

Prime Minister ②

In my view this is too complacent. In 1981 there were 916,000 one parent families, compared with 367,000 in 1961. 30 percent of children in Lambeth are in one parent families. Given the relationship between one parent families and difficulties at school and juvenile crime, this is very worrying. AT 716 I agree

PRIME MINISTER

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AT 716

A CONSERVATIVE SOCIETY

Media comment on events like the Brussels riot leads us to believe Britain is suffering from social instability. The traditional family is supposed to be disappearing. But does the evidence bear this out?

### Households

30% of households now consist of a married couple with one or more dependent children, as against 38% in 1961. 24% of households now consist of one person, as against 11% in 1961. And this is taken to show that the traditional nuclear family is declining. But it is misleading:

- i. If you look at numbers of people rather than numbers of households, the picture is very different. About 78% of people in private households in 1983 lived in families headed by a married couple, virtually unchanged from 82% in 1961.
- ii. Despite the increase in single-parent families, the normal nuclear family is still an important phase in most people's lives. But we marry later and live longer, so it is more likely that in other stages of our lives we will be living alone. In particular, the rise in single households largely reflects the increase in old people. 16% of households now consist of one person over retirement age, compared with 7% in 1961.

Perhaps what matters more is the changing pattern of power and authority within the nuclear family, rather than the dwindling of family units.

### Marriage and Divorce

Again, there are widespread myths about the decline of marriage. The most frequently quoted statistic is that one in three marriages will end in divorce. But again the underlying picture is much more complicated.

In 1972, one in three women marrying for the first time was a teenager; in 1982, it was a little over one in five. Spouses who marry in their teens are almost twice as likely to divorce as those who marry between the ages of 20 and 24. And there are fewer marriages where the bride is pregnant (greatly increasing the likelihood of divorce). So these pressures which can lead to divorce are weakening.

Cohabitation has increased, yet is often a prelude to marriage. Of women marrying for the first time in 1979, about 19% said they had lived with their husband beforehand - as against 2% for marriages between 1961 and 1965. But fewer than 7 in 1,000 of all women between 18 and 49 are living and bearing children in permanent unions outside marriage.

### Property Ownership.

The table below breaks down the percentage of owner-occupiers by age of head of household:

<u>Age</u>	<u>Owner-Occupiers (%)</u>
60-64	50
45-59	59
30-44	67

So there is still scope for major increases in total owner-occupation as people move through the age bands.

### Conclusion

An article in New Society, of all places, sums up the message:

"Most adults still marry and have children. Most children are reared by their natural parents. Most people live in a household headed by a married couple. Most marriages continue until parted by death. No great change seems currently in prospect."

There is comfort here, and material which can be drawn on for speeches.

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(Sources: Social Trends, Household Survey, New Society)