

Private Sentiments in a Public Context: Aspects of Co-operative Housing in Oslo

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The subject of the article is the Oslo model of co-operative housing. A co-operative model may be considered a predominantly 'public' solution, or given a more 'private' flavor, depending on the different forms given to the co-operative idea. This article considers the political consequences of alternative implementations. It presents a historical survey of the initial reactions of the tenant urban working class to the insecurities of the housing market, its inevitable clash with landlord interests, and the earlier varieties of radical and socialist responses to the housing misery. The search for a 'public' form of ownership leads to the gradual acceptance of the co-operative solution, and the rise of one co-operative organisation (OBOS) from a position of modesty to one of dominance. The administrative principles employed in the distribution of apartments lead to a number of unexpected consequences relating to the rights of the members and owners. While the OBOS administration is engaged in limiting the contagion of the 'free market', it is also concerned not to antagonize the opinions of the members. These conflicting interests lead to a number of administrative knots, particularly since new sentiments among both old and more recent members press towards a 'private' interpretation. The political parties react to these sentiments in the electorate in different ways, but with deep concern for the increasing interest in ownership.¹

1. The Language of Co-Operative Housing

If someone who thought exclusively in terms of private versus public property should describe the forms of housing in Oslo in the 1970s, he would quickly become aware of the extreme difficulty of working with this clearcut distinction. The most awkward phenomenon would probably be the most prominent form: the co-operative solution represented by OBOS.² The legal terms applied to describe the rights of occupants of co-operative houses would not contain the word 'own', but rather such phrases as 'dwelling right', and the formulations would in general avoid words conjuring up the sentiments of private property. A clear demarcation line is drawn between this type of apartment and 'self-owned apartments', which are entered separately in the property register and generally thought of in terms of clearcut private ownership. But it is also considered as differing from 'joint-stock apartments', where a cooperative solution does not preclude *private* ownership, although the property of the indivi-

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1. The Language of Co-Operative Housing

If someone who thought exclusively in terms of private versus public property should describe the forms of housing in Oslo in the 1970s, he would quickly become aware of the extreme difficulty of working with this clearcut distinction. The most awkward phenomenon would probably be the most prominent form: the co-operative solution represented by OBOS.² The legal terms applied to describe the rights of occupants of co-operative houses would not contain the word 'own', but rather such phrases as 'dwelling right', and the formulations would in general avoid words conjuring up the sentiments of private property. A clear demarcation line is drawn between this type of apartment and 'self-owned apartments', which are entered separately in the property register and generally thought of in terms of clearcut private ownership. But it is also considered as differing from 'joint-stock apartments', where a cooperative solution does not preclude *private* ownership, although the property of the indivi-

dual does not have a separate matriculated legal status. The co-operative way of living is thus verbally different as well as organizationally separate, and certainly functions in somewhat different ways.

However, with respect to many of those aspects of private property considered to be important, the tenants may not in reality experience such very marked differences. The co-operative tenant can decide how long he wants to stay in his apartment. He cannot be expelled unless his behaviour is well beyond the limits of civilized conduct. He may sublet it for a considerable period of time, on rather liberal conditions. In order to obtain an apartment, he has paid a substantial deposit, and in this respect is rather similar to an owner of a joint-stock apartment. If he feels like moving elsewhere, he may use the apartment in a barter relationship, and his next of kin may buy it, and also inherit it. These conditions show that the differences between the privileges of 'normal' private property and the advantages and rights of 'co-operative' living are at the most questions of degree: this is born out by the fact that the subjective feeling of OBOS dwellers is split between an image of themselves as owners and tenants, one third opting for the former designation, two thirds finding the latter concept more appropriate.

This blurring of borderlines is also indicated by the broad acceptability of the co-operative solution across ideological borders. It has been identified with at least three different strands of political thinking.

On the one hand, *the co-operative solution may be seen as a leftist position*. The co-operative idea is directed against the landlord, an attempt to work out an alternative both to purely market processes, and to the psychological features characteristic of the greedy bourgeois property holder or the concomitant irresponsible proletarian tenant.

Secondly, one may see in the co-operative solution an alternative both to purely municipal housing, and to other solutions: in this perspective, *co-operative housing occupies an inbetween position*, with overtones of that hostility to both the big landlord and government which has been characteristic of petty bourgeois liberalism with its penchant for small-scale solutions.

Thirdly, one may view the *co-operative solution as an essentially conservative solution*, in principle not different from 'other' forms of private possession, and in its essence appealing to the same notions of individual ownership. Seen in this light a conservative may find some blessings in the co-operative form, interpreting it as a variety of 'democratic capitalism.'

It is our belief that co-operative housing may, indeed will, contain clues

to all these ideological positions, and for these reasons draw support from highly different categories and classes. But to point out the multifaceted nature of the institution is but a logical starting point, from which no immediate conclusion about its functions can be derived. It points to a possibility, but does not outline consequences. It indicates *a potential* which may or may not be exploited and which may vary over time. The concrete consequences may affect rather deeply the degree to which the co-operative solution has a 'public' or 'private' flavour.

It is how the changes in the character of the political forces supporting or opposing this solution and the choices of administrative details have affected this aspect of the cooperative way of housing that is the theme of this paper. Quite simply, we believe that OBOS has travelled a long way organizationally, ideologically, and administratively since its creation in 1929, and that the changes along the public-private dimension represent some of the more pertinent aspects of that evolution. Some of the latter have been fully endorsed and accepted as simple and undisputed parts of the new reality; others have been incompletely implemented and reluctantly admitted; while still others live as *sub rosa* individual sentiments in isolation from, though not always seriously bothered by, official goals and declarations.

2. The Point of Departure: Landlord – Tenant Conflicts

To a great extent, the political concern with housing in Oslo has been a *radical* concern. This does not mean that the individuals engaged in the politics of housing were exclusively radical. They included employers who for various reasons wanted their workers to live in pleasant quarters, and were administrators without any strong partisan commitments who nevertheless put their stamp on public decisions within this field. It does mean that if we restrict our interest to the politically elected representatives and ask whether they devoted their time and energy to housing policy we find that this was a more frequent concern on the left than on the right. The question of housing was first given broad attention by the national Labour party conference in 1916, and in Oslo the Labour party was responsible for the well-known housing initiative in 1910. The left was for all practical purposes the active prodding element, though certainly not necessarily opposed by the other parties when measures had been worked out and proposals were tabled.

There was a very simple reason for this. The Oslo working class lived in tenement houses, where it was exposed to rather problematic living con-

ditions, as well as to the insecurities linked to this particular form of housing. In this respect they were just like the working class in most cities in Western Europe. The cause had been a large and rapid flow of newcomers to the cities, an influx which in Oslo occurred towards the end of the 19th century. While thus conforming to broad continental patterns, the Oslo housing situation in the Norwegian capital was distinctive from that of other Norwegian towns. In many a town on the southern and western coast, the incidence of workers as well as salaried middle class owning their own houses was very high, contrasting sharply with the conditions in the capital.³

A demographic study of Stavanger, one of the larger cities on the west coast, shows that while working class homeownership had fallen from 78% in 1801, it was still as high as 40% in 1865 (Næss 1975). Since the existing suffrage rules after 1814 were based in part upon property ownership, this also influenced the political structure and probably also the party structure (Lipset and Rokkan 1964, pp. 376–444).⁴ We shall later show in some detail how this difference in the prevailing type of houseowner and in the party structure affected political voting reactions to some attempts to protect the tenant at the possible expense of the houseowner.

