diverse locations (Inanda, Onverwacht) and the squatter settlements near cities but in the bantustans (such as the Winterveld); and in the dispersed new growth points, such as Bronkhorstspuit. Even without the passage of legislation such as the 'Orderly Movement and Settlement Bill' proposed during 1982, the increasing costs of housing will produce these effects, swelling the urban and semi-urban populations of relatively peripheral areas of the country with displaced urbanites.
5. None of this is to deny that a substantial group of 'owner-occupants' is now emerging in the townships, nor that the new selling scheme will have some success, measured in terms of units sold. For the majority of these people, owner-occupancy will be an end in itself, perhaps, as Kemeny (1977, p. 50 ; 1980, p. 378) suggests, increasing housing costs for young nuclear families but decreasing housing costs in later years. The potential political implications of the growth of this group of owner-occupants will be discussed below.
6. If it is correct to argue that a considerable number of purchasers will choose or be forced to sell, then conversely those who are able to concentrate housing in their own hands will emerge as a distinct group of private landlords, and, perhaps, speculators. Since it is quite likely that 99 year leaseholds and even occupancy titles will be trading, within a year or two of the initial large-scale sale programme's commencement, at prices of three or more times their state-sale level, both the initial impetus to selling and the existence of limits on the numbers of people who will be able to purchase houses are evident. Quite possibly those who presently derive a large income from private subtenants within the rental housing stock will become the large-scale landlords of the eighties. Historically, this shift will represent a return to the extensive landlordism which once marked working class areas of South African cities such as Cato Manor, District Six, Doornfontein and Sophiatown, in some cases as early as the 1860s (Maasdorp and Humphreys, 1975; Radford, 1979; Hellman, 1948; Paton, 1977). Unfortunately detailed work on the development of private landlordism and the housing market generally in home ownership schemes such as

Mitchell's Plain is not yet available, but such research will shed light on likely directions in these aspects of the housing question.

7. Those owner-occupants who in addition to the initial purchase of their houses continue to accumulate additional benefits by, perhaps, moving relatively frequently and realising cash gains as they do so, or by renting spaces to subtenants, or by other forms of participation in the housing market, may be separated from 'ordinary' owner-occupants on one hand, and landlords as such on the other. The emergency of such a grouping - some of whom will be in transition between owner-occupation and landlordism - seems assured, and the questions posed by the existence of these ^{pre-accumulators} again demand discussion of the political significance of the home ownership program.

The emergence of such diverse groupings in relation to housing suggests a number of different aspirations among them which might lead to conflict between them and, at least, to some resistance to the process of selling of state-owned housing. When it is recalled that housing has been at the centre of a number of recent violent struggles in the townships (the Cape Flats in 1980, Lamontville in 1983 for example); that home ownership has been demanded by some groups (e.g. the Soweto Civic Association) only on condition that freehold tenure over both land and 'improvements' be the basis of such schemes; and that previous selling schemes (the 99 year leasehold scheme and the Mitchell's Plain project) have met with considerable apathy if not substantial resistance; then it is unsurprising that the administrators responsible for the sale of housing have adopted a mass advertising approach to their task. In some respects this approach is similar to that adopted by the Cape Town City Council to the sale of houses at Mitchell's Plain, where a private company was contracted to carry out the job at a commission of R90 per sale (Social Review, 1981, p. 32; see also Fig. 1). As McCarthy and Friedmann (1982) have argued, the mass media reflect many changes in urban areas; the beginnings of the 'media push' for home ownership are already evident. The banner headlines which greeted the March, 1983, announcement of the state's recommodification program are merely a symptom of a much larger phenomenon. Without a detailed analysis of this 'tremendous propaganda on behalf of the personal benefits of home owning' (Agnew, 1981, p.475), the space devoted to newspaper columns like the Rand Daily Mail's 'Homefront', the time allotted to the joys of individual owner-occupation in both programming and advertising on television and the appearance of the first pamphlets ^{and billboards} aimed at 'consumers' of housing in areas such as Soweto (WRAB, 1983; see also Fig. 2) are nevertheless obvious signs

of the extent to which the media are being employed to overcome apathy and resistance to recommodification.

