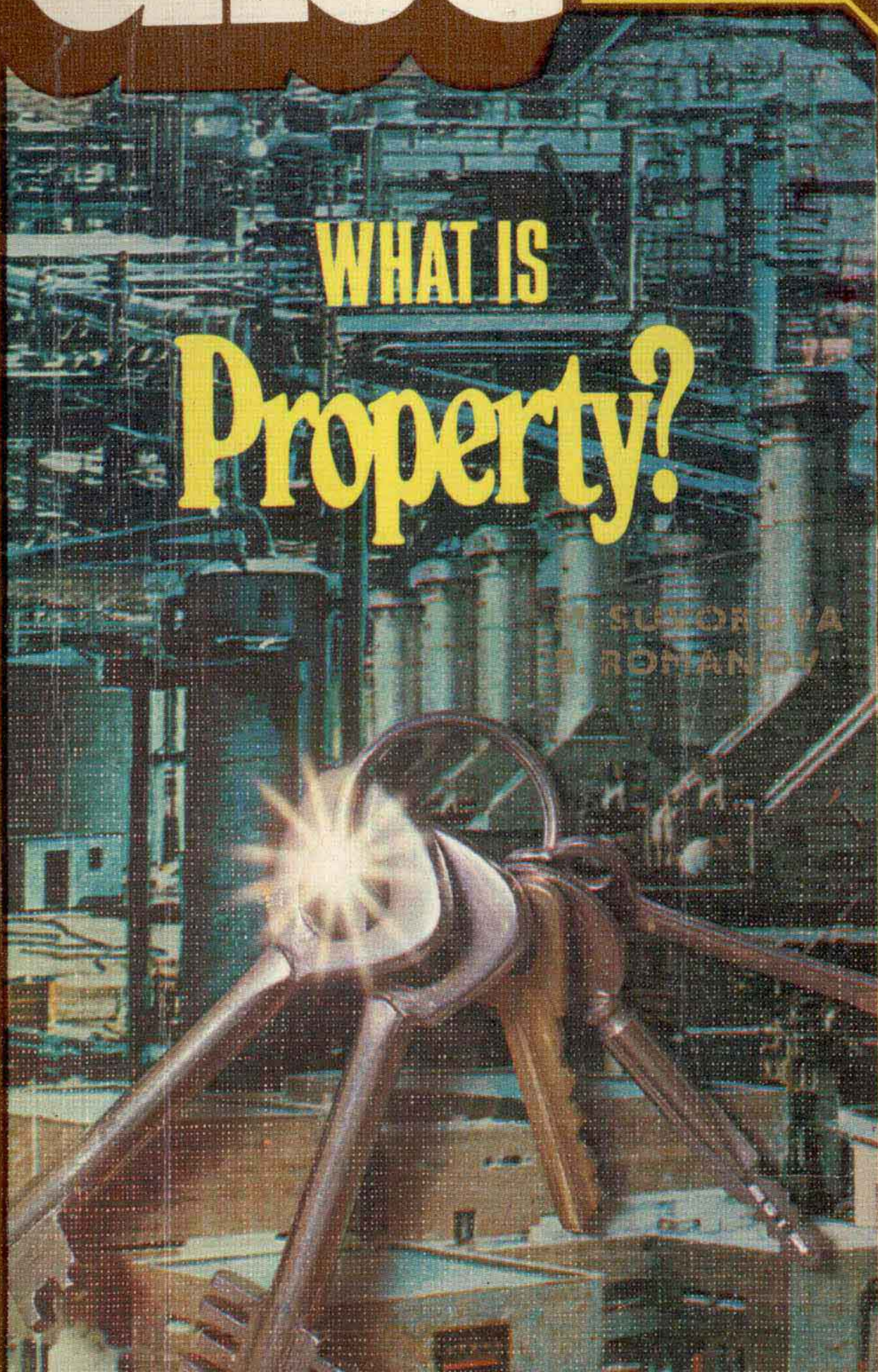


abc

OF SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL
KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS Property?

BY SUSOROVA
AND ROMANOV



ABC of Social and Political Knowledge

Maria Suvorova, Boris Romanov

**WHAT IS
PROPERTY?**



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ЧТО ТАКОЕ СОБСТВЕННОСТЬ?