As in most European countries, these efforts of the radical wing took two different avenues. On the one hand they pursued lines of thought in which the traditional landlord was done away with, just as other blueprints for the future managed without the capitalist. On the other hand they had to carry out the day-to-day struggle against the landlord. In this setting there were essentially three arenas for fighting the landlord, and the leftist parties and the tenants tried them all. 1) They tried to raise the minimum standards of the commodity the landlord was allowed to offer on the market. 2) They tried to limit the price permissible for a given piece of housing. 3) They tried to lengthen the period in which the tenant was safe from eviction, and to restrict the legitimate grounds for eviction.

It would be misleading to picture these three avenues of attack on the freedom of contract as so many parts in a coordinated policy or as so many items in a broad philosophy. They were launched at very different points in time, and supported by both somewhat different groups, and rather different types of arguments.

The concern with *the quality of housing* was not a direct attack on the landlord, but was derived from ideas about standards of living: it did, however, have a bearing on the landlord-tenant relation. When, for example, the medical professor Axel Holst conducted his pioneering study of housing conditions in Oslo (Holst 1895), the focus of inquiry was

upon whether the inhabitants of the less attractive parts of Oslo could be said to live above or below some reasonable medical standards, not upon the social antecedents of misery.⁵ However, to the extent that such studies revealed conditions judged to be below the borderline of the acceptable, it did in some way reflect upon the landlords. And when these studies pointed to stiffer sanitary requirements, their interests were still more directly involved. While many of these suggestions were rather tangentially related to the landlord-tenant relationship, the opinion they created was on the whole, and in the long run, inimical to the owners.

The attack on '*exorbitant prices*' falls in a different category. One obvious tenant strategy was to introduce notions of fairness as an alternative to the free play of market forces, by trying to make some judgement on 'reasonable' rent levels, and correspondingly to draw a distinction between 'nice' and 'nasty' landlords. But until the First World War there was no wholesale attempt to translate such ideas into legislation.

The quickly rising prices during the first phase of World War I made the authorities respond with considerable speed to demands for a brake on rent levels. This was first settled by administrative decree, and after 1916 through parliamentary intervention. These laws made possible local rent control through the delegation of authority to municipal agencies. After their initial introduction they have never been absent except for a short period before World War II, though their forms and the geographical extent of their application have varied: Oslo has more or less consistently been subject to rent control.

The Labour party was a natural supporter of the attempt of the Liberal wartime governments to brake rent levels. But so, to the indignation of the landlords, were the conservatives. The latter did, of course, emphasize that this control should be a temporary and not a permanent solution, that it attacked the symptoms rather than the real causes, and that there were problems concerning the proposed regulations which required careful examination and possible re-evaluations after a trial period. But they did not oppose it outright. The reason was probably that the conservative voters counted a number of tenants, and therefore it would have been complete political folly to side unambiguously with the landlords.

The third point where the interests of the landlord and the tenant clash is that of *security of tenure*. This question, which was not explicitly regulated by law until 1939, is not one but several: How long in advance should notice be given for termination of the lease, and are there situations when the landlord should not be allowed to terminate the lease at all? These questions were handled only partially by the various wartime laws. Since

the latter expired in 1935, there was a short interregnum before demands by tenants for guarantees of security on the part of tenants resulted in the law of 1939. It has later been modified – not least because of war-time problems – and changed, but it introduced guarantees against ‘unreasonable eviction’, by making possible an appeal to a special Housing Tribunal, that would weigh the arguments and needs of the landlord against that of the tenants. The Oslo Houseowners Association claimed that this meant ‘socialized housing’, but the principle survived to be an accepted part of the general notions about the rights and duties inherent in the tenant – landlord relationship.

The organizational context of these developments was characterized by the lack of any clearly organized group of tenants. There were, to be sure, occasional mass meetings but these actions were of a decidedly ‘flash-in-the-pan’ kind, full of sound and fury, and nothing much survived in the form of continuous concerted action. The tenant groups and the national tenants’ meeting of 1919 left little in the form of a durable organization. The various measures were taken up by political parties, by municipal administrators and the like, and within that context considerable successes were achieved. It was quite late – not until 1933 – that the tenants in Oslo established a formal organization. It is still the main representative organization of that group in Oslo, though not now a very strong organization.⁶ This weakness is another indicator of the same phenomenon as its late arrival. Still another is provided by its formation. Rather than being established from below, it was formed by cooperation between the Oslo Trade Unions Joint Committee, and the Oslo Labour party. These organizations established a preparatory committee, chaired by the central figure in the Oslo Labour party, Einar Gerhardsen. Far from being born in the context of concrete conflicts it was established in anticipation of what would happen after the abolition of the regulations in 1935. It probably indicates the function of the political party as the substitute of the many specialized agencies on the left, a pattern which may exist in many other countries.

A landlord organization, however, was established much earlier, and without any promptings from above. An association of Oslo houseowners was formed as early as in 1883 (Oslo Gaardeierforening 1934, p. 6). But since it has not left any trace of its activity, it is unlikely that it achieved anything of consequence. Its formal existence was acknowledged by the name given to a new organization in 1894. By appropriating the title the Oslo Houseowners Association, the latter indicated that the earlier organization was for all practical purposes non-existent. In the years to come

the new organization was the central agent of the houseowner and landlord interests, and was the core of the formation in 1912 of the National Houseowners Federation.

The activities of the federations were quite varied. It organized meetings where common problems were discussed, whether they be laws and regulations or techniques of rat extermination or toilet construction. It was a source of legal advice to landlords in distress, and it made some efforts towards establishing an effective 'blacklist' of undependable tenants. It also engaged in municipal politics, especially items related to public housing, an issue of rising importance in the 1910–1930 period.

The urgency of public housing followed from the fact that these measures, while certainly not of limited importance, essentially were attempts to protect one of the contracting parts within *a given situation of supply and demand*. They could order, formalize, and offer relief against arbitrary actions; this might often be important in itself. But any real advance would have to attack the question of the relative market position of the two sides of the conflict. Or to put it simpler: it could only be done by increasing the existing stock of apartments.

3. The Pressing Question of Public Housing

The period from 1910–1935 was characterized by various attempts to come to grips with this question. The ways in which this might be done were essentially three. The commune might itself build and rent apartments. The commune might support the building of apartments through financial support and/or financial guarantees to private building firms or private organizations. Among the latter there were co-operative organizations, some trying to build houses for their members on a continuous basis. As a third measure, the commune might give priority to one of these and single it out as the building agency of the municipality.

These three forms of public housing differed in the way they could be used to control the amount and type of apartments built. In the first case the municipality had full control. In the second case, the control was less effective: it depended upon private initiative and brought the municipality into a somewhat complicated bargaining position, which, moreover, was weaker when the economy worked better. The third solution gave more effective control over the amount of the output, but it also freed the municipality of any direct engagement in the actual running of the system. Thus, it is not easy to rank the three forms according to some simple 'public-private' criterion.

The landlords had fairly explicit opinions both on the presumed need for construction and the preferred modes of construction. On the whole they favoured, like most suppliers, a limit to the supply. If one reads through the pages of the *Gaardeieren*, later *Huseieren*, it is filled with arguments pointing to the general adequacy of the existing supply (Gaardeieren 1911, pp. 10, 38, 53, 78). In this, their normal interests were given an extra edge by memories of the pre-1910 building slack, when they had serious problems with the tenants, and when vacancies were a common plague. It is surely no exaggeration to say that the landlords were profoundly uninterested in replicating this miserable period for them; consequently they viewed statements to the effect that more housing was needed with the utmost scepticism.