While further research on the ways in which the media lend themselves to the home ownership drive is obviously necessary, the political implications of home ownership which are not evident in the treatment given to it by the popular media require much further analysis. It is to these political aspects of the process that we now turn our attention.

RE-EXAMINING THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HOME OWNERSHIP

When the new 'home ownership' scheme was announced by Dr Piet Koornhof and Mr Pen Kotze, the Ministers of Co-operation and Development and of Community Development respectively, it was the 'stabilising effects' of the scheme which drew comment from various quarters :

'The new home-ownership scheme involving the sale by the Government of 500 000 State-owned houses has been hailed all round as "one of the most stabilising" steps that has been taken in many years".'

(Rand Daily Mail 5.3.1983)

'Dr Nthatho Motlana, chairman of the Soweto Civic Association, and the Urban Foundation both saw it as having stabilising effects.'

(Rand Daily Mail 4.3.1983)

It seems that not only the Urban Foundation and the Soweto Civic Association, but also the critics of state housing policy, are in agreement about the effects of this policy. All agree that the extension of house ownership is likely to stabilise the population of the cities, not only geographically but socially: home ownership is almost universally seen as encouraging conservatism, as an integral part of the creation of a 'middle class'. On one hand the Urban Foundation enthusiastically promotes home ownership in order to contribute to the development of a property-owning black middle class who will champion the virtues of 'free enterprise' (Urban Foundation, 1978; Urban Foundation, 1980; Karon, 1982). On the other hand critics of home ownership have traditionally seen it as diversionary for the working class, and aspirations towards home ownership as 'false consciousness' not in the

true interests of the working class. Although these views differ radically in supporting and rejecting home ownership respectively, they rest on eventually the same analysis: that home ownership encourages stability and conservatism. As the South African state takes its largest-ever step towards selling off state-owned retail housing, it becomes essential to re-examine home ownership and its political implications.

The recognition that home ownership may have different meanings for various groups underlies our analysis. At the same time, the recent literature on the politics of owner-occupation displays many different understandings of the significance of home ownership, particularly for the working classes of capitalist societies. A review of this recent literature provides the starting point for our analysis; and within this review, Edel's classificatory exercise is useful in separating a number of perspectives in the literature from one another :

Working-class ownership is an anomaly if one takes literally the notion that the proletariat has 'nothing to lose but (its) chains'. From this perspective, unless the owner occupier is defined out of the proletariat, either the home must be defined as 'nothing', or it must be defined as a 'chain'. (Edel, 1982, p. 206).

1. The home as 'nothing'

The approach which effectively defines the home as nothing is based on the idea that the home is not capital. The rationale for this position is that a house is not the same kind of property as stocks or bonds and that the decision to buy a house, therefore, does not represent a profitable venture based on the desire for accumulation; but is, rather, a product of the need to acquire a series of housing services (Luria, 1976, pp. 267-268).

The house may be defined as nothing for two other reasons. First, it may not, as in the Cape Town case where the condition of houses is so appalling to be worth wanting to own (Cape Times, 16.5.1983; Grassroots, April, 1983). Second, the change to ownership may represent no necessary change in social relations :

Indeed, how does changing the title in any way affect the exploitation of working people by capitalists, which is the ultimate source of the major contradictions in capitalist society? Home Ownership makes people indebted to lending institutions instead of landlords and places all responsibility and risk on them as individuals". (Angotti, 1977, p.43).

2. Home as chain

The classic analysis of the home as a chain was presented by Engels in The housing question. His work, a response to conditions in Germany in the 1870s, emphasises the way home ownership bound the workers to their homes, limiting employment mobility and the ability to strike. In a development of Engel's argument, home ownership is seen as a mechanism for the fostering of an individualistic and materialistic ideology based on commodity consumption (Marcusen, 1964). In Agnew's extension of this analysis, home ownership combines with the local nature of property tax administration of much public service provision in the United States in the development of a local consciousness which undermines participation by workers in broader class struggle (Agnew, 1981, p. 473; Cox, 1978).