На английском языке

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FOREWORD

Property is one of the fundamental elements of political economy, which is why a scientific view of property and its development through a law-governed succession of forms is a cornerstone of the materialist view of history.

Many philosophers, historians and economists have sought – and continue to seek – to bring out the content of property, but that was done only by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the founders of scientific socialism.

Their predecessors, including such outstanding thinkers as the French utopian socialists Henri-

Claude Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier, the classics of English bourgeois economy Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and the German classical philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, realised that the state of the society depended on property, but all of them identified property with the appropriation of material values and with property relations as reflected in the laws of ownership, and so reduced the content of property to the right in property.

Marxism maintains that actual economic relations among people concerning the production and distribution of material values constitute the content of property. In that sense, property is a relation among people, and not a person's relation to a thing, as expressed in the power of that person (the subject) over a thing or material asset (the object). Nor can property be defined as man's natural ability to appropriate objects of the external world, which is why the attempts of bourgeois economists to derive property from Robinson Crusoe's economy and from his relation to the things around him are scientifically invalid. As a social being, man is engendered by the society and always carries on his economic activity within the framework of this or that society, so that property should be derived from the conditions of the society's material life rather than from the life of an individual.

Consequently, if we want to understand pro-

property and its content, how it originates and why it changes, we should analyse the actual relations among people in the social production of material values, relations which are independent of their will and consciousness.

That being said, Marxism admits that the problem of property is complicated and multifaceted. Property has its objective basis in social production, and that is crucial to an understanding of its content. But property also has external, or outward forms of manifestation, one of which is the right in property. It is a reflection of the real economic content of property, i. e., it is secondary to and derivative from property as a social relation. Moreover, being a nominal reflection in the human consciousness of real economic relations among people, that right very often distorts, as well as reflects, the economic content of property.

Thus, bourgeois law assumes that all the members of the capitalist society—capitalists, wage-workers and peasants—are private property owners, so obscuring the qualitative distinction between the capitalist, who owns huge enterprises and employs thousands of wage-workers, the working man, who has nothing but his labour-power, and the peasant holder, who owns a small plot of land worked by himself and members of his family. What actually determines the economic essence of the capitalist society is that while the capitalist owns the means of production, the

worker has none and is thus obliged to hire out for a wage, that is, to sell his labour-power to the capitalist, who subjects him to ruthless exploitation.

So, property is both an objective phenomenon, independent of human will and consciousness, and a subjective, superficial phenomenon, expressed in various legal forms.

Political economy studies property as an objective relation manifesting itself in social production, in relations among people in the course of social production, that is, in their relations of production. Since the relations of production themselves depend on the development of the productive forces and are determined by these, the inevitable conclusion is that as the society develops, one form of property is superseded by another in a law-governed process: primitive-communal property gives way to slave-holding, slave-holding to feudal, feudal to capitalist, and capitalist to socialist social property. That is why the scientific view of property is incompatible with the notion that private property is natural property corresponding to man's immutable nature and so is equally immutable and eternal. Such a view of property pervades all bourgeois doctrines of property, whose class purpose is to prove that the "sacrosanct" principle of capitalist private property is natural and everlasting.

So, Marxism transfers the concept of property

to the sphere of objective production relations. In other words, property is primarily an economic phenomenon. Hence the legitimate question: what is property as an economic phenomenon?

Like any other science, political economy expresses its generalisations and conclusions in concepts and definitions, which make up its specific language. That is why, if readers are to gain a clear understanding of the essence of property relations, they should be of one mind with the authors about the sense in which the various concepts and terms are being used here. A point to note is that over the centuries bourgeois political economy, with its numerous schools and trends, has failed to work out any coherent scientific language: indeed, bourgeois economists give different readings of the same concepts.

Marxist-Leninist political economy alone has elaborated a coherent conceptual idiom, whose concepts and definitions reveal the materialist approach to the study of the society's economic life. We append a short glossary of terms, which are most commonly accepted in Marxist economic writings and which are also used in this book.

Chapter
One.