Their hostility to the first alternative, pure public housing, was given additional strength since it was generally held that this would probably lead to a pressure on rents: the municipality was under political pressure and could not afford to earn the reputation of being a hard landlord. On this subject the landlords were particularly clear and outspoken, and they enjoyed the support of the Conservatives.

The latter had, however, considerable difficulties in acting fully on behalf of the landlords.⁷ In fact the landlords did not judge them to be sufficiently die-hard supporters of private enterprise and private ownership. Houseowners had, wrote P. A. Ringdal, to wage

'a very disconcerting guerrilla war against the evasiveness, the passivity and the covert liaisons with the enemy, which has been observed in parties, men and newspapers from whom one might have expected positive assistance in the battle.'

For this reason the Oslo Landlords Association pursued a somewhat erratic political line. On the whole they relied on the Conservative party,⁸ while also presenting suggestions to all the bourgeois parties when they were about to draw up their electoral slates. At one time they co-operated with other disgruntled small business interests to form a poujadist protest party, at another they were on the verge of running their own slate.⁹

The reasons why the Conservative party could not entirely accommodate its small business supporters were simple enough. They relied, as Labour representatives pointed out, on a much wider category of voters (Arbeidet 1919, Oct. 24.) White collar workers, civil servants, and business functionaries, had an entirely different attitude to the question of housing. To the extent that they did not live in a house of their own, but in an apartment, they were interested in security, and this pointed towards some form of

ownership. There was no reason why this heterogeneous category of people should share the landlords' fear of excessive building.¹⁰ Still less reason was there to assume that they would not be interested in mobilizing the municipality to give loan guarantees to private firms. Their motives were in many respects rather identical to those of the working class, and the form of the 'joint-stock' apartment is in many respects not *that* different from the co-operative form, for which it may also have been something of a model.

Consequently the predominant mode of construction in the twenties was the private firm supported by a loan guarantee from the municipality. A large number of these enterprises were launched, essentially supported by all the major parties, the Conservative, the Liberal, and the Labour party.

The reason for this unanimity is fairly obvious if one inspects the sheer variety of enterprises. Socially and organizationally they were certainly not all of a piece. Some were built in the patrician west, others in the proletarian east. Some were formed by pre-existing groups and organizations, in quite a few cases by civil servants' unions. Others were formed as appendages to a factory. In some cases the municipality managed to place people who were in deep housing and social distress. There were, to be sure, some common ground rules which the enterprise had to comply with if its enterprise wanted to be considered for a municipal loan guarantee, but the social content still varied considerably.

This type of effort could work rather well, but the questions of the reliability of the enterprise and the continuity of the effort were considerable. The first might not be unsurmountable. One way of solving it was to establish some municipal contact. But the need for control, and for a continuous plan for building could not be taken care of in this fashion. The absence of an organizational scheme that guaranteed the full realization of these goals was felt to be a liability.

In principle this could take many forms, one of which would be purely public housing. This was not the solution chosen. Instead the commune opted for co-operative housing; it wanted an organization that could keep on building. OBOS, founded in 1929, fitted these requirements. In 1934 the city council decided to co-operate with OBOS. The commune obtained representation on the OBOS board (the mother organization), which established dependent 'daughter' companies for each finished project. These remained in the 'family', they ran themselves, but according to statutes established by OBOS.

This meant that a new municipality-controlled co-operative organization was launched. The question was now what kind of support it could enjoy in the competition with the private firms in the battle for building sites, and other privileges and amenities. This shifts the attention to the more regular links between this organization and other agencies, and the degree of success of this way of building and of co-operative living.¹¹

Table 1. Various indicators of the size and performance of OBOS, 1945–1975.

Year	OBOS members 31. Dec.	OBOS dwellings constr.	Total dwelling constr. in Oslo	% OBOS	Number of OBOS dwellings	Total number of dwellings	% OBOS	OBOS members in excess of OBOS
45	6,194	(–)	33	0	2,935	119,209	2	3,259
46	6,478	(48)	365	13	2,983	119,217	3	
47	8,700	(584)	1,498	39	3,577	119,557	3	
48	17,433	(1,071)	2,443	44	4,648	121,030	4	
49	28,439	(1,552)	2,577	60	6,200	123,582	5	
50	33,078	1,102	2,733	40	7,302	126,134	6	25,776
51	35,786	1,370	2,890	47	8,672	128,993	7	
52	38,374	1,255	4,186	30	9,927	133,147	7	
53	41,827	1,787	4,731	38	11,714	137,823	8	
54	45,929	2,210	6,302	35	13,924	144,070	9	
55	49,566	2,704	5,580	48	16,628	149,594	11	32,938
56	53,275	2,541	4,500	56	19,169	153,406	12	
57	56,149	1,596	4,299	37	20,765	157,652	13	
58	59,156	2,002	4,114	49	22,778	161,713	14	
59	62,143	1,726	3,943	44	24,505	165,602	15	
60	68,009	1,840	4,430	42	26,344	169,768	16	41,665
61	72,238	2,062	4,609	45	28,406	174,378	16	
62	75,835	1,709	3,992	43	30,115	178,341	17	
63	79,713	1,530	5,085	30	31,645	184,426	17	
64	84,908	1,343	3,333	40	32,988	186,759	18	
65	90,000	1,623	3,568	45	34,611	190,327	18	55,389
66	94,949	1,620	3,567	45	36,231	193,894	19	
67	99,716	2,116	3,912	54	38,347	197,806	19	
68	104,026	1,946	3,817	51	40,293	200,897	20	
69	108,384	1,242	4,435	28	41,535	205,659	20	
70	112,528	429	3,526	12	41,964	209,166	20	70,564
71	117,289	1,455	3,815	38	43,419	212,954	20	
72	121,300	2,125	4,421	48	45,544	217,383	21	
73	126,373	2,455	5,399	45	47,872	222,509	21	
74	128,612	1,164	3,647	32	48,783	225,762	22	
75	131,070	1,222	4,410	28	50,134	229,926	22	80,964

* Source: Statistical yearbooks for the city of Oslo.

4. OBOS: Membership Growth, Political Support, and Building Performance

In the years preceding World War II, the scope as well as impact of OBOS was limited. The postwar years, however, witnessed an impressive growth in size, influence, and activity.

The most spectacular, as well as the earliest sign, is probably the growth in *membership size*. Like most co-operative associations, OBOS was a membership association. The organization does not just have clients or customers, but members. These members who have joined the association through their own free will are the basis of the organization, and their wishes its main source of legitimacy. Moreover, the membership figure is a political asset to be reckoned with in municipal politics. This figure was about 3000 before World War II; in 1946 it had doubled, to somewhat more than 6000. The subsequent growth was a virtual explosion: in 1950 the number of members was 33,000, in 1960 68,000 and in 1975 130,000 (see Table 1, column 2).