There is a myth which dies hard that home ownership necessarily means greater stability and a ~~commitment~~ commitment to property among home owners. Imagine (or live) the situation of a family which has been on a waiting list to rent council housing on the Cape Flats for many years. Eventually the family gets a house or a flat. To move to better jobs in Port Elizabeth they would have to go through a waiting list all over again. Rental housing can, under specific circumstances, tie people to one place, to one job, just as effectively as monthly payments on a bond used to buy a home. The outright owners of houses, free of bonds, are the only people who have any real freedom to move, particularly when there is a shortage of housing (Mabin, 1983, p.5; Durban Housing Action Committee, 1982, p.8). As Edel (1982, p.207) points out, contemporary variants of Engels's argument that home ownership is a 'chain', like Engels's own, fail to show 'how equity in a home affects consciousness'. Private property in housing does not necessarily enhance stability, nor a sense of commitment to the principle that houses should be 'owned' by their occupants (Mabin, 1983, p.5). The problem is that such chains might arise just as much from some rental situations as from some ownership situations, and perhaps even more so from conditions in the workplace (such as low wages).

3. Owner-occupants as non-proletarian

The two views on the significance of home ownership described above differ in the negative or neutral effects which they ascribe to the phenomenon, but both are rooted in an acceptance of the possibility of working-class

home ownership. A further view defines the home owner out of the working class altogether: the worker with a house is privileged. Therefore, the home-owner is distanced from the working class politically as well as economically. An absurd conclusion of this line of argument might be that if all factory and office workers owned their houses or flats, there would be no working class. (3)

A Weberian view of social class, based on consumption or on revenues rather than on social relations primarily rooted in the production process which characterise the Marxian view, allowed Rex and Moore (1967) to identify home owners as a separate housing class. In a critique of this position Saunders (1978, p. 139-46) rejects Rex's concept of housing classes, but argues that a separate owner-occupant 'interest' emerges on the basis of the petty accumulation potential of home ownership. Where housing prices rise faster than inflation a new propertied 'class' which has claim to both revenue and wages may emerge from among working class owner-occupants (Saunders, 1978, p.234). For Saunders, however, there is no necessary connection between what he describes as 'economic classes' and political action, so his argument does not extend to defining necessary implications of working class home ownership. It might be argued that where workers receive a major or significant part of their income from home ownership they become petty-bourgeois (Edel, 1982, pp.211-2). Such a view would seem to follow from, for example, a strictly Poulantian view of class applied to land ownership (c.f. Massey and Catalano, 1978, pp. 28-30), esp. notes 2 and 4, and pp. 150-1). A less structuralist variant of this position would be that those workers who receive a significant portion of their income from their position as home-owners could be ^{come} divided from the rest of their class by economic and political differences.

From a classical marxist point of view there is no reason why the working class should divide politically over the offer of home ownership. Edel (1982, p.212) notes that divisions over home ownership are often the result, not the cause, of other cleavages in that class: divisions, due for example, to the existence of a labour aristocracy, to racial separation (as in South Africa), and to generation (Kemeny, 1980). The inability of younger groups to afford housing in highly inflationary times contrasted with the established owner-occupancy of older cohorts has had political effects in parts of North America, for example. We might add spatial separations within the working class as a further possible cause of political differences.

The positions which have been outlined thus far are not fully satisfactory. They fail to analyse the rôle of housing as part of the historically determined needs of workers - in which the advances of capitalist production and struggles by workers enter into the determination of what kind of shelter, under what conditions, is 'necessary' to the reproduction of workers. Taking this view, housing and the forms through which workers gain access to housing (ownership, rent, etc.) are the subject of individual and collective struggle: we must then question why workers at certain times seek to acquire ownership of their housing (Mabin, 1983, p. 3) as well as seeking 'to identify conditions under which splits in the proletariat may occur because of home ownership' (Edel, 1982, p. 219). The extension of our analysis therefore requires an examination of workers' own attempts to acquire greater security at 'the point of reproduction' (Mackenzie, 1976) (perhaps through home ownership) and an investigation of the various strategies by which sections of the working class can and do respond to the housing question.