THE MODE OF PRODUCTION
AND ITS TWO ELEMENTS:
THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES
AND THE RELATIONS
OF PRODUCTION

1. Material Production
As the Basis of Social Life

Recognition of the primacy and decisive role of men's social being in relation to their consciousness and will is the essence of the materialist approach to the study of social life. Social being here means real human activity in a definite historically conditioned social setting.

History is always made by people, and it is difficult to understand the materialist view of history because people usually ascribe their economic behaviour to their own desires, emotions and subjective goals. Bourgeois researchers say that the main task of political

economy (which they call "economics") is to study the subjective motivations of human economic activity, but that does not explain why people have these particular strivings and goals, and where the source of the motivations lies.

Bourgeois economics is inconsistent not because it traces human activity to ideal motives and thinks it necessary to study these, but because it stops at that point and fails to go on to examine the underlying objective causes of economic activity.

Marxism does not ignore the human consciousness or ideal motives, yet it does not regard these as the ultimate causes of historical phenomena. The true motive forces of history are rooted in the inducements which set in motion large masses of people, whole classes and nations, rather than in the inducements of individuals, however outstanding they may be. A distinctive feature of these mass inducements is that they are lasting and persistent, since they are ultimately engendered by the material conditions of men's life, by their social being.

The material conditions of human life include, first, the natural environment, that is, the surrounding nature with its land and waters, its plant and animal kingdoms, mineral deposits and climate; second, the population, its size and composition; and third, the mode of producing material values, or production. The latter is stud-

ied by political economy as the material basis of the society's socio-economic development.

The society has existed and developed in material conditions of two kinds. On the one hand, there is the natural environment, which develops in accordance with its intrinsic laws and which even today largely remains beyond man's conscious control and regulation. On the other hand, through an active impact on nature based on conscious use of its cognised laws, man creates the specific conditions of his life: the sphere of material production and material culture in the broad sense of the word. Over the ages, human labour has in a sense doubled the surrounding material world. Thus, men have built cities and villages and covered huge tracts of land with a webwork of railroads, highways, electric-power transmission lines and pipelines. At all the factories, electric-power plants, mines, farms, construction sites, etc., the diverse world of things surrounding man today is being ceaselessly reproduced on an expanding scale. These products of human labour are just as material as the natural products of nature. The whole of modern technology, from wrench to computer, and all consumer goods (foodstuffs, clothes, footwear, household utensils, transport facilities, etc.), all these material things have been made by man from natural substances and in accordance with natural laws, while man himself is a part of nature, the supreme

product of its development.

The material conditions of human life are far from immutable, they keep developing and improving. That entails changes in the conditions and character of labour in the first place.

2. Social Labour

Labour is man's purposeful activity aimed at the appropriation of the substance of nature through a conscious realisation of goals set in advance. The natural organs of labour – the head and the hands – are only developed and perfected in the course of labour activity. At the same time, these organs of labour are extended and become much more powerful as man comes to develop and use instruments of labour.

Labour is an activity intrinsic to man alone, it is that which singles him out from the animal kingdom. To say that animals “work” is to use the word in a figurative sense, for their “labour” springs from natural instinct, which is inherited. What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees, says Marx, is that “the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality”.¹

The labour process includes these rudiments:

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, p. 174.

1) man's purposeful activity, or labour itself; 2) the objects of labour: that upon which man acts in the process of labour; and 3) the instruments (implements, tools) of labour: that which man uses to act upon the objects of labour. The objects of labour together with the instruments of labour constitute the means of production, and labour itself is productive labour. That definition of productive labour is true under any social system. As man's purposeful activity, labour is aimed to produce material values, i. e., the things which meet man's physical and spiritual requirements. Since man has the physical and mental abilities necessary for labour activity, he is a labour-power which is realised in material and spiritual production.

But labour is something more than just a source of material values necessary to meet diverse human requirements: it is also a process which expresses the very substance of human activity, that which enables man to stand out in the animal kingdom. Labour has created man as such; in other words, it is labour which has made him what he is, and it is only in the process of labour that the human personality is developed and perfected. The Scottish historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle emphasised that labour was man's real life, while the Russian writer Lev Tolstoy believed that the notion of happiness as idleness was one of the most amazing delusions.