This means that an ever-increasing proportion of the adult inhabitants of Oslo has become OBOS-members. A fairly recent estimate obtained from a survey from 1974, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. OBOS membership in 1974 among adult Oslo-dwellers

	%	N
Member only of OBOS	26	259
Member of OBOS and other co-operative society	5	49
Member only of other co-operative society	9	88
Member of no co-operative society	61	632
Total	101	1028

Our data show that as much as 31% of the respondents were members of OBOS. They also emphasize that OBOS virtually dominates the co-operative sector: among those who are members of some co-operative society, only one in four is not member of OBOS. The organization also looms large in a national perspective: it is by far the biggest local association within the NBBL, the national association of housing co-operative societies: in 1970 the OBOS-apartments (surely not an entirely precise membership measure) made up 25% of the total number of joint stock/sharholding co-operative apartments in Norway.

Given this steady growth and prominent position, it goes without saying that the organization has enjoyed considerable *goodwill among politicians and sympathy from municipal authorities*, which fact again may contribute to further growth. This general goodwill is, however, not the only feature and some further nuances should be added.

As an organization devoted to mass housing, the organization has inevitably been the subject of highbrow ridicule. Intellectuals have pointed to it as the apotheosis of drab conventionality; the houses have been judged against strict aesthetic standards, a criticism not unrelated to a revolution against the common-ness of OBOS; sometimes a distinction between the nonconformist sentiment, the aesthetic frown, and plain snobbery is hard to draw. Since, however, those who are ordinary and conventional (a considerable majority) see this as an asset rather than a liability, this resentment from the angry young men and not so angry cabaret artists is not likely to have bothered the organization unduly.

Probably not unrelated to these ideas, always more prevalent in well-to-do circles, but with considerably more immediate impact, was the subdued enthusiasm for OBOS within the Conservative party. It came as no surprise that the Labour party has been by far the most eager pro-OBOS party. Leading figures among the OBOS luminaries have been labourites; they have very seldom been conservatives. Prominent labour politicians have held OBOS positions; the conservative councilmembers seldom appear in such capacities, though it should be mentioned as part of a balanced picture that the present conservative mayor, Albert Nordengen, has made a point of his active interest in the organization. The Conservative party has, while certainly not taking a pronounced hostile position, quite consistently and repeatedly opposed the presumed favoured position of OBOS: emphasizing the need for variety in forms of building and ownership systems, it has voted accordingly, e.g. in the case of the Lambertseter area, where it preferred to let several organizations share the total housing project.

Due to its political connections, OBOS has been quite prominent in *the construction* after the war. Before the war building activity was rather limited: a few hundred apartments each year. In the post-war period (with the exception of the first few years) the number of apartments built each year was on an altogether different level: in no year after 1950, with the exception of 1974, has the figure been lower than 1000, and it has frequently been above 2000, occasionally even above 2500 (1955, 1956). The proportion of all apartment construction going on within the orbit of OBOS has been quite considerable: rarely less than one third (1969, 1970,

1974 only), and quite frequently close to 50%. It is thus quite obvious that although far from occupying a position of monopoly, its role as Oslo's 'master builder' has been unchallenged.

The result of this construction activity, coupled with the fact that the demolition of sub-standard apartments has been outside the province of OBOS, has led to a slowly and consistently increasing number of apartments in Oslo within OBOS. As Table 1 shows, the proportion has risen from a tiny percentage (2%) in 1945, to 6% in 1950, 16% in 1960, to more than 20% in 1975.

The spectacular rise in membership figures, the increasing importance of the OBOS apartments as a form of housing, and the high level of OBOS construction activity are all indicative of growth. But there are some disparities in the growth rates which merit closer inspection, most notably the increasing absolute gap between the membership size and the number of OBOS-apartments, particularly when the stable level of construction is kept in mind. This poses problems both with regard to the possible further development of these trends and their effects on the way OBOS functions as a distributor of apartments. A key to the problem is the formal system of distribution of new apartments and the rights of those to whom these are given.

5. The Initial Acquisition of Dwelling Rights

The OBOS philosophy is one with many facets. It is a philosophy of living, pitted against both individual ownership and tenant irresponsibility. It is also a philosophy of hostility to the market place, linked to notions of 'reasonable' prices, dislike of profit, etc. But it is, and possibly above anything else, the philosophy of a public builder. While certainly concerned with the dwelling style, and not uninterested in the rules guiding the further transfer of apartments once acquired, the central part of the organization's activity was devoted to the construction and distribution of *newly constructed* apartments. This part of the activity, and the principles applied here, both formed the greater part of the philosophy and required the larger part of the energy of the organization. In turn they came to be of central importance to other spheres of concern.

The rules governing the initial distribution of vacant apartments might in principle have relied on rather varied types of criteria. One might have emphasized *need*, and worked out corresponding indicators; present housing situation, number of children, health conditions . . . Another possibility was *effort*: another co-operative organization used this criterion

alongside various measures of need.¹² These and other criteria, supplemented by administrative discretion, might have served. But OBOS settled on a fairly rigid principle which was easier to administer: *seniority of membership*. This principle was quite simple and the general idea of waiting one's turn probably appealed to the clients.

There was another reason for avoiding involvement in too cumbersome and intricate measures of individual housing conditions. The problem of how to order the queue was important, but not that important. Given the fairly hectic OBOS building activity of the post-war years, as well as the reasonably short queue (for all practical purposes comprising the number of members minus the number of existing apartments) it was for a number of years quite reasonable to expect to be offered an apartment in the course of a couple of years. If we look at Table 1 and pick out the year 1950, we see that the total number of OBOS members was 33,000. The number of OBOS apartments was 7,000, which leaves us with about 26,000 'excess members'. Given the fact that the yearly construction was around 1,500, we should expect about 15 years of waiting. This figure is much too high, because a number of members moved from Oslo, or found other forms of housing etc. In a couple of years' time a member would have advanced to the acquisition of an apartment. One may safely say that in this instance the system works in roughly the way it is supposed to work, by rewarding people who line up fairly quickly. It might be added that OBOS actually gave more of a service than that: it also guaranteed its members against losing their money. This might seem to be a small matter now, but in the immediate post-war period this risk was something to be reckoned with. Particularly for the less fortunate, unexperienced, and less well-to-do, this asset was of major significance; it made OBOS into the little guy's safe, cheap, and speedy way of acquiring a decent place to live.

We have already seen one consequence. The membership figures skyrocketed. The organization surely did not consider that very much of a sign of defeat, but it was an undeniable fact that the absolute gap between the number of apartments and the number of members kept on widening. Considering the fact that the construction level was very stable this would at least in some respects mean that lining up at the end of the queue became steadily less of an asset. The increase in the length of the line had no natural upper limit, since the acquisition of membership was not a very costly thing anyway, and could not be made so without violating the main credo of the organization: cheapness and accessibility.

The growing number of members also had another implication. While producing a different expectation of acquisition of an apartment, it also

made for – surely reinforced by the process just mentioned – a different type of OBOS joiner, both with respect to age and marriage status. The considerable changes brought about are clearly visible in Table 3. It shows with striking clarity that while the typical joiners in the late 1940's were married, they are now singles, and very young ones, too: one half of all joiners are now singles under 20! This is no less than a complete reversal, and it must undoubtedly be explained by the fact that people, knowing that OBOS is a reasonable solution, urge their children to join well before any immediate questions of marriage arise, or are contemplated. One joins 'just in case', and the costs are negligible. There are a few minor modifications to this interpretation worth mentioning. The marriage age has gone slightly down; this gives the age brackets a somewhat different social significance over the years. The reduction of the number who are engaged seems striking, but one may soften the impression of this change by keeping in mind that getting engaged may not be as common as it used to be.

