

Private property

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Private property, to a communist, is not your shoes or toothbrush, or even your house.

Those things are called personal property and under socialism and under communism they continue to belong to workers in much the same manner as they do now.

When Marxists speak of private property under capitalism, it refers to the tools of production that should be owned by all of society, such as factories, lands, stores, mines and all those things that are gifts of nature or are built by many people over many centuries, but are now being monopolized by a few. These few don't concern themselves with how many years of human labor went into their creation, just so long as they alone can reap profits from legal ownership of that property.

The goal of socialism is to increase personal property many times over, through the abolishment of private property.

Enemies of communism say that communists want to take small farms away from the women and men who worked so hard to keep them going for so many years and put small grocers, tailors and carpenters out of business and deny them an independent living.

Capitalism has already put most of these small operators out of business and made wage slaves of them, destroying their dreams of independent prosperity. Wal-Mart and Target routinely put small retailers out of business. Giant agribusiness conglomerates mow down small farms every week. Supermarket chains have wiped out the corner grocer. The few small businesses that remain live precariously on the

edge of an abyss, with whole families sometimes working long hours to compete.

Private property in the means of production is owned by a very small fraction of the population in the capitalist countries, but it was produced by generations of working people — by the immense majority who, over the centuries, learned to till the soil, mine the ores, and make buildings and bridges out of trees, rock, clay and new combinations of nature's bounty.

In the earliest days of capitalist accumulation there were, here and there, some people who amassed relatively small private properties through hard work and miserly living. But most properties, even then, were gained through influence, bribery and deceit — by robbing the working poor of their labor. It is laughable to think that anyone or any family could have earned a billion dollars — or even a million — without becoming themselves a big capitalist and utilizing mass exploitation of labor.

Personal property has increased in the capitalist world, too: Vast estates, mansions, yachts, private jets, designer clothes all are hoarded by the few, while the personal property of the many decreases in quantity and quality. The 2007 housing bubble bust caused the greatest loss of personal wealth in history for working people in the United States, as millions lost their homes. What they had thought of as theirs belonged, under capitalist law, to the banks and mortgage companies, which snatched it away from them.

In the struggle to secure personal property — the necessities and comforts of life — the working class will find it necessary to overthrow the institution of private property and put all the means of production under the control of a workers' government. In some places the people have overthrown the system of private property; in many others the people are working towards its abolition. Now, with the international capitalist class in a huge economic and financial crisis, more and more workers and oppressed people are saying "enough is enough." Rebellions are taking

place across the world, from industrial centers to former colonies.

Personal property — homes, nourishing food, smartphones, cameras, bicycles, books and thousands of small items that raise the health and cultural level of a people — will increase year by year under socialism, but no one will personally own land, the factories, or the banks.

Additional reading

[Private Property and Communism](#) — Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844

- Return to [What is Marxism?](#)