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Housing tenure and social classes in Kingston Ontario 1881â€“1901

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Abstract

Housing once again became the subject of political struggles and debates in many countries in the late nineteenth century. It is argued that these struggles may best be understood within the frame of reference of Marxist theory and, in particular, an interpretation of the significance of housing in terms of the production of wage labour as a class relation. From this perspective, attention is directed to the changing relationship between housing tenure and social class. Unfortunately, very little is known about this relationship over the period in question. We lack information on trends in home-ownership in particular and domestic property ownership in general. Furthermore, we lack information on the changing tenure characteristics of the urban populations of the time in relation to their developing class structure. This lack is especially apparent for Canada. On these questions we present evidence from Kingston, Ontario. We note a decline in homeownership which was experienced by all classes. In particular, however,

we note a dramatic increase in absentee (as opposed to resident) landlordism. The origins and political effects of these trends may be understood in terms of the particular character of Kingston in the period. Unfortunately, however, it is impossible to define adequately this uniqueness in the absence of comparable research on other American and Canadian cities of the day. We conclude with a set of questions for future research.



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