Table 3. New OBOS members by year of joining, marital status and age. Percentages.

Year of joining	Single			Engaged	Married		Total
	Under 20	20–29	Older		Without apartm.	With apartm.	
1945		11		4	84		755
1946		9		6	83		2,499
1947		8		9	82		2,212
1948		8		14	77		2,538
1949		16		18	64		4,051
(1950)		23		27	48		3,069
1950/53	1	7	12	31	25	21	11,268
1954/57	4	8	11	31	16	22	13,222
1958/59	10	11	17	25	8	27	6,919
1960	17	12	15	21	8	23	4,778
1961	27	12	14	16	7	22	4,096
1962	29	12	18	14	5	20	4,022
1963	37	12	10	12	6	19	4,025
1964	40	13	10	11	8	14	4,798
1965	36	17	13	10	8	13	5,540
1965	36	17	13	10	8	13	5,540
1966	31	16	13	12	12	13	3,637
1967	32	16	11	12	12	14	3,967
1968	35	17	11	10	11	14	3,880
1969	37	17	10	9	9	14	3,667
1970	42	12	9	8	10	17	3,609
1971	45	14	7	7	8	16	4,423

These changes are most likely to be linked to changes in the social composition of the joiners, a matter we shall look into in section 7. Be this as it may, it is clear that many of the joiners may have something else in mind than a fairly quick relief of immediate housing distress, more of an extra insurance against the future than anything else. This leads us to inspect the uses to which membership and apartments acquired may be put, or, to express it more directly: how negotiable are the two main commodities in OBOS, the place in the queue and the acquired dwelling?

6. The Transfer of Rights: Some Administrative Headaches

As long as the queue was short, the OBOS organization had a fairly simple and fairly adequate picture of itself. It was in the business of production and distribution of apartments: it produced cheap apartments and distributed them to those who needed them most. Those in the queue were more likely to need an apartment than others (that was why they were there) and those in front of the queue presumably had been needy for a longer period than those at the back. The transfer of the waiting list of the Housing Director of Oslo to the OBOS queue emphasized this point, and seemed to drive home the main points: equitable distribution of reasonable apartments.

However, as the queue grew longer and the organization came of age, this picture needed modification. When the time span between membership acquisition and apartment acquisition increased one could not safely conclude that the outcome was a more equal distribution of housing. Status changes in the interval might twist the process and interfere with the realization of this goal. It also became more obvious that what OBOS parcelled out was not a consumer good, but *property* of a particularly desirable kind. While the initial image of OBOS thus partly grew more blurred, it also acquired features strikingly at odds with those prominent earlier. This led the organization to ask itself, if not in exactly this form, then certainly with the same problems in mind, two separate but related questions: *for whom are we building?*; and *how thick is the wall separating OBOS from the free housing market?* Neither allow for easy answers, and the fact that they have become progressively more intricate testifies to some essential changes in OBOS.

In a provisional reply to the first question, one might say, quite simply, that it is for those with the highest seniority. However, even in this simple form the answer would at least be partially misleading, if one interpreted this to mean that those who actually had been standing in line for the

longest period would benefit. The difference between these two formulations is important: seniority may be transferred. Before 1960 this could only occur between parents and children, and with the additional provision that the beneficiary had at least two years of seniority. From 1960 to 1971 a more liberal system prevailed: it now became possible to transfer the seniority to other relatives than just the next of kin. An average of 1600–1700 memberships was transferred a year, or an incidence of 5%. Due to active pressure from OBOS the organization was allowed to practice an exception to the general law in this field; by limiting the number of times one single place in the queue might be transferred to *one*, OBOS reduced the number of transfers to 750 a year. In 1975 the rule was tightened once more. The number of seniority years acquired by a beneficiary was not to exceed the number of years he himself could have been a member if he had joined the OBOS at the tender age of 14: if someone was 21, he could not by transfer acquire more than seven years seniority, even if the seniority of the ‘donor’ was several times this figure.

There was also another qualification in the simple seniority system. We have so far not said anything about what happens to someone’s seniority the moment one receives an offer to buy an OBOS apartment, or acquires one. Different principles might have been conceived, according to which – from the point of view of serving those who were mostly in need – an offer received, but not responded to, or an apartment acquired, would temporarily or for ever limit one’s rights to receive further offers or buy other OBOS apartments. We are familiar with this type of limitation from other organizations, and it is highly pertinent to ask what traces, if any, we can find of this way of thinking.

The answer is that there were some such traces, but that they were gradually removed. This was not the case if one passed over an offer: this never has implied any sanctions at all with respect to further possibilities. Whether this was motivated by the wish to see no apartment taken by those who were not really motivated rather than people in dire need, or prompted by the administrative complications it would entail to keep track of who had got an offer and who had not, is difficult to tell. The fact, however, is indisputable. The right to apply for a new project if one already had an OBOS apartment was, on the contrary, not initially a standard part of the seniority right. There were applications of this kind, but before 1955 they were dealt with in a complicated way which emphasized their anomalous character. In 1962 it was settled that the acquisition of one apartment did not interfere with one’s seniority, but one stipulation still hedged its full force: in new building projects the number of apart-

ments allotted to people who were already OBOS dwellers; was limited upwards to 25%. In 1965 even this modest requirement was discarded.

The upshot of these changes was a marked change in the importance and function of the queue. In the case of some new and tempting project – with high quality apartments or an attractive location – people with high seniority would dig up their membership cards and file their applications; in cases of less palatable offers they could not care less. Position in the queue was deteriorating as indicator of chance of first acceptance as well as of state of need, as indicated in section 5, in which we showed the decreasing importance of married couples as joiners. The length of the queue also became less useful as a measure of the collective need, or as a sign of when a joiner would be likely to acquire an apartment. From having been an honoured yardstick of the Oslo construction need, its perceived relevance declined to the point that it was no longer considered to tell very much about how much and what to build.

Indeed, membership itself might be less and less of an indicator of one's chances to become an OBOS dweller. This brings us right to the second problem: *how thick is the wall separating OBOS from the free market?* Or in more concrete terms: what was an individual allowed to do with one's apartment?

One type of transaction had always been thought acceptable; transfer to next of kin. Simple sales were out of the question. The crucial point was barter.

In the first years barter was circumscribed by all kinds of restrictions, including membership requirements and a certain seniority on the part of the one who did not live in an OBOS apartment; the procedure was rather cumbersome, and discouraged this type of transaction. From 1960, however, free barter was allowed. In 1971 the provision that public price assessment be carried out in cases of straight barter was dropped.

If we view all of these changes under a common perspective, do we see an increase or a decrease of egalitarian regulations? We cannot very well question the fact that liberalist practices, with concern for the interest of those who have acquired seniority or apartments, have on the whole been on the increase. The obvious exception to this is the limitation in the number of transfers of seniority, but the other aspects of the change must be of greater weight, and the exception mentioned should not be given undue emphasis. Market forces have gained.

One might argue that there is another exception since sale has never been permitted, and that the degree of change is therefore negligible. We should, however, like to point out that from the point of view of the

strength and influence of market forces the distinction between barter and selling is purely fictitious. By allowing barter and banning sale, OBOS has of course not made it impossible to get one's money in black market terms for an OBOS apartment, one has only stipulated that it be collected in a slightly more complicated way. Since barter does not necessarily involve any directly observable amounts of cash, one may entertain the notion that the sale involves 'profit' while barter does not, and thus worship the organizational goals of 'cheap housing' and pay tribute to the idea of 'non-profit'. But it remains a pious ideological ceremony, and bears a striking resemblance to a rule according to which one is not allowed to bring a certain type of commodity across the frontier at the customs inspection points, but still permitted, by law, to do so at any other point along the border.