A brief survey of writings on the working class reveals that there exists no coherent theory of the actions of workers towards the fulfilment of their own aspirations. Recently some attempts have been made to fill this gap, particularly within the marxist tradition. For example, Damaris Rose has empirically investigated the historical conditions and tactics surrounding efforts of workers both to defend and to acquire their 'own' housing (Rose, 1979; 1983). At the same time she has interpreted the causes of this drive to home ownership, with results similar in essence to the theoretical position espoused by Michael Lebowitz, who argues that only the analysis of the worker engaged in activity for self, as opposed to activity for capital, will allow a more complete understanding of social reproduction in capitalist society (Lebowitz, 1981). This perspective provides a fourth view of the significance of home ownership. From this position one might, indeed, argue that workers would in some circumstances reduce the weight of their 'chains' through home ownership rather than renting - a view which contrasts rather strongly with the simplistic argument that in striving for home ownership, workers display 'false consciousness' (Mabin, 1983).

From our review of various positions adopted in literature on the political significance of home ownership, the conclusions to be drawn are essentially simple. First, there are circumstances under which home ownership forms

divisions within working class communities, but divisions which themselves are likely to be related to more fundamental social cleavages. Second, the existence of private property in housing can acquire its own potential for polarising different working class groups economically and politically. And third, it is clear that the various outcomes of owner occupancy are likely to develop simultaneously with the result that the formation of general strategies to confront the housing question under conditions of expanding home ownership is a daunting task indeed for organisations - in South Africa as much as elsewhere.

RESPONSES TO RECOMMODIFICATION

The confusion which has surrounded the state's policy of selling its rental housing stock has been matched by unclear and uncertain responses on the part of organisations such as civic associations and trade unions. Thus Cahac (Cape Areas Housing Action Committee) stated that it would not 'deny tenants their rights' by organising against any purchase under the scheme; criticised the state's policy shift; but avoided the enunciation of any alternative strategies (Cape Times, 8.3.1983). A mass meeting called by Cahac to protest government housing policy could make no decisions regarding the 'sale of state houses' other than a declaration that it was part of a strategy 'meant to make apartheid work' (Cape Herald, 21.5.1983; Cape Times, 16.5.1983). Similarly, while rejection of the policy is evident among community organisations in rental schemes in Durban (Sunday Tribune, 8.5.1983) and in unions representing mainly black workers on the East Rand, proposals for alternative strategies are rare indeed. The state's proposals and the difficulties of responding to them have already produced splits in organisations (as evidenced by the withdrawal of one civic association from Cahac over the failure of the umbrella body to condemn the sale of rental housing outright); and they have produced a spate of unco-ordinated demands linked to housing on the part of trade unions. The potential for disruption among these organisations is apparent in such developments. If our analysis of the emergence of distinct groupings is correct (as outlined above in the section on economic implications of expanding private property in housing), the results of the 'new era' in state policy will include the emergence of groups affected in far more adverse ways than others. To assume that the desperate straits of some will ensure solidarity in a collective struggle to improve their lot on the part of those who are relatively advantaged even if potentially subject to the same devastation would be a singular error - as revealed by political developments in countries

such as Britain. All of these divisive pressures must be confronted by organisations concerned to represent the working class in South African cities. They demand a number of tactics to maintain if not to increase the unity of such organisations. New ways of forging links between divergent groups necessitate an analysis of 'housing classes' far more penetrating than we have attempted here, as Wilkinson (1981, p.68) has argued. Such analysis must necessarily take account of the national issues affecting housing - the Group Areas Act, influx control, relocation and so on.

In addition, new forms of organising among the most disadvantaged; the successful linking of housing issues with other demands made by trade unions; strategies for linking local issues of importance to owner-occupants to more general issues; and an assault on the ideology of home ownership ('private property impoverishes some while it enriches others') are all essential parts of a unified approach to the housing question.