This problem does, however, point to a deeper ambivalence on the part of OBOS. To insist on the importance of OBOS as a means of improving one's housing standards – even if this means barter out of OBOS – while frowning on a profitable deal which has the same end result, means that the very same principle is dusted off and applied or quietly laid to rest as one sees fit. Such inconsistency usually indicates an organizational dilemma: in this case it can be located in the tension between the administrative temper of the organization and the sentiments and opinions of the clients.

7. New Clients and New Sentiments: the Changing Context of Opinion

If the capacity of OBOS to act as the enforcer of strict regulations appears to be on the wane, the causes seem to be many and diverse. Partly they lie outside the organization: in 1960 the organization had to swallow the considerable liberalization of seniority transfer because national laws and statutes were changed. But it would be erroneous to overlook the quite considerable changes in opinion climate inside the organization. It seems quite clear that several factors have contributed to this. First, changes in opinion may be the result of *changes in the age of the members*: as someone who has acquired an OBOS-apartment has lived in it for a number of years, opinions and interests may change. Secondly, the *new members* who acquire apartments (or move up in the queue) may differ from those who did so earlier. Thirdly, *the attractiveness of OBOS as an alternative may change*. Fourthly, other more *general social changes may occur*, changes which emphasize the individualist solution rather than the co-operative spirit, or, to use a less highflown phrase, the compliant

attitude to the OBOS laws and regulations. These changes may have resulted in changes in both the 'proximate' opinion (reactions to the administrative actions in so far as they impinge on the individual member) and in the 'distant' opinion (more general attitude to the goods of the organization) without any guarantee that these go in the same direction.

The first factor is *change in the age of the member*. An individual may at one time want an OBOS apartment, he may later on desire something else. Most of the OBOS apartments were two or three-room apartments. It goes without saying that this might become a rather tight spot for a family of four, and quite naturally lead to wishes for 'something else'. That 'something else' on the whole did not exist inside OBOS, and would automatically lead to an interest in other alternatives. We shall later show when and in what form these alternatives appeared; here we just point out one potential source of disaffection. Given this, the individual would quite naturally want to make some use of the OBOS apartment in the process of acquisition of the new. How strong these feelings would become would depend on the general level of expectation: this has certainly been on the increase in the post-war period, giving this tendency additional force. One should also remember that such interests may occur at a time when the OBOS-dweller possibly does not feel any strong gratitude towards his initial cheap apartment. He may also focus more on the more or less accidental nature of his having acquired *this* kind of apartment, and possibly on the increasing liabilities, liabilities which may have been augmented by changes in the price-level.

But in the course of some thirty years the organization has also experienced *an inflow of new members*, and their attitudes and beliefs may be rather different from those of the old members. We noticed in section (5) that there were big changes over the years in the age and marital status of the OBOS joiners, but how profound are the changes that new members have brought in class, political affiliation, and general perspective on OBOS?

Several types of evidence point to an increasing proportion of middle class members among the new joiners. In addition to the general political and social colour of the organization in the earlier years, and the fact that the membership ranks earlier were supplemented by large categories of needy couples from the Housing director, we have some more hard information. A survey of present members of OBOS shows that recent joiners are much more likely to have an education beyond elementary school than older joiners: The figures are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Percent of OBOS-members with more than 10 years of formal education, by year of affiliation

	Earlier than 1950	1950-54	1955-59	1960-64	1965-69	1970-74
Total:	30 37	33 33	44 41	49 45	73 59	66 47

What the table shows cannot be caused by increasing levels of education only; the percentage differences are much too large. We also found that the category which has acquired its seniority by seniority transfer shows a percentage of 74 (N = 43).¹³ The fact that the changes are most marked between the age 1960-64 category and the 1965-69 category fits with the point of most drastic changes in age-marital status in Table 3. If one assumes that membership earlier had a more 'proletarian' cast, the fact that it is now very much representative of the city points strongly to recent overrepresentation of the middle class.¹⁴

There have been some changes in the political colour of OBOS members over time. Initially the organization was almost wholly dominated by Labour. However, if we look at the general reliance on OBOS at the present (we refer again to the 1974-survey) the proportion of OBOS membership is practically the same for all parties. The two major parties, Labour and the Conservatives, display an almost identical pattern (see Table 5).

Table 5. Membership in co-operative housing organization, by party. Percentage.

	Labour	Socialist Left	Christian Party	Liberal	Conser-vative	Anti-tax party
OBOS only	22	30	30	22	25	24
OBOS and other organization	5	13	4	6	3	12
Other organization	10	4	8	6	10	7
No membership	63	53	58	66	62	56
Total	258	116	53	32	275	41

These changes in the social composition of the joiners are likely to have influenced the general perspective on OBOS. Education seems to contribute to a more relaxed reliance on the organization. When asked in 1974 about their general reliance upon OBOS versus other ways of solving their

housing problem, OBOS members differed as their education varied: as shown in Table 6 those with less education had a marked tendency to disregard other alternatives, while those with higher education looked at OBOS as one alternative among several.

Table 6. Percentage of OBOS members who view OBOS as one of several solutions, according to education.

	7 years or less	8-10	11-14	15 or more
Total	32 37	53 102	58 124	73 44

Apart from changes in the initial members and possible changes in the kind of people who became members later on, one cannot question the fact that *OBOS as an alternative* has changed in the course of the last thirty years. We do not as yet have precise figures on the quantity and size of OBOS dwellings as compared to other forms of ownership, but given an upgrading of the average housing ambition (e.g. for a semi-detached house) it will have more difficulty of being realized within the OBOS context than used to be the case; this view presumes that the larger Oslo area is seen as one housing area. OBOS may, however, quite possibly be an equally 'fashionable' alternative within the borders of Oslo city.

These three changes are by themselves important. They are likely to have been strengthened by other, more general, social changes.

One is increased *mobility*. Various data indicate a considerable increase in change of residence, and this mobility can hardly have reduced peoples' interest in the value of property.

Another is *inflation*. In the course of the post-war period the increase in prices has been a permanent fixture, but the 1960's probably saw more drastic shifts in price-levels than did any previous period. This change meant different kinds of dislocations between the price-levels of apartments, houses etc. and would probably sensitize the owner of an apartment - OBOS or other - to the gap between the price of an apartment and the price of a single house. In the case when the gap between OBOS and other types of housing seemed to put the possessor of OBOS apartments in a more difficult spot, one might expect less direct and unflinching obedience to OBOS rules and standards. Inflation would thus loosen the general willingness to accept the OBOS style and the OBOS restrictions.

This change in the price level has led to increasing interest in ownership.

But as we mentioned, there are several ownership forms, in which a permanent claim to the apartment is linked to rent paying (co-operative apartments, joint-stock apartments, etc.) and in this inbetween category there is an increasing tendency to emphasize the *ownership* element: *the proportion in this category identifying themselves as 'owners' rather than 'renters' has increased from 26% to 64% from 1964 to 1975!* (Gulbrandsen, L. and Torgersen, U. 1976. «Eierfølelse, offentlig regulering og partivalg». En kommentar til kommunevalget i Oslo 1975 in *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, Oslo.) This dramatic increase may quite possibly have been of rather different strength for various sub-groups; the figure is probably close to 100% for the joint-stock apartments, but only 30% for the OBOS. Different assumptions may account for this, but if we assume that OBOS has always exhibited a lower percentage than the other sub-groups it follows that one must either assume a parallel growth, a growth in OBOS more than anywhere else, or a growth elsewhere than in OBOS. While these alternatives would entail somewhat different interpretations they would all serve to strengthen the feeling of ownership in OBOS in the long run, since the present situation would put the OBOS dwellers in a strongly disadvantageous position. One should consequently expect them to be alert and actively concerned with the maintenance of their rights vis-à-vis public authorities, including OBOS, and to some extent find a responsive audience in broad categories of the population.

8. The Broader Political Framework

This active concern to have control over one's rights and apartments is by itself without any immediate political consequences. But it emphasizes a duality in the co-operative ethos, and it points to an ambiguity in the behaviour of the Labour party, an ambiguity which in the public mind may have been enlarged and distorted. This ambiguity and the reactions to it appears to have played some role in the public discussion and related political behaviour, e.g. party choice.

The co-operative philosophy does in fact have mixed components. We pointed out that by some of its proponents it was considered to be 'private', while others conceived it to be 'public'. This split on a very high level of generality has more concrete counterparts: OBOS's idea of this form of ownership was one of the middle road. It should neither be the egotistical private form of individual homeownership nor the possibly equally asocial style of life often perceived among tenants, whose hostile relation to the landlord precluded any broader concern for the apartment or its wider

milieu, but genuinely *co-operative* ownership. The emphasis on ownership was linked to the actual way of life in the dwelling, and did not expand on the right to sell or otherwise transfer the property. One may thus say that the philosophy 'covered' some parts of the rules well, others less carefully.

The same ambiguity also characterized the Labour party. Surely it had emphasized personal ownership and its increasing role; a number of public measures had increased the number of owners. But the Labour party was also concerned with the limits of ownership, and the right of the public at the expense of individual rights. It follows that the creation of large categories of owners within an administrative framework emphasizing other values than the full use of one's private rights is likely to create some tension, probably unavoidable tension. The phenomenon bears great similarity to a number of other situations where 'private' interests emerge within formerly 'public' structures – like the emphasis on individual rights within institutions with strongly 'mission'-oriented style (churches, armies, universities etc.). It is, for this reason, somewhat difficult to locate ideologically: to say that it is just workers who become conservative when they acquire property, misses important facets of the reality.

It follows, however, that this became a problem for the Labour party. The entire housing area proved to be complicated to handle politically. It is probably no accident that a number of commissions have been appointed in this area, essentially manned by civil servants and non-political experts, that they have presented a number of proposals, that these have been subject to attack from the non-socialist parties, and then shelved. This was particularly the case with the housing taxation committee, which, while pointing out the differences between the way apartments and houses were taxed came out with some proposals for its solution. This let loose a barrage of attack, and the Labour party immediately disassociated itself from the proposals; if it had not, it would probably have committed political suicide. In another case, the question of the expropriation law, the most ownership-conscious of the bourgeois parties, the Center party, sided with the Labour party, which nevertheless was considered the main culprit by the non-socialist press. In still another case, the question whether co-operatives should be allowed to split up into private lots, the Labour party took a clear stand against this proposal. The issue was essentially symbolic, as the main benefit supposedly was the possibility of avoiding public price assessment; this can be evaded by moderately smart people in any case. On the whole, a 'property'-versus-'labour' image began to build up.

The political effects of these proposals and measures are not quite clear. But in one specific area, we think that the conflicts between the private interests and public control efforts can be observed, and seem to have fairly strong political impact. The measure was that of public control of housing sale and barter, a measure which, we will argue, made quite a dent in the Labour party strength in 1975 in Oslo.

The measure was proposed by a national public commission – quite according to the pattern just mentioned. In 1972, the Oslo Labour party generally endorsed the scheme on which there probably was no complete agreement within the municipal administration. Some newspaper articles commented on it, but it did not create any violent reaction at that time, though it acquired so much notice that a reasonably attentive newspaper-reader could hardly fall to notice it.

The fact that the Labour party did not come out clearly *against* the measure may have had serious political consequences. The evidence we have on public opinion shows this very clearly.

The measure was proposed in 1971. In the fall, the Gallup Institute asked two questions concerning that proposal. The first question measured support for and hostility towards the proposal, the second was concerned with its effects on the Oslo housing situation.

The findings may be summarized as follows:

- 1) There was general hostility to the measure among owners, and slight support among tenants.
- 2) This was the case for the voters for both the major Oslo parties.
- 3) There was a particularly high degree of worry among owners of apartments as compared to owners of houses.

This last point reminds us of the increasing tendency to identify as owners (see section 7), and points to a link between this increasing feeling of ownership and the rather dismal results of the Labour party in the 1975 Oslo elections. Surveys show that it was exactly in the ‘inbetween’ category (described in section 7) that the left (Labour + Left Socialist) lost in 1975: in the categories of owners and renters no change occurred, but in this inbetween category the left suffered a dramatic loss. (Gulbrandsen, L. and Torgersen, U. 1976. «Eierfølelse, offentlig regulering og partivalg». En kommentar til kommunevalget i Oslo 1975 in *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, Oslo.)

It is hard to know exactly how such sentiments may have influenced the political strategies of the parties; it is rather clear that the conservatives have seized this theme and still consider it to be a very viable one, emphasizing e.g. the expropriation law and other ‘individual-ownership-

versus-the-state' themes.' At the same time the present government (Labour) has taken up the idea that tenants should be allowed to barter their apartment freely. It has, on the other hand, opposed the further division of old apartment blocks into individual 'self-owned' (i.e. rent free) apartments. The gist of the matter is that both the major parties have taken notice of the urge to own, albeit in slightly different fashions.

The general point behind all these issues is that in a number of fields the increasing role of OBOS had transformed the interest and conflict lines. Vested interests have changed the alliances. When the homeowners association now also directs its appeals to OBOS members as possible allies in the battle against the state, it shows the distance housing in Oslo has travelled from the time when the landlord-tenant antagonism was the most interesting conflict. It is by no means entirely extinct, and some administrative agencies, e.g. some public housing agencies, are organized around this polarity, despite its decreasing irrelevance. But new and different divisions and alliances seem to supplement and obliterate the old. It may of course be quite suitable for these new interests to use the language of the old conflicts, while actually representing something entirely new. While the interpretation of the changes in the character of the market de-emphasizes the marxian juxtaposition of the exploiting landlord and the exploited tenant, it certainly calls for marxian ingenuity to detect the way in which new interests clothe themselves in old ideological garments, not just as a cultural lag, but as an active strategic device.