The state and the representatives of capital have moved from a relatively unidimensional approach to the housing question and are currently engaged in the elaboration of a complex strategy involving home ownership, some rental, 'self-help', the creation of a joint housing corporation (Rand Daily Mail, 21.6.1983) and a massive propaganda assault on behalf of this strategy (as argued earlier). In response, community and worker organisations cannot afford to adopt any less complex a strategy. At the most general level the goals of such strategy must be carefully determined. What kinds of housing do people want? What new forms of housing can be evolved? Is it necessary continually to pander to the supposed needs of the nuclear family - especially when the reality of life in the townships has been so far from this notion - by building single family type housing? What forms of tenure will be acceptable in terms of security, privacy and the needs of people concerned? All these are questions which have received little attention.

Demands which might make sense in the long term may well be inappropriate in a short-term view. While self-help may, for example, be an appropriate long-term option, in the short term the inequitable distribution of resources in South Africa makes it an unacceptable part of housing strategy in most areas (Durban Housing Action Committee, 1982, p.17). Long-term

demands need to be conditional: thus, while the purchase of state-housing by individual or co-operative groups might be acceptable in the future, where the houses have been badly maintained their immediate purchase is rejected (c.f. Grassroots, April 1983). And long-term strategy needs to be sufficiently flexible to cope with changing conditions, such as falling as well as rising house prices.

CONCLUSION

In the last section we have commenced a discussion of the strategy and tactics of working class responses to the recommodification of housing in South Africa. In so doing we have been forced to consider the attempts which community and worker organisations can make to influence their own environments: attempts to make housing a creative process in their own lives rather than a process which controls their lives (Turner, 1976; McCarthy, 1982).

Of course, much of the time workers do not get what they want, whether it is houses to own, rent or live in free of the strictures of private property. Capital and the state determine how, where, on what conditions and at what price housing is available, subject to the outcome of "struggles around the built environment" as David Harvey (1976) puts it. But it is the outcomes of these struggles which will determine the nature of South African cities in the future.

As tenants in the townships are forced to buy their houses or face 'drastic rent increases' (Rand Daily Mail, 4.3.1983) the struggle over the housing question in South African cities will sharpen. As it does so, organisations in working class areas will face the possibility of losing touch with people through inability to deliver, or even to deal with, the housing needs and demands of their constituents. While some groups do stand to benefit economically from the process, others - squatters, private tenant, the displaced and the remaining state tenants - do not. The claims made of home ownership as the route to a more equitable distribution of social and economic well-being are suspect. Housing scarcity and housing policy are intimately related to the increasing poverty of many people in urban areas in South Africa.

Footnotes

1. The intrinsic difference between the two schemes is that under the 'home ownership scheme' (which might better be referred to as the 'right of occupation scheme') a purchaser gains indefinite rights to occupation of a house, while under the leasehold scheme the purchaser acquires rights of use to a particular piece of land for 99 years. Owing to the impossibility of registering transfers under the right-to-occupation scheme financial institutions will not lend on such transfers, though transfers of surveyed stands can be registered and thus building societies will, in general, lend on the 99-year leasehold scheme (West Rand Administration Board, 1983).

2. Even if informal income were added to the figures in Table 2 other commitments not included in the cost of living figures given, such as hire purchase agreements, *preclude extensive saving*.

3. It should be noted that Engels did not argue that home ownership creates a separate or privileged section of the working class.

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Table 1. : Discounts available on purchase of tenant occupied home under state selling scheme, 1983.

House price	Discount
Over R2 500	25%
Under R2 500	30%
Additional qualifications	
Occupation over 5 years	5%
Moratorium (1 year)	5%

Source : Kruger, 1983

Table 2. : Approximate initial outlay for house purchase

	R
20% deposit	200
Registration fee (approx.)	50
Water and sewage connection	225
	<hr/>
Total for "occupation rights"	475
Leasehold fee	450
Surveying fee	60
	<hr/>
Total for "99 year leasehold"	R 985

Sources : SAIRR, 1982; WRAB, 1983.

Table 3. : Income of Soweto residents

Income Category (Rands per month)	% of Soweto Population in each Income Category*
0 - 150	24,7
151 - 250	31,9
251 - 350	24,6
351 - 450	9,3
451 - 650	8,4
651 and above	1,1

* These are official figures; it is likely that the income of unofficial Sowetan residents is substantially lower.

Source : RSA, 1982, p. 64, para. 3.3.

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SALDRU
School of Economics
Robert Leslie Building
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7700