NOTES

- 1 The data reported or referred to in this article have been collected through financial aid from the following sources: The Institute for Political Science at the University of Oslo, The Norwegian Council for Research in Science and the Humanities, the Eilert Sundt Research Fund, and the Housing Fund, administered by the Department of Municipal Affairs. We are grateful to the Housing Seminar at the Oslo Institute for Political Science, where a number of the main points in this article were suggested and worked out; we are especially indebted to Per Otto Riis, Geir Conrad Tufte, and Ingar Wilhelmsen, who all wrote their MA's within this research programme, and to Arne Jensen, who wrote his MA in history.
- 2 The name of the organization is 'Oslo Bolig og Sparelag' ('Oslo Building and Savings Association'). There are other co-operative associations, but OBOS is by far the most important.
- 3 On this point we do not have any broad or exhaustive study. Torgersen (1964) Ch. 2, shows considerable variations in the proportion of the electorate with working class occupations: these differences are so striking that it would be very unlikely that they are simple indicators of the frequency of that occupational category: it seems reasonable to assume that the frequency of ownership must have had a considerable influence as well. In addition to this we should like to add a few suggestive figures: they are derived from the same source as the work mentioned above, *Statistiske Opplysninger 1877*, C 14. This publication gave a detailed menu of the extent of public suffrage under various suffrage

proposals; consequently we can infer from data on the incidence of suffrage among lower civil servants and workers the incidence of house ownership, since this was the only way these occupational categories could acquire the voting rights.

<i>Houseownership among lower civil servants</i>			
	<i>Owners</i>	<i>% Owners</i>	<i>Total</i>
Oslo	117	11	1027
Other cities	894	36	2504
Total	1011	29	3531

<i>Houseownership among manual workers</i>			
	<i>Owners</i>	<i>% Owners</i>	<i>Total</i>
Oslo	21	1	4056
Other cities	5289	30	27733
Total	5310	25	26789

These figures do not give any detailed description of the regional variations, but they show with great clarity the highly special position of Oslo, both with regard to the lower civil servants and the workers.

- 4 Differences in urban party structure in different Norwegian regions (particularly between the East and the South-West) have normally been linked to differences in support for religion, temperance, and the rural language variety. We do not want to raise any general objection to the validity of this general point, but we should like to indicate that it is a moot question whether this explains differences between identical social categories in different parts of the country or whether the content of the social categories may also be different, e.g. because they are rather crude and do not take into considerations such modifications in the class structure as ownership variations: the degree of middle class respectability conferred by even minor pieces of real estate may be missed, as well as the interests flowing from this status. We would like to suggest that the workers on the Southern and Western coast, because of the higher incidence of houseownership, were incorporated earlier into the political system, and partly for this reason, but for the concrete interests involved as well, became a more solid part of the Liberal party, not as easily swayed by Labour when it appeared. This contrasts clearly with the Oslo situation, where the Labour party emerged much more quickly after the working class had been incorporated into the liberal party, and much less solidly. We have not had the time to work out the assumption in any detail, nor to pursue the empirical ramifications of this perspective.
- 5 A biographical sketch of Holst by Fr. Grøn will be found in *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon* vol. 6. Oslo.
- 6 A tiny organization had existed since 1924, but seems to have had very few members; it ceased to function upon the arrival of the 1933-organization.
- 7 An illustrative example may be found in the case of a vote where Robert Jacobsen, a lawyer who was on the pay-roll of the Houseowners Federation, voted alone for the landlords' position, while the rest of the Conservative party supported a rather different policy.
- 8 C. J. Hambro mentions that this pressure group was particularly active in 1910. (Hambro 1934, p. 319.) In the *Kristiania Arbeiderpartis aarberetning og regnskap* 1913, p. 4, the Labour party claimed that in 1913 all houseowners were requested to serve as precinct captains for the Conservative party.
- 9 The Oslo Landlords Association never got around to run its own list. This also holds true for the year 1919. This year saw considerable activity on the part of local housing organizations in other, mainly western, towns, possibly as a reaction to the admonition to influence the election from the National Landlords Association, but possibly also as a result of local pressures and frustrations. In Stavanger, Bergen, Haugesund, Kristiansund,

and Trondheim this group ran as an independent party, and apparently drew its strength from the irritation with the locally administered housing regulation and rent regulation. In *Stavanger* this new party was considered to be more conservative than the normal Conservative party, and ran on a program which emphasized their hostility to the housing regulations and a very straight no-more-taxes-simpler-administration program. Its slogan was: 'My house is my castle!' ('Herre i eget hus!') It drew considerable attention from the Labour paper which seems to have directed as much of its fire against this as the other bourgeois parties. The Labour party suffered a serious set-back. See *I. mai* 1919; 8/8, 23/9, 5/11, 11/11, 14/11, 18/11. In *Haugesund* the party was named 'The Non-political Non-Socialist Party' ('Det upolitiske borgerparti') or 'The Houseowners' party' («Hus-eierpartiet») and it obtained 7 seats out of 52: according to the Labour paper *Haugesunds Folkeblad* 1919, this party directed most of its attention to the southern part of the town, led by the active propagandist Gaut Mathisen, who told everyone that 'the socialists, if they obtained power, would take away the houses from their owners.' (2/12), for which reason the party is assumed to have suffered some loss. In *Bergen* it also appeared; the Bergen Labour party fought a very aggressive pro-tenant campaign, proposing such measures as rationing of apartments: see *Arbeidet* 19/9, 12/11, 13/11, 17/11, 18/11, 19/11, 20/11, 21/22, 22/11, 24/11 for antilandlord editorials or mass meeting coverage. It suffered a moderate defeat, and the new party made some headway. In *Kristiansund* it seems to have made less of a dent in the established party structure; it looks as if the possible loss of the previously socialist-voting houseowner was balanced by the influx of new tenants to the town: the socialist paper ran a very stiff housing plank in its program, and directed very much of its attention towards this question. According to *Tidens Krav* 3/11 1919 there were those in the party who wanted to run exclusively on this plank. The newspaper gives very much space to discussions about municipal housing and the inadequacies of such initiatives that might relieve the housing shortage, see 15/10, 22/10, 23/10, 24/10, 29/10, 30/10. In Trondheim the new party was more vigorous; and the housing line of the Labour paper *Ny Tid* seems to be cautious; see e.g. the absence of rationing as a measure. *Ny Tid* 27/11, 28/11, 29/11. Six landowners were elected. The successes in Stavanger and Trondheim were explained by the large proportion of houseowning workers, as against the predominance of apartment houses in Oslo and Bergen. See *Arbeidet* 4/12 1919. The members in Trondheim had earlier requested modifications in the construction laws to make the building of inexpensive houses easier, as seen in the annual report of the Norwegian Labour party of 1910. *The main point is that the appeal of the houseowners' association was strongest in the towns that did not have the most typical landlords. All the phenomena described above occur outside the orbit of the national houseowners association's real organizational strength.*

- 10 This question was discussed by Friedrich Engels who in a series of articles in 'Der Volksstaat,' in 1872 devoted considerable energy to the discussion of the relative importance of the tenant-landlord conflict and the worker-capitalist conflict; his obvious choice led him to de-emphasize the political conflicts within the middle class on this score. See Engels 1935, p. 24. This polemic with a certain dr. Mühlberger, who advocated worker ownership of their houses is discussed in Henderson 1976, and Marcus 1974, pp. 195–197.
- 11 We have omitted the somewhat tangled history of the Labour party's conversion to co-operative forms as the preferred form of public housing; we hope to deal with it in a later article.
- 12 The organization later dropped these measures and relied solely on seniority. See Jacobsen 1976.
- 13 This interpretation rests on the not completely safe assumption that the 'defection' from OBOS to other forms of ownership has not affected the aggregate characteristics of the remaining members, or subcategories of these.
- 14 This is borne out in our 1974 survey, and by an OBOS survey from 1971.

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